

# **Happiness and Post-Conflict**

Edited by Constance Goh and Bernard McGuirk



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*Happiness and Post-Conflict,*

edited by Constance Goh and Bernard McGuirk

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### **Dedication**

This collection of essays is dedicated to Elizabeth Taylor.  
Ever striving to avoid conflict, she inspired happiness.

## **Introduction** **On Happiness and Post-Conflict**

**Constance Goh and Bernard McGuirk**

Wars – hot and cold – are like love affairs. They don't just end. They fizzle and sputter; sometimes they reignite [...] for a postwar era lasts as long as people affected by conflict employ that painful or exhilarating experience to assess their own current relationship and aspirations [...] the morning after is always an ambiguous moment. What just happened? Who benefited from it?

Cynthia Enloe

There are and will be many mornings after... The series *Studies in Post-Conflict Cultures*, launched in 2006 with *Post-Conflict Cultures: Rituals of Representation*, posed the challenge that has subsequently been taken up in the volumes *Hors de Combat*, *Diasporas* and, now, in *Happiness and Post-Conflict*: how to record, whilst respecting, if not recapturing, those always ambiguous moments – referred to in Cynthia Enloe's interrogative as to "What just happened?" – that resonate sometimes in silence, though often amidst all-too-intensive noises on and off the post-conflict stage? Such inseparable testifying and questioning have been and will continue to be the aspiration of all contributors both to the series and to the present volume. Their re-engagement with the silences and violences residing in the notion of the "post-conflict" exposes further, and plurally, the contradictions always latent, and often lying, within the term as within the spheres of former and ongoing confrontation and struggle. The aftermath, the latter effects, the subsequent to or consequent upon entailed in the "post-" can only be understood, if ever explained, in and by what is veiled by the replays, the deferrals and the slippages of the conflict and its still combative or would-be conciliatory discourses. In other words, the posting of the script will ever gain further momentum in and because of the conflicted space and the conflictual time, whether in aggression, retaliation or reconciliation, in which the embattled subject performs. As Macdonald Daly avers, in his essay on Leon Trotsky, albeit in respect of another time, another place and other circumstances, "we are always in conflict".

Neal Curtis opens a discussion which is lodged necessarily within the interstices of the *economy* (in both the conventional sense and with the Derridan added meaning of differential relations) of ontology and the ontological dimension of economic systems. Curtis argues that economic colonisation, the "attempt to seize and plunder resources", is masked, more often than not, by the rhetoric of neo-liberal and, then, neo-conservative democracy that defines the approach of a West to its Middle-Eastern or Eastern other. The insistence of the United States that the countries of conflict join the "movement of transnational capital", and those countries' compliance to its directive, demonstrate

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how the economy and politics of those nations are, however vicariously, already and always in the hands and at the mercy of a Wall Street-Washington alliance. Curtis's analysis of the manner in which the democratic superpower conducts the economic war by ontological manoeuvres covers Tony Blair's turn to neo-conservatism after the "infamous 'dodgy dossier' that was the product of incompetent intelligence and political deceit". As "the epitome of liberal democracy", the United States' intervention in Iraq uncannily recalls its "profoundly anti-democratic project" of Vietnam with the same failure – *pace* George W. Bush's belated claim to the contrary – to raise Iraq to the economic stature of a so-called democratised country, resulting in the economic deprivation and political turmoil in the "new" – hardly post-conflict – Iraq.

