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Irreconciliation and its divergences

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(This lecture <u>partly</u> draws on a book that I edited and was published in 2022: <u>On Irreconciliation"</u> *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute Special Issue Book series*).

I am thrilled to be invited to give the 2023 Firth Lecture and that too among ASA colleagues and in SOAS where I received my Phd around 2 decades ago which also coincided with the year when Raymond Firth passed away. Amongst the audience are some of you who read my first fieldwork report or draft chapters. So, it feels momentous to be delivering the Firth lecture among all of you. My interdisciplinary background of political and social theory has also had an influence in the way I learn, study and teach various aspects of political anthropology particularly in relation to the areas of gendered violence during conflict (<u>trigger warning re discussions of sexual violence and a five-minute animation clip on this during the lecture</u>), politics of aesthetics, memorialisation, war crimes tribunals and transnational adoption. It is through this interdisciplinary ethnographic experience in these various fields of research that has made me formulate the concept of irreconciliation. The cover slide of the broken wall of Martyred Intellectual memorial in Bangladesh stands in for the lack of closure and irreconciliation in the context of the losses of the Bangladesh war of 1971. In the first part of this lecture, I will draw out the various divergent manifestations of irreconciliation and outline its theoretical framework. The second part of the lecture will focus on the role of the rule of law and suggest ways in which irreconciliation might offer us possibilities in this troubled world. Today's lecture partly draws on a book that I edited and was published in 2022: <u>On irreconciliation</u>. My thanks to Professor Dan Hicks for the cover of the volume – which is the base of the graffitied Colston Statue at the M shed museum in Bristol.

Conflict and Post-conflict situations are marked by the urgency and need for reconciliation. Following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the post-apartheid period in South Africa in 1994, debates on reconciliation has had a particular currency in addressing violent pasts, seeking 'closure' 'moving on' and 'moving forward'. Most post-conflict reconciliatory exercises make it incumbent upon survivors to forgive, [what Lisette Josephides has referred to as 'commanded forgiving' (2022)] - and seek closure as an exhibition of 'moving on'. In 2019, I organised a AAA executive panel on irreconciliation which was held in Vancouver. Referred to as a city of reconciliation I was nervous what

feedback our panel on irreconciliation would get. Yet, evident in a First Nation Panel on Reconciliation at the AAA, 'Thou shall reconcile' – was one of the phrases I heard being mentioned by panellists to highlight the compulsion to reconcile in the context of Canada's relationship with its First Nation communities particularly in the light of the horrific accounts of the missing children of the residential schools. (See Neizen 2022).

Various anthropologists have criticised reconciliation and the related forms of 'alternative justice' extensively but within the framework of maintaining social bonds and the rule of law. The idea of 'national reconciliation' emerged from a particular set of historical and political experiences, namely the transitions to liberal democracy that occurred at the end of the Cold War (Wilson 2003: 368). Richard Wilson (2001) in critiquing reconciliation has focused on the need for post-conflict state legitimacy and accountability through retributive justice (via bureaucratic and legal processes) as reconciliation is deemed to undermine the rule of law. Along with Fiona Ross (2003), Wilson (2003; 2020) has also critiqued reconciliation for its emphasis on positivism while also including and excluding certain kinds of survivor narratives. The banner held at the South African TRC by the survivors read: 'Reconciliation through Truth' (Wilson 2020: 18), which highlighted the need for transparency i.e., truth telling and reparations from the TRC which was eventually not addressed.

In *Denktagebuch* (Thought Diaries, 1950-1973) Hannah Arendt wrote that acts which cannot be forgiven are beyond punishment and hence cannot be reconciled to. In this annual 2023 Firth lecture, I draw from Arendt to further theorize and extend the concept of irreconciliation and reflect on the lessons that we can learn from it. While there exists an anthropological critique of reconciliation, I ethnographically explore how irreconciliation has not been reflected on as both a social and a political position. I seek to examine the need to not forgive, not reconcile, as a political stance and to think through the ideas and aspirations of justice embedded in it. This is because in spite of the normative prevalence of forgiveness and reconciliation, many of us studying post-conflict contexts were coming across the position of irreconciliation in different ethnographic settings.

