



Eastern Cape Bloodlines I: Assembling the Human

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This is an article less about red as installation, colour or symbol, and more about assembly.¹ I have used Red, the installation by Simon Gush, as provocation to think of exhumation, its work and processes of assembling–disassembling–reassembling.² The particular exhumation discussed here involves the mortal remains of five anti-apartheid activists recovered at Post Chalmers outside the rural Eastern Cape town of Cradock in July 2007 by the Missing Persons’ Task Team (MPTT).³ ‘Topsy’ Madaka and Siphiso Mthimkulu, and Champion Galela, Qaqawuli Godolosi and Siphiso Hashe (the ‘Pebco Three’) were killed in April 1982 and May 1985 respectively by Port Elizabeth security police, who thereafter burnt the bodies.⁴

Parenthesis 1

This article too is a product of assembly–disassembly–reassembly. Written first as a conference paper on corporealities of violence, I later abandoned the unfinished article and then disassembled and re-assembled it for Red Assembly, with a different thematic in mind. Such an ‘exhumation’ from a graveyard of earlier papers ideas, or drafts will be familiar to many.

At the time of writing about corporealities of violence, I had in mind a provocation offered by Suren Pillay, whose dissertation critically examines how violence is figured in South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC) work. Dissecting the TRC’s focus on the individual as locus both of suffering, defined as gross violations of human rights (the ‘victim’), and of responsibility for such violation (the ‘perpetrator’), Pillay proposes:

Apartheid has been seen as a set of gross violations of Human Rights, rendering the latter liable and the former opaque, and in the process normalizing one kind of violence while pathologizing another. We have therefore been moved to study the bodies, search their remains for traces of the state that might have been left at the scene of the violence. This is the forensic work performed in the production of a counter-narrative to the state. We have been looking for the state on the body, for its fingerprints and its presence... Death as a result of political violence in South Africa under apartheid has produced ‘who’ questions that simultaneously had readymade answers.⁵

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