

GENEVA PEACE WEEK 2019

GGA Session: The Transformative Power of Non-violent Truth Force

United Nations Office, Geneva: Palais des Nations, 6 November 2019 at 11.15-12.30

- The Honourable Ela Gandhi (former MP, Durban-based granddaughter of the Mahatma)
- Mr Breyten Breytenbach (renowned poet, writer and anti-apartheid activist)
- Mr Thapedi Masanabo (Curator, South African Memorial at Delville Wood, France)
- Professor Alain Tschudin (Executive Director, Good Governance Africa and professor at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg)

Aim:

The idea is to debate the profound value of a transformational agenda that shifts individuals, communities and systems from violence to peace. We hope that Ela can speak to Gandhi's settlement in Durban, Breyten to Gorée's promotion of reconciliation (for example, the Dakar Meeting of 1987) and Thapedi's valuable work in transforming the memorial (itself a place that was intended to commit to memory but actually committed violence based on racial exclusion).

Framing:

The statue of the Mahatma Gandhi, sitting in the park alongside the Via Appia and besides the Palais des Nations amidst the fallen autumn leaves, paints a picture-perfect portrait of peace, tranquility and much yearned for Zen. Last year, when Achim Wennmann and I discussed the Geneva Peace Week, in this the 150th celebration year of both Kasturba and Mohandas Gandhi, we felt it important to re-introduce a voice that, albeit trendy at times, has become marginalised and somehow silenced by contemporary discourse. This is the voice of *satygraha* – or the “non-violent truth force” - the way of being Gandhi developed during his time in South Africa.

It is, therefore, not coincidental that we have three South Africans on the panel today, one of whom is the direct descendant of Gandhi and two others who draw inspiration from aligned practices designed to promote social justice, peace and reconciliation. I am privileged to call all three my dear friends. In these people, and in their diverse but somehow intertwined

stories, I hope that we'll be able to weave together some common threads that better help us to understand the power of the "non-violent truth force".

Ramachandra Guha writes of Gandhi's four major callings as "freedom fighter, social reformer, religious pluralist and prophet". Noting the adage that "South Africa is the grave of many reputations...[and] certainly the birthplace of a few, and one such is that of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi," Guha recognises that of Gandhi's multiple contributions, *satyagraha* "has had the greatest impact on the world." He writes: "Before Gandhi, those discontented with their superiors had either petitioned their rulers for justice or sought to attain justice by means of armed struggle. The distinctiveness of Gandhi's method lay in shaming the rulers by voluntary suffering, with resisters seeking beatings and imprisonment by breaking laws in a non-violent yet utterly determined manner."

In *Non-violence in Peace and War*, Gandhi states, "Man as animal is violent, but as spirit is non-violent. The moment he awakes to the spirit within he cannot remain violent. Either he progresses towards *ahimsa* or rushes to his doom". He reiterates this by suggesting that, "Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will... Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute... The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law... [T]he strength of the spirit... *satyagraha* and its offshoots, non-cooperation and civil resistance, are...new names for the law of suffering." (Gandhi 1948: 1,2)

Nelson Mandela flags the importance of Gandhi's way of being in the world as follows: "In a world driven by violence and strife, Gandhi's message of peace and non-violence holds the key to human survival in the twenty-first century. He rightly believed in the efficacy of pitching the soul force called the *satyagraha* against the brute force of the oppressor, and in effect converting the oppressor to the right and moral point."

Our session today revolves precisely around the notion of peace and non-violence as key to our survival. To this end, we are not having a theoretical lecture or a conceptual debate in session, but rather a conversation about the practice of non-violent truth force and the

transformational power that it holds for a world desperately in need of alternatives to our current flight path. With that in mind, I would like to introduce our distinguished panelists and get right into the dialogue.

Within the dialogue, a series of questions was intended. As promised, these are posted below to enable participants to benefit from the insights that could not otherwise have been shared due to time constraints within the venue.

Questions for Ela Gandhi

1. Ela, your grandfather referred to your grandparents' farm in Durban, South Africa as Phoenix – was that dramatically ironic given that the buildings were burnt to the ground in the 1980s during intense political violence only to rise Phoenix-like afterwards? Is this compounded by the fact that the house itself was referred to as *Sarvodaya*, which, literally translated, means, “for the good of all”? How has this been realised in Inanda, and in the informal settlement that surrounds the farm now?