The normative position within social sciences and also various classical anthropological scholarship (Gluckman 1955) has predominantly highlighted the role of agreement and conciliation showing in the process how conflict and harmony are modes of maintaining social control. Here, ethnographies of feuding by Emyrs Peters (2007) and Michael Herzfeld (1985) show what they have long argued that the conflicts they discuss are actually not "anti-social" but in fact constitute alternative grounds for human relationships.

Irreconciliation is a social good which is interrogating the compulsion and control which is often intrinsic to the prescriptions of reconciliation.

Following Raymond Firth's (1954; 1955) focus on process than structure, on individual divergences as a source of social change rather than social organizations, I reflect critically on the interdisciplinary scholarship on reconciliation, apology and forgiveness and theorise irreconciliation as a less examined lens of analysis through which such change can be aspired for. Rather than Irreconciliation being in opposition to 'peace', or being equal to revenge/vengeance, irreconciliation instead allows us to interrogate the status quo by refusing to forgive endemic impunities, <u>particularly</u> in the aftermath of staged, compromised, failed processes of justice, claiming to address injustice and absence-presence of the rule of law. So, to clarify the focus is on the role of commissions, tribunals, investigations, committees, investigations, committees and the role they have in ensuring justice is not served in the name of trying to secure justice. Here the refusal to forgive is also hinged on the decision to 'move on' on the basis of one's own decision and not because of being asked to 'move forward'.

I explore the work of irreconciliation in the following instances: One, when past historical injustice has not been addressed; two, when historical injustices have been symbolically addressed – virtue-signalled - without structural changes (like 'a cut price apology' given to the stolen generation by the Australian government without any reparation) (Mookherjee 2009); third, when highlighting the forms of continuous protests against this virtue-signaled and performative reconciliation; Irreconciliation as a technology of control. I outline various ethnographic divergences of irreconciliation:

First divergence of irreconciliation: Survivors and reparative tools

Itihas ki shudhu kothai o kagojer patai? Kaje kichu nai? (Is history only in words and in the pages of a book? Does it not come of use?/does it not show in action?) (Moyna Karim, a *Birangona*).

These powerful words questioning the role of testimonial processes and oral history projects have been voiced by survivors of wartime sexual violence of the Bangladesh war of 1971. In 1947, the independence of India from British colonial rule resulted in the creation of a new homeland for the Muslims of India by carving out the eastern and north-western corners of the country, which came to be known as East and West Pakistan respectively. Over the years, various impositions as well as West Pakistani administrative, military, linguistic, civil and economic control, led to the nine-month long liberation war in 1971, which resulted in the formation of Bangladesh. With the end of the Liberation War, Bangladesh was faced with the

staggering number of 3 million dead and 200,000 women (contested and official numbers)[1] raped by members of the Pakistani army and by the *Razakars* (local Bengali and non-Bengali collaborators), within a span of nine months.

