know more about the less well documented social life of the rural populace at this time. I am not convinced that the picture she draws of institutionalised women participation in precolonial Nigeria, holds true across society and variegated political structures.

Reading through the book, one is pleasantly shocked by prescience and perceptiveness of the women political activists, who, far more than their descendants of the 1990's, grasped the strategic advantages of organisation and mobilisation, what we see today is a myriad of groups and splinter groups sometimes working at cross purposes. Among the many delights of the book, are the lessons which it offers, in the area of strategy, to the empower-

ment activists of today - the significantly altered terrain notwithstanding.

I warmly recommend the book for the striking contemporeity of its theme, its judicious scholarship and lucid prose style.

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Truth Before Reconciliation Wole Ogundel

W.P.B Botha, A DUTY OF MEMORY, Heinemann, Oxford, 1997.

HE question, what would post-apartheid South Africa be like has now changed to: what is post-apartheid South Africa beginning to look like? Three years into the new era, it is no longer a speculative question though there are no definitive answers yet. In many respects the whole of the decade-if not also the next-will clearly be a transition period between apartheid South Africa and democratic South Africathe South Africa without the compound prefix

made things easier. For one thing, there is a feeling among the Black population that the Afrikaner National Party has been let off too easily. Could just dismantling apartheid alone, as laudable as it was, atone for half a century of deliberate, systematic sins, political evils and crimes? Thinking that it had done enough by just letting go of power, the National Party did not see any reason to apologise for all those crimes. Clearly, some form of confession followed but apology was needed to heal the wounds, and also to make the necessary social and moral transition. The device now being employed to bring both about is of course the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Judging by the harrowing truths that several of those-white or black-who have been testifying

> before this Commission have been divulging, it has so far been a useful device serving a very psychological as well as social and political purpose. But long after the Commission would have forgiven all those forgivable, wound up its business and dispersed, memories and mutual suspicions would still linger. Especially memories of the seemingly gratuitous violence committed between 1989 and 1994. For apartheid in this period of its death throes was a wounded snake biting anything and everything within its range, blindly, mindlessly. Perhaps the Truth Commission's most difficult task so far has been how to separate genuine politically motivated crimes from deliberate crimes against humanity - i.e, morally rep-

rehensible and politically inexcusable ones. Even if the commission were juridicial rather than political, it would still probably never be able to neatly and satisfactorily make the distinctions, talk less of squaring their truths into circles of political and moral reconciliation.



Archbishop
Desmond
Tutu and Alex
Boraine at the
inception of
the Truth and
Reconciliation
Commission
in Cape Town

'post-apartheid', the South Africa no longer weighted down by the terrible burden of two centuries of wars, racial hatred and 'separate development.'

That apartheid did not end in a cataclysmic war but in a negotiated democracy has not

W.P.B. Botha's A Duty of Memory is, literally and figuratively, one of the 'testimonies' before the commission. This third novel by an Afrikaner (his earlier ones are The Reluctant Playwright and Wantok, which this reviewer has not read), is a total, no-holds-barred moral, political and social indictment of, not just the apartheid regime, but the very civilisation which the Boers evolved in South Africa and which became dominant during that period: a joyless, xenophobic civilisation which created more 'metal monsters' than human beings. A Duty of Memory is about how the lives of two families, one Black and the other Boer, inextricably intertwined since the days of apartheid, come to a paroxymal end in those violent years leading up to the democratic elections of 1994. Indeed, a significant aspect of this novel is its indirect allusions, if at all, to these events that held the world spellbound between 1989 and 1994. Botha manages to make these events the background to the tapestry of his narrative without making them distract our attention from the figures in the carpet. There is Andried Hertzenberg, a rugger of great promise who makes the mistake of letting an English girl, Caroline, talk him into marriage. From the moment Andries marries her, his hopes of playing for the Springboks are dashed for ever. For Afrikanerdom, marriage to this girl, whose people are believed to be the historical enemies of the God-ordained apartheid kingdom is a sin and also an act of political betrayal. Shunned by family and nation, Andries takes to the bottle and the sjambok, using the former as liberally on himself as he uses the latter on his wife and black servantworkers. He also takes to molesting his young but beautiful daughter Johanna (Jo). Just before going mad from a combination of beatings, loneliness and the xenophobia plus extreme parochialism of the little farming community of Middleburg, Caroline performs one last act of defiance: she spirits Jo out of South Africa to England. Her second child, Eeben 'Bin Ears' Balthazaar, grows up in this dissociated environment of a violent, drunken father and abused mother who eventually has to be taken to the asylum. For fear of being spirited away also, his father takes him to the boarding school. But although Eeben may have escaped the horrors of home, he cannot escape the rumours whispered about his family by his schoolmates.

The other family is that of the black workerservants on the Leeufontein farm: Lucas, Lettie and their children Flora and Mafimane. Midwifed by Lettie's mother, Mafimane and Johanna are born in the same hour and in fact put in the same cot for the first few hours of their life. From that moment until Johanna is

'stolen' away to England, the two are inseparable. When several years later Eeben returns to Leeufontein, his father having already ruined himself and the farm, it is Mafimane who helps him to get it going again. But Eeben had already gotten into bad company while in school, and now, these friends have graduated from bashing homosexuals into killing anybody who seemed to be in support of the rapid political changes taking place in the country. Always of a weaker spleen, Eeben soon develops a conscience, is in a danger of being eliminated by his more bloodthirsty Boer friends and takes to drinking. Then he, his mother, wife and children are found together in a car, all shot dead. Mafimane is arrested.