“Indeed, Phoenix rose from its ashes and is slowly beginning to make its mark as an agent of service delivery in the Inanda area. *Sarvodaya* is for the good of all. The loud and clear message in the building is *satyagraha*, soul force, or non-violence or *ahimsa*, which actually is more than non-violence; it is love and not hate. A message of conservation and care of the environment and practice of good health and simple lifestyles. There is a message for equity through local home industry and through support for local produce or *swadeshi*, the idea of spinning as a concept of self-sufficiency. The message of *swaraj*, or control over one's self – Gandhiji said if we each perform our duties then rights will be automatically attained by all. These are messages in the displays in *Sarvodaya* and our museum in Phoenix. It also depicts the life of Kasturba and the important role she played, both in the liberation movement and in Gandhiji's life.

To answer the question about the impact on Inanda and the large squatter community surrounding the settlement; all Gandhiji's ashrams have been deliberately located in areas where the poorest of the poor live, so to be located in the middle of a squatter settlement is not a problem. The challenge for us is to build a relationship with the surrounding community

and to see how best we can be supportive of each other. This is being done through taking little steps. One cannot rush these things. We are providing some services such as computer literacy, weekly tuition in various subjects, grooming in basic values, and we have started a reading circle. These are all aimed at building a relationship with the community as well as helping them to achieve a better quality of life through acquiring essential skills.”

2. Ela, this year marks the 150th celebration of both your grandparents, Kasturba and the Mahatma Gandhi. Very often, little is shared about your grandmother, so this question relates to gender affirmation. Given Kasturba’s formidable role in her own right as a social justice and peace activist who died in detention before Gandhiji’s assassination, how has she influenced you and how might she serve to inspire women today? She had a profound effect on Gandhi, so what might contemporary men learn from Kasturba?

“Kasturba was self-confident and courageous from the very early days of her life gandhiji, who was an initially domineering husband. But she did not accept that domination; in her own way, with dignity and fortitude, she would do exactly what she wanted, notwithstanding the protests and even sometimes angry reactions from her husband. She held her own with tremendous dignity, no needless arguments and no angry outbursts but firm in her resolve and assertive about her own rights without arrogance or disrespect. Through these actions, she tamed him into accepting that she was not going to be a slave, but also gaining his respect and devotion. Gandhiji acknowledged that he learnt *satyagraha*, or soul force, from Kasturba. These are inspiring attributes, worthy of emulation by all women and men. Contemporary men need to learn that they are partners and not superior to women. They may have different attributes, but that does not make anyone superior to the other; it only helps to complement each other.”

3. Ela, the Mahatma wrote about concepts such as *swadeshi* or “local production” and *swaraj* or “rule over oneself”. How would you say that the notion of local production or subsidiarity and livelihood sustainability affects the capacity of individuals and communities to rule over themselves with a degree of autonomy? We know that local ownership is key to sustained positive peace, so how might greater attention to these concepts promote direct democracy and thriving societies?

“Gandhiji believed in decentralisation. So, instead of huge industries engaging in mass production, he believed that locally run small industries would help to meet the needs of the local community and empower them. But they needed assistance to start up and push to be able to excel at what they were doing. An example was handspun and woven cloth. In the old, pre-colonial days, India had a thriving cotton industry. Gandhiji tried to revive that at the local level. So, beginning with the production of raw cotton by planters, a group would then clean and process the raw cotton into cotton pieces ready to spin, then another group would spin the cotton into thread. The thread would then be counted and made into bundles. That bundle could then be taken to a *khadi* shop, where there would be articles of clothing, food, cleaning material, cosmetics, and medicine, and the bundles of cotton could be exchanged for any of these articles. The shop would then weave the thread into material, which would be sewn into garments and sold in the shop. Everybody would be able to make a living from this industry, but no one would be able to become super rich. All would be able to improve their lifestyles together, as they produced better quality cloth and improved their skills and were able to sell their products to city dwellers. Gandhiji’s appeal to city dwellers was to buy these locally made articles and the village would thus become self-sufficient, with their own schools and arts and culture, and be able to live in peace and dignity. If the work was made easier through machines that would be acceptable, but not machines to replace human labour. Each person had the right to work and to be able to live in dignity, so the machine must serve the purpose of easing the work for the worker.

This was an ideal, and it can be seen in some communities in India today, otherwise it remains an ideal not yet properly realised.