The anti-democratic phantom lurking behind, or prior to, the United States' democratic stance is invoked by Roberto Grandi's circumspect contextualising of more than a century's interrelations between media and conflicts. Grandi's "On the Promotion of Conflicts: the Media and War" is a critical re-mapping of the ways in which the democratic superpower obtains and maintains the consensus of its population in favour of its war effort through media manipulations, corroborating Curtis's thesis on how media machinations aid in the concealment of the agendas of the hegemonic power-broker. However, as Grandi argues, the media domination of the United States which helps "to maintain a mass consensus for war" occurs "at the cost of censoring and deforming the news". Grandi's exploration starts with the Crimean War and concludes with the post-Gulf War II Iraq conflict in a succinct and comprehensive tracing of the way the media both document and aid the propaganda efforts of the democratic powers. But even media machinations cannot and will not control indefinitely or with impunity the otherwise verifiable documentation upon which authentic journalism is founded – a direct representation of the occurrences in the war zone – not least because of technological advances in mass communication; these can and habitually will be subject not only to manipulation but also to the testing of any suspicions arising from and subsequent interrogations of the ostensible or alleged motives supporting the war effort. Choice? To be Foxed or out-foxed? That is the question.

Constance Goh's discussion of the Danish Cartoons Controversy shows up the contradictions within the power struggle between the Muslim fundamentalists and the Western powers with a focus on form as *technē*. Unwilling and unable to take sides in this supposedly Manichaeian confrontation, in a willed and precarious sitting-on-the-fence, she reveals the underlying sameness within the difference between the two opposing parties through a filter of Jacques Derrida's and Jacques Lacan's writings. Goh's argument stems from the dehumanisation implied by global dominance and resulting in the inhuman which takes the extreme form of suicide bombers – the terror from the suicide bombings reflects the horrors of what is known in postmodernity as the other than human. "Country Matters" are demonstrated to be also metaphysical affairs, an oxymoron predicated on a transition mobilised by and within metonymic transferences

between writing and being.

The question of violence in post-conflict cultures sees a provisional re-framing in Cristina Demaria's "Reconciliation and Forgiving: the Power of Happy Memory". Closing the theoretical section and acting simultaneously as the pivot that moves the discussion to the section on case studies, Demaria's interrogation of the efficacy of remembrance and forgetting in the form of narratives unveils the ontological destabilisation of historical traumas, extending both Curtis's and Goh's theses that the greatest violence is the aggression found in the universalising tendency of global colonisation, a violence emerging, for example, from a South African apartheid which eventually ends in dehumanising both the perpetrators and the victims, a dehumanisation based on "skin colour". Demaria looks at the possibility of reconciliation as experiencing the impossible, the miracle, in the reconstruction of history in its decapitalised form. The theoretical transition from Curtis's post-Heideggerian take on economic wars to the post-postcolonial letting the oppressed (or repressed) speak, instead of just letting them be, focuses on the effectiveness of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an emphasis predicated upon Paul Ricoeur's citation of the Derridan paradoxical notion of forgiveness as the ultimate letting go of the unforgivable.

Sturdy support is given to the opening theoretical reflections in the essays on post-conflict architectures and performance art. Michelle Pépin's "Reconstructions and Memories in the Post-Conflict City" turns to the "global cast of 'the city'" with a reading aided by Norberg-Schulz's writing on the interrelations between being and space within architecture. Pépin's comprehensive discussion of the metaphysics underlying environmental images covers a spectrum from the Greek city states to postmodern Berlin. Her argument outlines that hubristic edifice of the City of Man which attempts to override the Augustinian City of God – an intertwining of environmental mastery and cultural identity – and revitalises the symbolic capacity of spatial design to be read as "the expression of these experiences in defining the human being's comprehension of their "beingness", the self in manifestation. More importantly, Pépin's thesis alerts us to the fact that what we see (and hear) is only part of what there is despite the transparency and steeliness of the glitzy postmodern architecture.

Elena Pirazzoli's "Ruins and Reconstruction of the Post-Conflict City: Towards a Poetics of Rubble in the Twentieth Century" recounts the post-conflict rebuilding of cities after the massive environmental upheaval of modern technologisation in its double senses as manifested by the aftermath of World War II. Her essay recalls Derrida's infinite love of the ruin in the "Force of Law: the Mystical Foundation of Authority" with the focus on the wordplay between "ruin" and "rubble", an intersection that reveals the weak cornerstone of metaphysics. Its fall correlates with the cadence found in the rubble of the Third Reich which crescendos to the modern city of Berlin rebuilt from the "ground zero" of Nuremberg – "the destroyed city, the divided city and the capital of reunification" – and corresponds with the multiple "stratifications of History". She moves beyond Pépin's earlier use of

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Italo Calvino's literary representation of the city to the filmic level of Tacita Dean's shot of the *Palast der Republik* "in which she registers the light mutation of the orange-brown windows as they gradually gain golden reflections".