The Bangladesh government in an unprecedented move till date, referred to the women raped during the war of 1971 as *Birangonas/*war heroines. It also set up rehabilitation centres for *Birangonas*, undertook abortion,[2] put their children up for international adoption, arranged their marriages, trained them in vocational skills and often gave them jobs (Mookherjee 2007). Wartime rapes were widely reported in the press from December 1971 until the middle of 1973, after which it was relegated to oblivion in government and journalistic consciousness for 15 years, re-emerging once again in the 1990s through oral history projects and testimonies in public mock tribunals. I have explored the history of wartime sexual violence extensively in my book *The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories and the Bangladesh War of 1971* (Mookherjee 2015) in which I argue that there exists an extensive public memory on the wartime rape of 1971. Drawing from this book, I have also co-authored a graphic novel and animation film titled *Birangona and ethical testimonies of sexual violence during conflict* (Mookherjee and Keya 2019). While for many survivors trying out the perpetrators is significant, the sometimes intrusive, transgressive and unethical testimonial process of collecting their narratives has also come under severe criticism from them. As a result, they question the futility of the entire history writing process of being only in words and in the pages of a book and being of no use to them, no help being offered to them. If the testimonial cultures are a form of injustice, for the survivors the need for reparation and reparative tools becomes even more important. As a result, many of them would choose to be silent today as a way of expressing their irreconciliation to the violence of the testimonial process. Instead of the sensational representations of the horrific figure, birangonas would want their socialities of violence to be highlighted to show how they live with this experience in their quotidian, everyday lives. An illustration of this everyday irreconciliation, of their socialities of violence can be read/watched through this extract from our graphic novel and animation film (see minutes 9.18 – 14.47 and 31.53 – 33.01) (Mookherjee and Keya 2019).

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[1] The number of women raped vary from 25,000/100,000/200,000/400,000 in different contexts. See Mookherjee (2015) for the debates on numbers.

[2] Women did not go for the abortion as it was not available. The state introduced it without any legal fiat.

Extract from the graphic novel (Mookherjee and Keya 2019)

Second divergence of irreconciliation: *Memorials, forgiveness and apologies*

'The day Pakistan builds a memorial in Lahore or Islamabad acknowledging how the Pakistani army killed and raped Bangladeshis during 1971 <u>I will think</u> of forgiving Pakistan that day.'[3]

[Interview with a member of of *Projonmo Ekattor* (Generation 71)].

Projonmo Ekattor (Generation 71, individuals whose parents were killed by the Pakistani army during 1971) is an important organisation in Bangladesh comprised of children (now adults) whose parents were killed as part of the Pakistani army's attempt to kill East Pakistani intellectuals and particularly those who were part of the minority Hindu community. As a result, most of these individuals have an iconic status in Bangladesh as a survivor. They are also highly respected as a critical voice who have been vocal about the role of the Pakistani army during 1971 in East Pakistan as well as the role of the Bangladeshi army's oppression of the indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts since the 1980s. This quote by a member of *Projonmo Ekattor* would also be deemed to be a highly politicized one and not necessarily be an unmediated voice of 'the people'. *Projonmo Ekattor's* call for a memorial in Pakistan locates the analogous relationship between material objects and human memory squarely at the centre of this demand. It is assumed that the durability of such objects enables the prolongation and preservation of a memory beyond its existence. At the same time, it is apparent that as soon as we have memory fixed to an object, it becomes slowly consigned to oblivion. In short, memorialisation can enable forgetfulness (Mookherjee 2007) and violence in society needs forgetting than forgiving.

Hence *Projonmo Ekattor's* call for a memorial has a different temporal imperative. The call is also demanding the memorial be a symbolism of remorse, atonement and a structural apology from Pakistan for its role in 1971. This might trigger memories and questions of 71 in Pakistan as well as run the risk of sanitising and freezing this memory. For *Projonmo Ekattor* however, this memorial is the condition on which they position <u>their consideration</u> about a forgiveness towards Pakistan for the loss – personal and national – they endured as a result of the violence perpetrated by West Pakistan in East Pakistan in 1971. Members of *Projonmo Ekattor* (Generation 71 – children of all the martyred intellectuals) are also setting out the conditions in which the offering of apology and acceptance through forgiveness can occur. Hence here the desire for an architectural, memorial presence is a challenging and subversive call for apology and justice in the first instance and a demand for the memorial to

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[3] See Mookherjee (2019).