Swaraj, or rule over one’s self, is about self-restraint so that the rights of others are met. But Gandhiji also advocated *gram swaraj*, or village freedom, so that the village would have its own government. In this way, every person is involved in his or her own government and must be consulted and be able to participate in all aspects of governance. This was a form of participatory government starting from villages and going up to the centre rather than devolving down from the centre. It is an interesting model that needs further study and application to see whether it works.”

4. Closing reflection for all panellists:

On the weekend, South Africa won the Rugby World Cup in Japan. It's a contact sport, often referred to as a hooligans' game played by gentlemen. The first time the country won was at home in 1995, just as democracy was born, when Nelson Mandela donned the Springbok jersey. The next victory in France in 2007 coincided with the end of the Mbeki era. Twelve years on, amidst difficult social and economic conditions in South Africa, what hope does this win by Siya Kolisi, "Rassie" Erasmus and the team hold for the promotion of peace, unity and integration in the country and in the world at large?

"Rugby in South Africa was an essentially white sport. Even in 1995 the team was predominantly white, but the action taken by Nelson Mandela helped to create a spirit of camaraderie among all South Africans, accepting the team as theirs and rising above the old prejudices on the basis of colour. This team in 2019 was more mixed, although still predominantly white, and again has had the effect of uniting the country. We have emerged from a terribly racist past and the effects of it will take many decades to overcome. So, these are small steps towards building the unity and nationhood, which we so sorely need in the country. Sports has great power to unite people and to build cross-cultural respect, understanding and love. So, this is an important lesson for us, as well as for the world. We also saw this power come through in, I think 2010, when we had the World Cup in South Africa and the games were played in each province. The spirit that it gave rise to was wonderful, even though we did not win. But we watched the sports together and participated in all the activities together. Our famous song, *Waka Waka (This Time for Africa)*, called *Waka Waka (Esto es África)* in Spanish, a song by Colombian singer Shakira, became known and loved all over the world and, here, everyone was singing it. We also came up with the vuvuzela horn, which was blown by everyone and still remains a symbol of the World Cup and our unity.

Questions for Thapedi Masanabo

1. Thapedi, as an official serving in the democratic government of South Africa, you inherited a monument in Delville Wood, in the Somme, France that was constructed while the country was still a British colony and modified under the nationalist regime of PW Botha, who arrived only to be pelted by locals. How have you negotiated the sensitive journey of promoting the

memory of black soldiers in an attempt to transform this into an inclusive memorial that recognises universal dignity?

“The South African National Memorial, commonly known as Delville Wood, was meant to be a symbol of supreme sacrifice and peace when it was unveiled in 1926.

In reality, it was not about peace because black South Africans were excluded from the beginning, despite having participated in the war that was not theirs.

It is important to note that in 1926 when the memorial was unveiled, not a single black South African soldier was invited. The memorial was defined as a national memorial in a false sense of the term because it was about white South African sacrifice. Black South African soldiers were segregated while alive on the battlefields and also in death. The memorial was therefore made in the absence of peace.

Departing from violence to peace, a genuine transformation that would reflect a democratic and reconciled South Africa, which is at peace with itself, became necessary to address the wrongs of the past in the pursuance of the peace agenda. The purpose of the transformation was to present an objective and authentic South African military history that is inclusive in its approach.”

2. Thapedi, Delville Wood is described as a “living memorial” on account of the fighting that was so fierce (400 shells per minute for six days) that only one tree was left and the bodies of South African, German and other soldiers were so mangled that they could not be separated and thus left where they lay. The body of the first black soldier killed was exhumed and placed at the centre of the memorial, and the names of ALL fallen included on the walls. How might this example inspire others?

“The first significant phase of transformation saw the exhumation of the first black South African soldier to die in France and have him reinterred in the courtyard of the commemorative museum in 2014 to coincide with the centenary of the beginning of the first world war. His presence at Delville Wood represents all black South African soldiers who were

not acknowledged in the past and also ensures that, through him, their dignity has been restored.

The second phase was to erect a memorial wall of the names of all South African soldiers, both black and white, who died during the first world war in alphabetical order so as to forge a posthumous reconciliation that would reflect a South Africa that is at peace with itself. The inspiration that may be drawn is that it is never too late to mend the cracks of the past, to promote peace through this approach.”