Pirazzoli's focus on aesthetics is mirrored by María José Contreras's "Bombs and Poems: The Representation of Conflict through Performance Art" – re-echoing Demaria's notion of the reconstructive possibilities deriving from presentation within representation. Contreras's psychoanalytic reading of the bombardment with poetic book markers of five cities, Santiago, Dubrovnik, Guernika, Dresden and Nagasaki, by the *Casagrande* project, celebrates the memorial reconstruction of the cities affected by various conflicts via the semiotic slippages found in representation; her discussion also draws on Cathy Caruth's speculation as to how the psychological fragmentation of the individual can result from cultural traumas in her exploration of the impact of the remembered confrontation. Alternative recollection opens up a space for the post-conflict cultures to restructure their identity based on a "happy memory" – an expansion of Demaria's, Pépin's and Pirazzoli's reading of the interlacing of the individual and the collective experiences in the active commemoration of conflict through the performative dimension of representation.

Closing this section, Stanislaw Rzyski provides a penetrating look at how the sterile construction of government housing shows the "rift between ideology, planning and the actual completion of these blocks of flats" – the "heritage from the former [Socialist] system and the role of the word 'blokowsko'" – "block estates" reflecting the "lack", akin to the black hole mentioned by Neal Curtis in "Economic Wars and the Myth of Post-Conflict Democracy", within the Socialist *bloc* of the Soviet Union. Rzyski argues that the architecture which manifests the dogmatic ideology of Socialism had a lasting effect on the ontological status of the Polish people. The initial campaign to improve "the living conditions of the working class" by realising "the egalitarian principles of social policy concerning mainly equal access to flats of a uniform standard" cannot, in fact, be *realised* because of the schizoid Real symbolically reiterated by the connotations attached to the word "blokowski". According to Rzyski: "Following the changes to the system in 1989 the estates have become *something unwanted* or at the very least *troublesome*. They are synonymous with the old system, of *mediocrity, poverty, lack of prospects, and deprivation*. The notion of the 'blokowsko' has taken on a pejorative meaning which threatened to become a constituent part of the Polish mentality. Films about the block estates have been made, for example 'Blokersi' (*The Blockers*) by Sylwester Latkowski of 2001, 'Cześć Tereska' (*Hi, Little Teresa*) directed by Robert Gliński of 2001, or 'Dzień Świra' (*The Day of the Freak*) directed by Marek Kroterski in 2002. All these films portray the traumas connected with the living in blocks on these large estates [...] and strengthen the image of the 'blokowsko' as a *pathological space* which is unattractive and dirty, and which is, furthermore, inhabited by people who live on fringes of society without prospects".

Rui Gonçalves Miranda's "Constructed Happiness: On the Seductions

of Messianism" operates as a bridge into "Histories", reading the Portuguese obsession with King Sebastian, nicknamed the "Desired One", as another version of the lure of Messianism. The myth of the valiant King lives on because of the "present absence" at the core of the image, an absence shrouded in multiple narratives reconstructed in different genres – figuratively represented as a fortress of an Empire. Gonçalves Miranda's argument supports Vidal Bouzón's stance that happiness is experienced inversely in the pursuit of the desired object since one cannot completely recuperate something that is dead and lost centuries ago (we are told Sebastian's body was never found). But it is precisely the irrecoverable that prompts these efforts of recovery.