be built as a condition for them to grant forgiveness. Pakistan on the other hand has urged Bangladesh to show magnanimity and 'move on' from their deep grudge. The term reconciliation is not used in Bangladesh and is often associated with those who are deemed to have collaborated with Pakistani army to inflict death and violation during the war of 71. The War Crimes Tribunal set up in 2009 has till date executed over dozen men (mostly of the Jamaat-e-Islami) who are deemed to have been collaborated with the Pakistani army and enabled it to kill and rape East Pakistanis/Bangladeshis. While being critical of death penalty per se, most survivors and my left-liberal activist friends in Bangladesh would support the death penalty of the collaborators given their long-term impunity within the political system and so that they cannot get any reprieve under a changed government. Critiqued by the international community for not being fair and transparent the Tribunal and its executions however have a lot of support among Bangladeshis and 86% support its implementation.[4] There are various other instances of the problematic manifestation of reconciliation as the 'positive' and 'normative' way forward. In 2015, after Justin Trudeau came to power, he made reconciliation the cornerstone of his government to address the long-term injustice towards the First Nations people in Canada through the publication of the final report of the the Canadian Indian Residential Schools (CIRS) Truth and Reconciliation Commission. However, the Canadian TRC ensured impunity for the perpetrators by only allowing the victims to articulate their experiences (see Niezen 2022).

Debates from the recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty further enlightens how the calls for 'reconciliation' also serves a shield for those who are perceived to be the cause of violent forms of injustice. Paul Muldoon and Andrew Schaap (2012: 536) show that liberals in Australia distinguish themselves from the culture war of social conservatives to support what they deem to be the progressive reconciliation movement. However, this does not recognise that reconciliation was brought in as a measure to thwart the campaign for treaty by aboriginal people in the 1970s-1980s.

This narrative of reconciliation can be found in the prevalence of positive uplifting story from trauma to hope and renewal: what has been described as the 'Schindlerization of Holocaust testimony' (Reich 2006:466). This entails the need to have feel-good, upbeat endings which the framework of reconciliation readily provides and often runs contrary to the negative experiences and emotions of survivors. In the process, such upbeat 'healing'

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[4] Polling in 2013 by AC Nielsen found that more than two-thirds of Bangladeshis characterise the ICT as 'unfair' or 'very unfair', though 86% support its implementation. 'Final Sentence,' *The Economist*, September 17 2013: https://www.economist.com/banyan/2013/09/17/final-sentence

accounts control and foreclose the emotions of injustice of the survivors. Since 2002, the Rwandan President Paul Kagame, has emphasized the need for forgiveness for the sake of the country's future. Yet, a move away from these legal and political structures, highlights that people are often forced to forgive against their will and when asked, participants in reconciliation are often quite scathing about it. This is evident in Esther Mujawayo's – a Rwandan sociologist and psychotherapist's account in Thomas Bhudholm's work on Resentment's Virtue (Brudholm 2010; et al 2009: 43). Mujawayo notes of 'the interest in post-atrocity forgiveness as an "obsession"—not on behalf of the survivors, but on behalf of the authorities, NGOs, and other agents of reconciliation', what Wilson (2003:383) calls a 'global reconciliation industry.' Similarly, Innocent Rwililiza, [as quoted in a book on post-genocide Rwanda: Jean Hatzfield, *La strategie des antilopes 25* (2007) (Fr.) (translation by authors) as cited in Brudholm et al 2009: 44] notes: Humanitarian organisations 'import forgiveness in Rwanda, and they wrap it in dollars to convince us. There is a Forgiveness Plan as there is an Aids Plan.'

Rules and Laws or Rule of Law

In his book *Ecology of Mind*[5] published in 1971, Gregory Bateson has a chapter titled: 'From Versailles to Cybernetics.' Reflecting on the Peace Conference vividly described by Maynard Keynes in The Economic Consequences of the Peace (1919), Bateson (1971: 477) notes:

> This was one of the great sell-outs in the history of our civilization. A most extraordinary event which led fairly directly and inevitably into World War II. It also led (and this is perhaps more interesting than the fact of its leading to World War II) to the total demoralization of German politics. If you promise your boy something, and renege on him, framing the whole thing on a high ethical plane, you will probably find that not only is he very angry with you, but that his moral attitudes deteriorate as long as he feels the unfair whiplash of what you are doing to him. It's not only that World War II was the appropriate response of a nation which had been treated in this particular way; what is more important is the fact that the demoralization of that nation was expectable from this sort of treatment. From the demoralization of Germany, we, too, became demoralized. This is why I say that the Treaty of Versailles was an attitudinal turning point.

