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PEBCO 3 and the TRC

The period of Truth and Reconciliation will forever be an important part of South African history and will be remembered because of its progressive approach of being open and attempting to reconcile instead of punishing everyone involved in the atrocities committed during the era of apartheid. Many were killed and detained unjustly during apartheid and the transitional justice promoted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission strived to attain the truth for the victims' families and the world. One of the many stories of abduction and murder during apartheid, that emerged out of the TRC's truth-telling process, was the story of the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation Three or PEBCO Three. Their story began on 8 May 1985 when Sipho Hashe, Champion Galela, and Qaqawuli Godolozzi were abducted by security police. Although apartheid destroyed families, communities, and changed the lives of thousands, the PEBCO Three and other cases heard by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission illustrate the healing process of a nation through truth and reconciliation.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was a commission based on the idea of transitional justice. The hearings held by the TRC were not aimed at trying people for their criminal acts but at obtaining the truth by being open and honest about what had occurred during apartheid. Within the TRC, there were three committees each charged with specific tasks; these committees were the Human Rights Violations Committee, Reparation and Rehabilitation

Committee, and the Amnesty committee. Anyone who had committed a serious offense during apartheid could apply for amnesty in exchange for full disclosure of the events that took place.

Antje du Bois-Pedain in her book *Transitional Amnesty in South Africa* says of the TRC:

'The granting of amnesty was made subject to certain procedural and material conditions. It promised protection from criminal prosecution and from civil claims, but only in exchange for a full disclosure by the perpetrator of all relevant facts of his offence.' (du Bois-Pedain, 2007)

The TRC served to heal through the testimony of the perpetrator who helped answer all the unknowns surrounding the offence committed. It is hard for people emotionally to not know what happened to their loved one and the TRC was about being open in order for those emotional wounds to heal the best they could.

The TRC was not just about the perpetrators but the victims' and their families. It afforded victims the right to know what happened and also as a place where they could be heard through testimonies. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission made absolutely sure to include the victims, defined as:

'Persons who, individually or together with one or more persons, suffered harm in the form of physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, pecuniary loss or a substantial impairment of human rights.' (du Bois-Pedain, 2007)

The victims of apartheid were very much apart of the TRC hearings as were those applying for amnesty. South Africa's use of transitional justice as compared to that of the Nuremburg trials of Nazi Germany put an emphasis on amnesty as an incentive for telling the truth. In Germany, the focus had been on those accused of crimes, but in South Africa, the focus is on the truth and the victims. The families of the three Port of Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation members, until the hearings by the TRC, knew nothing of the circumstances surrounding their loved one's deaths.

Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation & the UDF

The Port of Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation was formed in October of 1979 in Port Elizabeth. The group's main objective was to fight for the rights of the people through mass protest and participation. Around the time of the group's formation, life was becoming increasingly difficult in Port Elizabeth. Gregory Houston, author of *The National Liberation Struggle in South Africa*, says of the conditions surrounding the creation of PEBCO:

'Drought, overpopulation and lack of employment in the homelands led to a rapid population growth and high unemployment rates. Funds for housing were inadequate, and the townships were characterised by a lack of adequate services, overcrowding and shacks.' (Houston, 1999)

PEBCO was one of many organisations that were focused on trying to help better the living situations of the masses and also end discriminatory laws in the Eastern Cape. PEBCO was about the people and was grounded in their will and participation in organised mass rallies and protests. It was one of a multitude of organisations that would attend these organised protests, leading to sometimes thousands of people rallying or boycotting certain products. The organisation of these groups was well done and disciplined, as in this one instance:

'By early November (1985) the boycott in Port Elizabeth was coming to a head. In the first place, the CB (consumer boycott) was—and had been for almost four months—still solidly in place and, within the retail sector, was having devastating economic effects.' (Houston, 1999)

The discipline and organisation of the masses by groups such as PEBCO were a major part of the struggle against apartheid. Groups like PEBCO not only organised the members within the group, but between each other too. PEBCO was an affiliate of the United Democratic Front, an umbrella organisation that made this type of coordination, between Pebco and other organisations and trade unions, possible.

The United Democratic Front (UDF) was formed in 1983 and was an instrumental part of leading the masses. Possibly their most vital role was the coordination of multiple organisations

to create mass protests rallies, and boycotts. The founding of the UDF came at a crucial time in the struggle against apartheid. Houston says of the UDF's role:

'The formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in August 1983 introduced a new challenge to white minority rule. This filled the instrumental vacuum created by the banning of the ANC and PAC, and the destruction of the BCM.'
(Houston, 1999)