Macdonald Daly's "The Dialectic of Conflict and Culture: Leon Trotsky and Less Fortunate Statesmen" which continues the meditation on histories (and not History) goes hand in hand with both Rzycki's take on ideology and the construction of identity through spatial configuration and Curtis's economic wars conducted via the ontological. It takes further the fundamental thesis of the volume that the strict demarcation between what are apparently oppositional elements is only a matter of convenience for the parties in power and this postulate is made obvious in Daly's sagacious reading of Leon Trotsky, "the seeming combination of man of action with man of aesthetic inclination and intellectual ability", whose *Literature and Revolution* is a figurative correspondence which can be read against the lack of such a phenomenon in British parliamentary history. With a critical analysis of the two histories, that of Russia during the October and February Revolutions and that of contemporary Britain, Daly effectively demonstrates that "the twin foci" of culture as (post)conflict(ed) in Trotsky's Russia and the savoir-faire of a capitalist economy operating in and through culture in modern England are effectively flipsides of the same coin.

Cultural dominance as a form of imperialism is also explored in Stephen Roberts's "Out of the Ashes: Unamuno and Hispanicity post-1898" with the focus turning to the word *Hispanidad*, first popularised by Ramiro de Maeztu, "a justification of Spain's influence on the New World". Roberts's historical account of the Spanish ideological and cultural movement exposes the complexity within Unamuno's cultural aspiration to "a spiritual brotherhood" based on linguistic and literary ties, arguing that his notion of *Hispanidad* cannot be equated with that of Maeztu "firstly because Unamuno always rejected the idea of a Hispanic 'race' and secondly, even at his most 'imperialistic', because he remained a firm opponent of any vestige of the old traditionalist and *casticista* Spanish spirit" and, more importantly, also because Unamuno's *Hispanidad* is not infused with the orthodox Catholic ideals; instead he champions an unorthodox, agonistic Christianity which he defined as "a common pagan-Christian conception".

Nicholas Hewitt's "*Le Poids des mots, le choc des photos: Conflict and the News Magazines: Picture Post and Paris Match*" discusses insightfully the visual impact of war photography. Hewitt relates conflict and news coverage in magazines by looking at the historical development of war and photography. His exploration supports Grandi's political reading of the promotion of conflict in media and war relations.

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According to Hewitt, "*Paris-Match* was able to call upon unprecedented resources, both from its own photographers and journalists and from news agencies. Also, in both wars (the Six Day War and the Vietnam War), the magazine was apparently able to break away from some of the controls of embedded journalism which had restricted the operations of *Picture Post* in World War II and which was to become such an issue in the first, but especially the second, Gulf War". He concludes by exploring the complexity inherent in the relationship between the viewer and the object. On the one hand, the pictures are meant to jolt and discomfort the viewer and, on the other, in order to maintain a strong readership, there must be photographs to reassure the readers that the horrors of war visually encountered are external to the happy homes they inhabit, "a complicated menu of concern and happiness which contributed a winning formula".

To close the section on histories, Patrizia Violi's "Remembering the Future: the Construction of Gendered Identity in the Balkans" is a piercing insight into and analysis of the construction of gendered identity based on the diversities discovered in what was formerly known as the Balkans. Violi's stance in terms of identity construction relates to the multiple temporalities which underscore the notion of "memory", as she argues that the past gains significance only in view of the present and, especially, the future. Her psychological study, conducted in conjunction with the Women's Centre of Bologna, includes an archive of thirty-four life stories of Kosovo women of varied origins: Albanian, Serbian and Roma, collected from 1999 to 2000 in Kosovo and Italy. Tying what she refers to as gender competence to genre construction, the autobiographical details can be read as a form of preservation and transmission of the specific culture to which the individuals belong, an elaboration of the theses of the other contributors' concern with identity and cultural reconstructions. What is particularly noteworthy in Violi's astute analysis of the shifting positions in the post-conflict narratives is her emphasis on singularity and her perceptive approach to the unvoiced excesses ever operating at the margins of cultural discourse.