> It goes on and on. The tragedy of oscillating and self-propagating distrust, hate, and destruction down the generations.

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[5] Thanks to Bhrigupati Singh for introducing me to this Bateson text in an invitation to be part of a Bateson salon in March 2023 as part of the American Ethnological Society conference in Princeton University.

> But from your point of view, we are absolutely crazy, and you don't know what sort of historic event led to this craziness. "The fathers have eaten bitter fruit and the children's teeth are set on edge." It's all very well for the fathers, they know what they ate. The children don't know what was eaten.

Bateson's reference to the intergenerational transfer of historic injustice is instructive for us to think through the formulation of irreconciliation in the light of Vincent Crapanzano's (2011; 2012) moving ethnography on the Harkis which is one of the few extensive anthropological explorations discussing the refusal to forgive. The Harkis are the Algerians now living in France numbering around two hundred sixty thousand and are the 'history's forgotten as they were ignored by journalists and scholars. During the Algerian War of Independence, they sided with the French and were demobilised at the end of the war by the French government. On returning to their villages unarmed, they were then attacked in Algeria for siding with the French army by locals and also by the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN). Despite appeals for help, the French Government did nothing to protect them and finally allowed them to settle in France but kept them interned in camps and in miserable conditions. Being treated in humiliating ways, the Harkis have gone into a 'haunting silence'. The children of the Harkis are affected by this silence of their parents and also by their own experience of discrimination in France. They have been campaigning to claim compensation and seek apology from France for betraying and abandoning their parents. As Crapanzano puts it poignantly: 'For forgiveness to occur, the wrongdoers and their victims have to acknowledge the wrongdoing, appreciate each other's perspective and recognize the role it has played in the way they have each configured their individual and collective lives (as, for example a central trauma, an excuse for inaction, a source of resentment)' (2012:191). As Crapanzano puts it poignantly: 'For forgiveness to occur, the wrongdoers and their victims have to acknowledge the wrongdoing, appreciate each other's perspective and recognize the role it has played in the way they have each configured their individual and collective lives (as, for example a central trauma, an excuse for inaction, a source of resentment)' (2012:191). Bateson's argument that treachery in a truce or peace-making is worse than trickery in battle allows me to elaborate on the role of rules and laws. This is because rules are constantly changed without it being discovered which transforms it as an instrument of control.

My focus on irreconciliation on one hand finds the practices of sovereign law (Derrida 2001: 59) as enabling, working with the state, leading to judgements which have predominant national support like in Bangladesh. It enables the wounds of a past to be kept open as

irreconciliation. On the other hand, the role of law also works as a disabling force, as violence, which work with the sovereign (states or organisations) to showcase the performance of justice in order to limit and derail truth. Irreconciliation emerges among non-state actors against such sovereign practices to maintain continued vigilance against the reinscription of continued impunity (Canada, Argentina, Sri Lanka, Colombia, UK). Law is also empowering when it is distinct from executive power, working against the sovereign to demand justice and can be a protagonist in the claims of irreconciliation (like in contemporary Argentina) or in Mayur Suresh's (2023) work on legal technicalities in terror trials in Delhi. These technicalities can however also change remembering Bateson's chapter on Metalogue where he shows how rules are constantly changed without being discovered which then transforms it as an instrument of control. This is highlighted powerfully in Ronald Neizen's (2022) work on the Canadian TRC, Noa Vaisman's (2022) work on Argentina and Vindhya Buthpitiya's (2022) work on Sri Lanka.