3. Thapedi, we know that at Delville Wood the remains of different combatants lie mangled with each other and that on this account it is a “living memorial”. Mindful of the process of truth and reconciliation in South Africa, which was encouraged to bring together victims and perpetrators, how might the model of Delville Wood help a broader process of post-conflict reconciliation? For example, following on from Marshal Foch and the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, no flowers are permitted on German graves in France. One hundred years on and might the time not be ripe to revisit this to promote human dignity and inclusive memory?

“The approach adopted in the transformation of Delville Wood was based on our lived experience as a South African nation that lived apart from each other through a particular ideology. The approach has worked for South Africa. It cannot be used as a blueprint, but it can be used as an inspiration for other nations, which might have a different lived experience. To respond to your question, on the occasion of the centenary of the Armistice, seeing the French president and German chancellor hand in hand in Compiègne forest, walking into the train coach replacing the one in which the Armistice was signed, was a very powerful message. The image was befitting reconciled nations of which one was the aggressor and the other was the victim. In the spirit of reconciled neighbours, repealing the Marshal Foch law would also re-enforce a genuine reconciliation between the two nations.”

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jersey. The next victory in France in 2007 coincided with the end of the Mbeki era. Twelve years on, amidst difficult social and economic conditions in South Africa, what hope does this win by Siya Kolisi, “Rassie” Erasmus and the team hold for the promotion of peace, unity and integration in the country and in the world at large?

“Winning the Rugby World Cup with the first black South African captain was a powerful message of reconciliation and of continued nation building, especially taking into account what rugby as a sport represented during apartheid. For South Africa, winning the World Cup was not just about sport; there is more to it as we continue to build the nation after the segregation that lasted for more than 300 years.

Questions for Breyten Breytenbach

1. Breyten, you left South Africa for France as a young man to pursue a life of resistance to the evil that was apartheid. When you returned in the 1970s you were tried for treason and imprisoned for seven years; yet within five years of your release you had managed to arrange for members of the ANC in exile and other members of IDASA to meet with apartheid government officials in Dakar. Could you walk us through some of the Jedi mind tricks involved in that?

“Like many young people, I wanted to see and experience the wide world out there. It was the late 1950s and I was studying fine arts and doing a BA course in Afrikaans at Michaelis Art School and the University of Cape Town. This opened my rather limited experiences to the life of visual artists and writers living and working in Cape Town. These people were often cosmopolitan, some having spent time living abroad (I’m thinking of Uys Krige and Jan Rabie, for instance), most of them quite marginal to the society of the time, and often politically active in resisting the régime (Richard Rive, Peter Clarke, Kenny Parker, Marius Schoon... come to mind). In 1959 I worked for a publisher just long enough to pay for a fourth-class passage on a Portuguese liner that brought me to Lisbon for my first European winter, with 10 English pounds in my pocket.

From then on, it meant surviving by my wits, doing all kinds of odd jobs, bumming through Europe, living in garrets. I'd started writing and continued painting whenever possible. Gradually, with the guidance of some established authors and poets, my work was published in South Africa, leading to the first volumes of poetry and prose. In Paris I met and married Yolande Ngo Thi Hoang-Lien. Our union was not legal under the Mixed Marriages Act of the Apartheid government, which meant that we could not go to South Africa. Early during the 70s we did manage to make our way to Swaziland via Mozambique, where my parents came to meet their daughter-in-law.

Back in Paris there was the May 1968 uprising. I'd met South African and other African political exiles living abroad, including ANC activists such as Oliver Tambo and representatives of various liberation movements. The ANC office in Algiers covered France as well. There was always a tug-of-war "competition" between the offices in London and Algeria; - and for a while I benefited from using a legal Algerian passport. Paris was a hub of mostly underground resistance activities. I'd started working with a grouping of ex-Resistance militants, Solidarité, and in due time formed a grouping of white anti-apartheid activists, most of them from South Africa, called Okhela. In 1975, I travelled to South Africa under an assumed French identity, with the mission to recruit and bring assistance to activists, mostly white, who were not necessarily in contact with the ANC. Arrested on my way out (1975), I was charged under the Terrorism Act and, after more than six months of interrogation, tried and sentenced to nine years imprisonment. The first 18 months of incarceration were spent in isolation in Pretoria's maximum-security prison. After a second trial (for plotting to escape), and under growing pressure from support committees abroad and, particularly, thanks to the tireless efforts of Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert, who at the time, was the leader of the opposition in the South African parliament, my situation improved and I was transferred to Pollsmoor prison in Cape Town, from where I was released in late 1982.