In a movingly personalised reconstruction of the inseparable historical and discursive aggressions to which *Boesman*, *Boer* and *Soutpiel* have been subjected by the predominantly English-speaking hegemonies of both governments and literary representations, Elizabeth Taylor traces the power of condescension towards a supposed "native other" back to Vasco da Gama and the very roots of colonised southern Africa. Cyclical patterns of denigration are shown to have culminated not only in the early use, against the Afrikaner, of concentration camps but also in the very separateness of self and other which, paradoxically, came to underpin apartheid and, more surreptitiously, the fictional representation in southern African literature in English of the ever-colonised stereotype.

Álvaro J. Vidal Bouzon's lyrical portrayal of Joan Manuel Serrat, with expressions not only about his songs but also the songs about him, continues the section on literatures and his essay is a figure of meta-language itself: the love of and for the other making the agent-writer paradoxically passive. Thus, the object of affection takes centre-stage

as the subject of the passive voice. Vidal Bouzón translates Sabina's song on Serrat:

I have a cousin who is a total master  
of what's mine, what's yours, what's ours,  
a luxury for the soul and to the ear,  
a way of avenging oblivion.

What he calls "that way of having revenge" is another way of depicting violence as that space of impropriety which precedes the discourse proper. Serrat, a singer-songwriter who paints pictures with words, speaks of Utopia as a woman, reminding us of the Lacanian phrase for the feminine "the not whole and more", a mirror of the lacuna within the utopic project. Thus, the female is not the "hybrid Nietzschean-Marxist superhuman superproletariat"; she is only a "properly passive" agent who bears the cross of freedom, equality and fraternity. Only as a symbol of the missing link, the female is made dependent on male discourse. Vidal Bouzon, then, in his tribute bears witness to the happiness one gets only with a home and a waiting for the arrival of a certain letter. In the case of Serrat, his is a fortress of solitude.

Colin Wright's perceptive reading of Michael Radford's 1995 *Il Postino*, which is a filmic adaptation of *Ardiente paciencia* by the Chilean writer Antonio Skármeta, focuses on the dialogic possibilities of the literary, a secret link to Violi's take on feminine narratives in the previous section. Drawing on the Derridan motifs of the "postal principle", the patrilineal inheritance and the *unheimlich*, Wright refers to "a necessary contingency in the very operation of language which results from the claim that, contra Jacques Lacan, a letter may always *not* arrive at its destination". The non-arrival can be the result of a conflictual situation that shatters the shelter given by national, familial or racial identity, what Wright calls the "economies of happiness", or a communicative interception as a consequence of the "gap between interlocutors"; because the inherent signifying dissemination allows a disruption of the "proper" transmission of the legacy, a father-son relation which Wright explores through the notion of the countersignature.

Bernard McGuirk's "In Search of Love Past" concludes the volume. His reading of Erri De Luca's *Tre cavalli* interweaves the multiple connotations of Argentina's "dirty war" with a narrative conflict set against the violence of Italy's own troubled Red Brigade past and a far from successfully sublimated shuttling and cross-cultural sexuality. Umberto Eco's "fathoming" of the Argentine press's coverage of the Falkland-Malvinas conflict animates McGuirk's discourse with the figure of the yellow submarine. De Luca's – unintended – crossing of swords with Luce Irigaray is made possible through an uncontrollable poetic deviance – the "*spécule-homme... de l'autre femme*" slipping into the body politic of the Lacanian *hommelette* (the *lamella* as a figure of a "little" man, "an unfulfilled subject's struggling to break out into social reality and out of a curiously isolating amorphousness") – just as the triumph of the bellicose British is enabled by the myths of the

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“formidable” subterranean warship.

In *Post-Conflict Cultures: Rituals of Representation*, Cristina Demaria and Colin Wright claimed that the most important gesture in circumscribing their – and our – emerging object of study in the series they launched was to surrender to conflict their own theoretical paradigms. What has happened since is that the assembling of the views of international specialists in an unlimited and illimitable range of disciplines has proven the need to think, interpret and understand the possibilities of and for radical intervention in such constructions as happiness, whether as reaction to, antidote for, or concealment of the ever-looming anguish that threatens the very category of “post-”.