Noa Vaisman (2022) shows that in Argentina reconciliation was used by the Armed Forces in the 1980s first through a decree, promptly annulled by the democratically elected government, and later, through an attempt, to fashion a narrative of heroism that ensures closure of the unresolved injustices. Vindhya Buthpitiya (2022) has shown that in Sri Lanka there has been a call by the Tamil diaspora to formally recognise the events of 2009 as a genocide which has been denied by the Sri Lankan government. The state has enabled a process of invisibility by concerted 'acts of erasure, silencing, spatial (re)organization, and embellishment that relied on not only infrastructure development, heritage-construction, and cultural production, but state violence, terror, and suppression aimed at contriving a consensus of "peace"'. As international pressure to address wartime atrocities mounted, a conciliatory government inquiry took place in the guise of the 2011 performative (Thiranagama 2013) 'Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission' (LLRC) and its recommendations have not been taken up.

In May 2020[6] the killing of George Floyd in America by a policeman reignited the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. I map a politics of irreconciliation in the call to reckoning on issues of memorialisation of slavery, race and history along with institutional responses to BLM, bullying and harassment. This aligns with theorists (Catherine Lu 2017) who are calling for reparative justice for injustices linked to colonialism, slavery as the

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[6] From this section till the end has been drawn from my article: Mookherjee, N. (2022), Irreconcilable times. JRAI, 28, S1: 153-178.

transitional justice scholarship is focussed only from Nuremberg and thereafter. I bring in the experiences of the bullying of BAME academics through my intersectional, privileged positionalities of being a South Asian/BAME female professor in anthropology. Rather than equating instances of genocidal injustice, debates about memorialisation of the enslaved and the bullying and harassment of BAME individuals in HE, I am drawing out the similarities in the processes through which injustices in all these 3 instances are not addressed and instead thwarted. While these are not equivalent, the institutional pushback against anti-racist protests particularly in 2020-2021 makes it essential for us to draw the connections between these events and analyse them on the basis of our experiences as ethnographers of memory and post-conflict contexts.

There are similarities between the legal processes through which redressal related to genocidal injustices have been stalled and the way in which the debate around statues have been curtailed by law. In January 2021, a new law was passed in UK to ensure that historic statues should be 'retained and explained' for future generations. The issue of 'due process' is also invoked in various institutional complaints relating to bullying and harassment. While the removal of the Colston statue was either described as 'destroying history' (William Dalrymple) or 'making history' (David Olusogu), it revealed how, since 1990, there had been a democratic, formal -- albeit fruitless – attempt to have Bristol's city council add a plaque to the statue that identified its connections to slavery. Yet any change was stalled by the wealthy Society of Merchant Venturers who ensured that Colston's plaque mentioned only his 'philanthropy' (Steeds and Raval 2020). The protestors, thus, reignited the conversation in UK about rejecting a society in which the statues of enslavers are allowed to tower over its citizens or be referred to as 'philanthropic sons.' Similarly, when the slavery memorial was finally built in Lancaster in 2007 at the peripheral quayside of the city where most will not see it, it was 'equalised' with the setting up at the same time of the pub with the name of the enslaver/'voyager' and furniture owner Robert Gillows in the city centre. Emblazoned on the pub's front window were these unabashed words: 'trading in the unusual since 1720.'

Higher Education's biases and discriminatory behaviour have been broached many times in the past, but have been unheeded, ignored, and enabled by bystanderism and obfuscation. In an event hosted by the Irish Museum of Modern Arts in March 2021, during a discussion of Professor Sara Ahmed's work on complaints (2017), other speakers compared the vilification of the complainants in HE that Ahmed described, to a similar resistance to the complaints brought by women, whose children were put up for adoption without their consent, by Irish mother and baby homes. This example links brilliantly to my ongoing