The UDF assumed many of the responsibilities of the ANC but attempted not to show any affiliation with them because of their banishment. The UDF played a big role in the Eastern Cape, where Port Elizabeth is located. Acting as a sort of umbrella organisation, the UDF organised protests and collaborated with PEBCO on multiple occasions. PEBCO also adopted the Freedom Charter upon the endorsement of it by the UDF. The Freedom Charter, created in the 1950s, was the central political doctrine of the ANC that called for equal rights, human rights and government by the people for the people. The charter was adopted by a multitude of groups that opposed apartheid. Because of the affiliation between the UDF and PEBCO, members of both groups were considered to be important political players in the struggle against apartheid, making them a threat to the government. Greg Houston says of the UDF's effectiveness:

'At the local level the organisational impetus provided by popular struggles during the mid-1980's led to the growth of civic organisations in every major city...These ranged from large, mass-based civics of Port Elizabeth...' (Houston, 1999)

The UDF was a major player in the Eastern Cape. They collaborated with hundreds of organisations including with PEBCO and its members, such as Champion Galela, President Qaqawuli Godolozzi, and General Secretary Siphon Hashe or the PEBCO Three.

The Deaths of the PEBCO Three

The PEBCO Three, Champion Galela, Siphon Hashe, and Qaqawuli Godolozzi were activists in the struggle against apartheid. They were leaders and well liked men who were prominent in organising community protests and rallies. Before these three men were abducted, each worked towards freedom in a multitude of ways. Siphon Hashe was interested in organising the youth, and he

'Had a strong passion for youth activism and played a behind-the-scenes-role while he was under house arrest for five years after his release from Robben Island, energising the students to activism.' (Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality website)

Siphon Hashe was committed to organising the masses for protests and he tried to do that through his encouragement of youths. His title, General Secretary, and involvement essentially made him a target for the security police.

Qaqawuli Godolozzi became the President of PEBCO after its transitional period in the early 1980s when the leadership positions in the group changed with the banning of president Thozamile Botha, whose strong leadership had attracted the support or membership of many of the people in the community. Godolozzi was a leader who looked to inspire and organise the masses in protests. *'He was a relatively younger and enthusiastic leader who, together with Hashe and Galela, played a prominent role in organising consumer boycotts...'* (Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality) Through peaceful protest and boycotts, Godolozzi affected the struggle against apartheid by illustrating the lengths him and the people he led were willing to go to for their freedom and equality.

Champion Galela just like Hashe and Godolozzi was a dedicated member of PEBCO who became one of the leading members of the group after the departure of Thozamile Botha. Galela was a respected member of society and a family man who was a revolutionary. He helped

organise protests alongside his fellow members. Hashe, Godolozi, and Galela, were the targets of an assassination plot by the security police in 1985. Their prominent roles in PEBCO and affiliation with the UDF caused them to be perceived as a threat to the government. Their subsequent abduction and assassinations were one of the many acts of violence committed against social and political activists. On 8 May 1985 Siphon Hashe, Qaqawuli Godolozi, and Champion Galela were on their way to the airport to meet a person whom they believed to be with the British Consulate who was sympathetic to their cause. However, this phone call was faked and was really just a reason to get the leaders to leave their houses so that they could be abducted. This plan was set up by the security police in Port Elizabeth as Johannes Martin Van Zyl of the security police said during his testimony:

'We decided to make use of the askaris. Captain Venter was obviously in charge of the askaris and the idea was that the askaris, because they weren't known in the area, and because their vehicle wasn't known, that they should actually carry out the abduction and that would then mean that no member of the Security Branch would be implicated in the abduction.' (Amnesty hearing Van Zyl, 1997)

When they arrived at the airport, they were abducted at their car by members of the askari. Askaris were people who had been part of the liberation movement but switched their allegiance to the state whether it was through coercion or choice. While the abduction was occurring, the Port Elizabeth security police were waiting elsewhere at the airport. Hashe, Godolozi, and Galela were then taken to a farm in Cradock called Post Chalmers. It was here that the men were interrogated. After spending the night, the next day they were given a sleeping agent in their coffees and they fell asleep. It was after this point that Johannes Martin Van Zyl, Gideon Nieuwoudt and Gerhardus Lotz of the security branch shot each in the back of the head. Their bodies were taken out back where they were put on top of some wood and covered in diesel fuel and set on fire in order to hide the remains. It wasn't until the TRC that the victim's families

would hear these details. The brutalities of apartheid would finally be told so that people could reconcile and know what really happened to their loved ones after so many years of not having the slightest clue. The case of the PEBCO Three illustrates the journey to reconciliation and just how important it can be to the victim's families.

PEBCO Three and the TRC

The purpose of the TRC was to be a truth-finding group that granted amnesty—only with full disclosure—for politically motivated acts carried out during apartheid. In the case of the PEBCO 3, there were many people who applied for amnesty, including Hermanus Du Plessis, Gerhardus Johannes Lotz, Gideon Nieuwoudt and Harold Snyman, Johannes Martin Van Zyl, Gerhardus Cornerlius Beeslaar, Kimani Peter Mogoai, and Johannes Koole, all of whom played a role in the abduction and killings. Van Zyl, Nieuwoudt, and Lotz were members of the Port Elizabeth Security Police and had recruited the help of Vlakplaas members who were Beeslaar, Mogoai, and Koole and Joe Mamasela. Mogoai, Koole and Mamasela were all askaris working for Vlakplaas. Mamasela was the only one not to apply for amnesty, but was subpoenaed by the commission to testify. Mamasela's testimony contradicted all of the others who had applied for amnesty and was the source of much controversy. Mamasela is said to have cut a deal in order to avoid applying for amnesty. Not only did all the men who applied for amnesty and Mamasela testify, but so did the wives of Champion Galela, Qaqawuli Godolozzi, and Sipho Hashe.