Johanna, now anglicised as Jo Hines, returns with her girlfriend Beth from London where she has been living a dissolute life. She believes that it is Mafimane who committed the crime, not out of any belated explosion of black rage, but out of a secret love pact he made with her long ago: 'That night when you were all asleep he put his arm round me under the table, whispered in my ear, "One day we will have our revenge. One day, sister, we will put an end to all this suffering." (p.140). Indeed, by the time Jo arrives - but unknown to anybody -Mafimane has already been hanged as a convenient scapegoat for the crime. It is never clear if Mafimane actually committed the crime, but Jo believes so. On the other hand Franz Muller, the young police sergeant who is in love with Jo, believes that Eeben first killed his mother. wife and children and then shot himself. This looks more plausible, as he has become totally disillusioned with Afrikanerdom and has been on the run from Draak and company, the fanatical and deadly Boer gang determined to undermine the new political process. Jo's lover Beth, who has stayed with her all this while, is intent on saving her by taking her back to England. But having learnt that Mafimane has been hanged, Jo makes a last desperate effort to get the truth out by handing over the tape in which Eeben has recorded the sordid family history to the police captain who has been waiting around. Draak's agents have also been waiting and are determined to not let the truth get out. There is a shootout, and Jo is killed. Her last thoughts are of Mafimane. In the novel's epilogue, Letie and her family, with the help of Muller, have put money together to buy Leeufontein farm under the name Jomane (a combination of Jo and Mafimane) Enterprises and Beth seems on the verge of making a decision to return to South Africa.

This plot summary does not do justice to this emotionally dense novel, nor to its different narrative strategies. Eeben's story for instance, which constitutes the tape evidence, is told in the camera close-up technique of first person; Jo's in the long-distance one of third person and through the recollecting minds of Eeben and Beth. Then a part of Caroline's is told through her letters, as are some parts of Mafimane's. There are also Jo's memorial flashbacks, which make the past not far away and long ago, but a continuous, immediate present. All these give the narrative the pace and quality of a slow-motion picture in which the camera lingers continuously on the faces of the actors, to register their minute and slowly changing emotions. The technique also enjoins the reader to constantly adjust her/his emotional involvement in the story, in addition to adding to its technical as well as thematic complexities. This is particularly apposite in a novel about time and memories, as the title emphasises. As Beth surmises, 'memories were not the same as facts Without memories facts were like the bricks of a demolished house. It was memories that held them together, gave them shape, meaning' (p.88). Indeed, at another point, there is a brief debate about the uses of memory between Beth and Lettie. 'Old memories,' says, Lettie, 'are like too much fat. They block the arteries.' No, Beth disagrees, '...they're the oxygen in the blood' (p.133). It is memories of their repressed childhood, of their brutal father as symbol of Afrikanerdom, that destroy first Eeben, and then Jo. But then, it is also memory, a refusal to sweep the past under the carpet of naive forgiveness, that will save the future nation from its horrendous past. Individuals like Jo, Eeben and Mafimane may be crushed, but as long as the nation is saved, their tragedies would not have been in vain. At the group level. the point that Andrie's story drives home is that the Afrikaners have been as much dam-

aged by their oppression of others (to oppress others, you have to repress yourself) as the Black people; but that because they are the victimisers, their own damage has remained repressed, hidden and unrecognised.

Written in a simple lyrical style that verges on the poetic (especially in the numerous land-scape descriptions), A Duty of Memory invites reading as a political allegory, especially of its numerous, obviously symbolic objects, actions and episodes: the tape as hidden/repressed memory which has to be brought out into the open; the birth of Jo and Mafimane at the same moment and together, plus the posthumous combination of their names in Jomane Enterprises, both encapsulating the past and future of South Africa; Jo's failed solo attempt to build a memorial wall in the kraal and her dream of Lettie (African), Beth (English) and Muller (Boer) cooperating to build it, and many more.

Although holding the advantage of numerical superiority, Blacks in South Africa never looked forward to the day when the Afrikaners would be driven into the sea, even in the days when war was considered the only option left for achieving freedom. Literature of reconciliation and racial integration has always poured forth from them, and from the pens of Coloured and Anglo-South African writers. Now that Afrikaners like W.P.B. Botha are adding their voice to this genre, we have reason to look forward to a real attitudinal sea-change in the country. For what A Duty of Memory shows is that, beyond its political and economic manifestations, apartheid was fundamentally a religious doctrine.

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Reading Faces

Owen Logan

Roger Ballen, CETTE AFRIQUE LA, photo Poche Societe, Paris, 1997, 55 pp

O summarise
Roger Ballen's photographs in South
Africa involves inevitable simplifications. The pictures are for the
most part of white South Africans and have been made in
a way slightly reminiscent of
Diane Arbus. Extending the

parallel with north America one might borrow the term 'white trash' which, although harshly pejorative, doesn't seem out of place when approaching the images. Lionel Murcott's introduction to the photo poche publication remarks on the 'atavistic' bleakness to be found in these pic-

tures. Ballen has indeed sought out a particular version of whiteness in South Africa which may appear subversive in the context of the former apartheid regime. The psychological sense which Ballen has brought to the pictures suggests perversely damaged and fragmented identities which seem to spit on South Africa's former white face. Many of the pictures also suggest an unseen violence which is more frightening by its very absence. Apart from the occasional gun or truncheon, Ballen draws on more ambiguous