research on adoption and the resonance the term irreconciliation has among transnational adoptees. Ahmed's work also speaks well to how bureaucracy and institutions recreate hierarchies and resist responding meaningfully to grievances. I also show the institutional tactics of 'equivalence', 'due process', and 'balancing' which is deployed in responses to complaints. Continued complaints in the face of unheeding bureaucracies thus emerge as forms of irreconciliation. Thus, participants at the event in Ireland saw a correspondence between the experiences of complaints of Irish mothers and that of BAME academics who protested against institutional injustices. That Ahmed's dictum if you raise a problem, you become a problem is also resonant in the 31st March 2023 report on systemic abuse in the fire services. Here again one is pushed out of an organisation if one talks about the abuse while abusers continue to be rewarded in their careers. The book *She Said* (2019) written by reporters Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey (which has been made into a biographical drama film in 2022) follows their *New York Times* investigation that exposed Harvey Weinstein's history of abuse and sexual misconduct against women. Reflecting on the role of the bystanders and the laws put in place by Human Resources in enabling the abuse to continue, the reporters note that: 'this is about the system protecting the abusers.'

As in Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs), the law sets the 'parameters within which conflict must be resolved' (Turner 2016: 45) and hence helps to serve the status quo. Ahmad (2019: 161) cites a powerful and familiar example:

> For example, a member of staff made a complaint about bullying from the head of her department. The experience of bullying had been devastating, and she suffered from depression as a result. It took her a long time to get to the point where she could write a complaint. She described what happened once she was able to file a complaint: "I basically did it when I was able to because I was just really unwell for a significant period of time. And I put in the complaint and the response that I got was from the deputy VC and HR. He said he couldn't process my complaint because I had taken too long to lodge it. Some experiences are so devastating that it takes time to process them. And the length of the time taken can be used to disqualify a complaint.

Rule of law in all these instances is meant to be present, enforced but is marked by its unofficial, palpable absence-presence thereby enabling the continuation of status quo and corruption. At the same time, the force of law decides the boundaries of the cases which at the outset shuts down, forecloses, the possibilities of truth and justice. In short, 'the rule of law', the rules and laws, the instruments of law, do not always build impunity.

Fourth divergence of irreconciliation:

At this juncture, it is also important to ask what are the limits of irreconciliation if the sovereign, legal and aesthetic registers work together to create admissible memories and an 'authoritarian victimhood' (Mookherjee 2020)? What if irreconciliation itself leads to new forms of exclusion, blame, culpability, power, subjectivation and governmentality on the part of survivors. We find that the coming together of the state and law, victim and executive, can result in a regime of extra-judicial repression and increasing authoritarianism among those who have been subjected to injustice and can constitute the darker side of irreconciliation. This is an important recognition for all those seeking to inhabit irreconciliation as a mode against injustice.

Having invoked Firth and Bateson earlier in the lecture it is also worth reflecting on the darker side of anthropology and its knowledge production which has been extensively documented by David Price (2011). He shows how during World War II Gregory Bateson designed and produced "black propaganda" radio broadcasts intended to undermine Japanese propaganda in the Pacific and was involved with a number of CIA's experimental psychological warfare initiatives and mind-control research. Bateson and Margaret Mead were married and in addition to producing pamphlets for the Office of War Information, Mead produced a study for the National Research Council on the cultural food habits of people from different national backgrounds. She along with Bateson helped the OSS to establish a psychological warfare training unit for the Far East. In 1943, Ruth Benedict, Mead's long-time friend and collaborator, became the head (and initially the sole member) of the Basic Analysis Section of the Bureau of Overseas Intelligence of the Office of War Information (OWI), a position Benedict sought to use "to get policy makers to take into account different habits and customs of other parts of the world." Benedict also undertook research on Japanese personality and culture. Raymond Firth also wrote the Naval Intelligence handbooks on the Pacific Islands for the British Admiralty (Clout and Gosme 2003). As a result, he gave a lot of focus in documenting the social and economic conditions in the colonies in the post-war context thereby leading to him being appointed as the first secretary of the newly established Colonial Social Science Research Council (later changed to Social Science Research Council). Hence, knowledge of historical, geological and topographic accounts has been considered significant for the purpose of the running of the colonial machinery and war efforts – a process with which many anthropologists and other social scientists were intrinsically involved. All these geopolitical concerns have been

encapsulated within the frameworks of physical and human geography, a division which has been called into question by Bruno Latour (2018: 41):