Rita Galela, Nquabakazi Godolozzi, and Elisabeth Hashe all testified in front of the Human Rights Violation committee, which had been created so that victims and their families could speak out about their struggle with apartheid and what it was like for them. During their testimonies, each of the three women shared their experiences of apartheid and to ask for the

truth to help them heal. During Rita Galela's testimony, she said

'I would like them to confess and state why they killed my husband and would like to know who were the perpetrators and murderers of my husband, so that we can be able to reconcile. If we have washed our hands we will be glad, we'll reconcile.... We don't want their disappearance to remain indefinitely. At least the truth must come.' (Human Rights Violation Galela 1996)

Mrs. Galela, Godolozzi, and Hashe were able to share their feelings and their thoughts during their testimony, and in doing so, they all championed the Commission for what it was trying to do. The above statement made by Mrs. Galela cuts to the heart of the TRC and its goals of full-disclosure and reconciliation. These three women understood this and stated during their testimonies that the truth would help them heal, that by knowing what happened they can come to terms with the killings and at the very least, lessen the burden that they had lived with for so long. The truth is a powerful thing and knowing the truth can make all the difference about how both the perpetrators and the victims feel.

Full-disclosure was a defining factor in being granted amnesty for politically motivated crimes. But full-disclosure was not just for the purposes of amnesty, it was solely a motive to share what really happened during some of the atrocities of apartheid. The truth does not only help the victims, but it can also help the perpetrator. In du-Bois Pedain's book she shares the reasoning of the South African Constitutional Court for granting amnesty in exchange for full disclosure:

'The families of those unlawfully tortured, maimed or traumatised become more empowered to discover the truth, the perpetrators become exposed to opportunities to obtain relief from the burden of a guilt or an anxiety they might be living with for many long years...sometimes painful objectives of the amnesty articulated in the epilogue' (South African Constitutional Court in du-Bois Pedain, 2007)

The recognition by the South African Constitutional Court illustrates the main purpose of the

truth and how it can be a powerful and necessary thing in order to reconcile. People want to know what happened in order to lessen a burden and many of the perpetrators want to lessen their burden too.

The perpetrator's testimonies served to create a timeline of events from the time of the planning of the abduction until their deaths. The point of these hearings was to learn the truth. In a cross examination between Advocate Lamey and Gerhardus Lotz, Lamey said to Lotz:

'Why aren't you certain? You see, we want to determine with some measure of accuracy what you know, we don't want to know what you think or seem to think, we would like to know whether it's possible - whether you know that they had already been locked up in the garage when you went to bed, or whether you can't say.' (Amnesty Hearing Lotz 1997)

Advocate Lamey's statement is an example of exactly what the TRC was implemented to do. He is searching for the truth and not uncertainties. The amnesty hearings hinged on telling the truth and the facts surrounding an event. The incentive of amnesty for crimes committed helped to ensure a more truthful response to questioning. Du Bois-Pedain states what the amnesty part of the TRC meant in the grand scheme of things:

'Moreover, by embedding the amnesty process in the wider truth-finding efforts of the South African TRC, amnesty was said to contribute to, and in fact to be crucial for moral and political reconstruction of society.' (Du Bois-Pedain, 2007)

The TRC was formed out of a political compromise and in that sense included, was part of the greater political refiguring of South Africa. It also was morally reconstructive because it emphasized the importance of honesty and openness from those involved in the abuses of apartheid.

The TRC was a vehicle to let all affected by apartheid speak their feelings. Not only were those applying for amnesty heard in these cases, but also so were the victims' families. They

were given a chance to confront those who took their loved ones from them in hopes of them being able to find some closure. In many of the videos taken during hearings by the TRC, there are many scenes of families crying who are distraught over hearing the testimonies of some of the security police and others involved. In “Facing the Truth with Bill Moyer,” a documentary on the TRC, one of the wives of the PEBCO 3 victims is so emotionally hurt by what she is hearing, she must leave the room. It is instances like these that in many ways illustrate the healing process. Grieving is part of that process and its one that some had to wait years and years to go through, but the TRC gave them the opportunity to move on with that process. While it might seem likely to worsen some people’s pain, the TRC helped to write the remaining part of a chapter in their life story and did its best to lessen their burden through searching for the truth, because the truth allows them to come to terms with what happened so that the healing of a nation can continue.

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