> The geopolitical strategists who pride themselves on belonging to the "realist school" will have to modify somewhat the *reality* that their battle plans are going to have to face. Formerly, it was possible to say that humans were "on earth" or "in nature," that they found themselves in "the modern period" and that they were "humans" more or less "responsible" for their actions….One could distinguish between physical geography and human geography as if it were a matter of two layers, one superimposed upon the other. But how can we say where we are if the place "on" or "in" which we are located begins to react against our actions, turns against us, encloses us, dominates us, demands something from us and carries us along its path? How are we to distinguish from now on between physical geography and human geography.

Latour's reflection shows how today how physical geography can itself turn on human geography and blur the boundaries set up between the two. It can also make us stop and think how irreconciliation is increasingly becoming relevant for the debate around reparation for climate justice. Bangladesh, which I know so well, is again at the frontline of this climate change catastrophe.

Conclusion

Reflecting on these ethnographic manifestations of irreconciliation it is important to turn to Hannah Arendt's questions: Hannah Arendt (2002; Berkowitz: 2011: 13) writing from 1950-1973 in *Denktagebuch* (Thought Diaries)[7] poses three questions in her judgement of Eichmann: Ought one to reconcile himself to Eichmann and his wrongs? Or, barring such an active reconciliation, ought one to pass by these wrongdoings? Or, finally, ought one to say that such crimes are irreconcilable, and that the world in which such crimes exist must be rejected in the face of unacknowledged injustices? Arendt's call to reject this world, questions not just the 'wrongs' but the structures within which such wrongdoings are enabled. She writes: "one cannot reconcile himself to and that about which one ought also to neither be silent about or to pass by." (Denktagebuch, 7 as translated by Berkowitz 2011: 13). Reconstructing Spanish colonial discourses in Mexico, Laura Nader (1990) has shown how the prioritization of harmony over justice has been part of a colonial strategy vis-à-vis indigenous communities. As Bateson (1971: 481) rightly notes: 'Men have felt for centuries

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[7] As cited in Berkowitz (2011: 13).

that treachery in a truce or peace-making is worse than trickery in battle.' Unmasking this "harmony ideology" as a tool for domination, Nader is also very critical of the current excitement about reconciliation as complementary part of state legal systems. As mentioned earlier, in Bateson's chapter on Metalogue he shows how rules are constantly changed without being discovered and that lack of knowledge of what has changed itself transform rules into further instruments of control.

The concern for humanity (of the one forgiving for Derrida and of the guilty for Ricoeur) is crucial for the development of the self of both the victim and the perpetrator. The self however, also needs acknowledgement, accountability to flourish as a person in the aftermath of injustice. If the corresponding counterpoint to reconciliation is the averted look - to be silent and pass by (Arendt 2002; Berkowitz 2011: 13), it is worth reflecting on the role of silence as irreconciliation. Silence here is a site of mourning and dignity, a place from which to make the demands of acknowledgement, of demands for retribution (not revenge and amnesty). A politics of refusal (Simpson 2017:19) (than recognition) thereby marks out a quiet confrontation (Selimovic 2018), borne out of an unwillingness to participate and hence legitimise processes claiming to seek justice. Irreconciliation is that speculative, indeterminate place from which one would move on one's own volition and only when justice has been delivered. This to me constitutes Firth's focus on process than structure, on individual divergences as a source of social change rather than social organizations. In such contexts, the continuing demand for accountability, acknowledgement and truth in post-conflict complexities, is what makes irreconciliation significant and might offer some possibilities for an engaged anthropology in these troubled times.

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