Upon my return to France I was a stateless person, but the Nansen passport did make it possible to travel. I obtained French nationality and was invited to join the board of trustees of France-Libertés, a foundation and pressure group conceived of and presided over by Danielle Mitterrand, the spouse of the then French president, François Mitterrand. I was able to build up contacts widely in Africa and elsewhere. After several encounters with decision makers in London, Paris, Dakar and Ouagadougou that I was in the position to facilitate for,

Van Zyl Slabbert and Alex Boraine of the then fledgling Institute for a Democratic Alternative in South Africa (IDASA), and with the benevolent protection of President Abdou Diouf of Senegal and France-Liberté, we managed to make the Dakar encounter of July 1987 possible. It grouped about 60 influential individuals from civil society in South Africa - academics, church and community leaders, leaders from the agricultural sector, influential journalists etc, both white and brown - who travelled together to meet with a significant ANC delegation led by Thabo Mbeki. The participants trusted us, the committee of go-betweens, implicitly even though they must have been aware of the political and career risks. We were lucky to have the collaboration of a professional South African travel expert, Chris de Broglio, originally from Mauritius and later based in London where he had a hotel; as a body builder, and married to a South African, he'd been active, together with Dennis Brutus, in a non-racial South African sporting body. A group of young African jurists, mostly from West Africa, also took part. The intense exchanges, frank and showing a profound commitment to a peaceful solution to avert a race war, stretched over a week. Most of us also travelled together to neighbouring African countries. These encounters were then followed up later by similar events grouping people with a shared professional background, such as the meeting of writers and artists, both from 'exile' and 'home', at the Victoria Falls.

It was important to us not to duplicate contacts and exchanges already taking place more or less secretly between the South African government and the ANC. It was as important for us to break the taboo (and the law, for that matter) against concerned and responsible civil society actors meeting with their banned and exiled counterparts, and to resolutely do so in an African environment and context. And thus, publicly, to promote a national debate that would have to involve all sectors of society.

One of the consequences of these exchanges and early attempts at accountable consensus-building as Africans from many diverse histories and different backgrounds was the recognition that the facilities for ongoing exchanges ought to be created. This is how the Gorée Institute as a non-governmental centre for the promotion of democracy, development and the transformative potential of culture came about, based on Gorée Island in the bay of Dakar - again with the generous understanding of Abdou Diouf and the Senegalese administration as hosts. The institute is governed by a pan-African board of trustees. The present executive director is Doudou Dia, who is himself originally from the island. The Gorée Institute, consciously striving to be a centre of excellence, has been active

in researching the causes for violent conflict, particularly in the West African environment; in mediating several conflicts; in promoting and organising and monitoring democratic elections; in various community building developments and programmes; and in the ongoing study and analyses of the interaction between democracy (or lack of it) and economic development, and the role played by cultural creativity and policies. It has also developed facilities for housing seminars and other study groups, and artists.”

2. Breyten, Gorée island was infamous for its “Door of No Return” at the Maison des Esclaves/Slave House through which African sisters and brothers were degraded and sold into slavery to be transported like chattel across the Atlantic. Four hundred years later and how can this “Door of No Return” become a “Portal for Human Return”? In other words, how might the horror of the past be used to reconfigure the meaning of an ethical and flourishing human life?

“When inhabited, islands are by their very nature liminal zones of aculturation and interaction and *métissage*. Under wise leadership, and with the right quality of shared values and concerns and a capacity for listening, they can be examples of tolerance. The 1,500 permanent inhabitants of the island, albeit of many different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and representing all the religious groupings and traditions present in the region, have, by and large, developed the mutually agreed upon codes of living together as one big family. This was not always so; it is rightfully also associated with slavery. It was occupied - and often disputed - by successive colonial forces: Portuguese, Dutch, French. For decades it was used as a slave *dépot*. Slaves were brought there from many regions of the continent before they were shipped off, mostly across the Atlantic but also to other destinations. Many ended up living on the island permanently as so-called 'house slaves'. In due time, a caste of *Signares* came about (this also happened in Saint Louis to the north on the continent, the erstwhile colonial capital of Senegal): descendants of the intermarriage between Europeans and indigenous Africans - women, often endowed, who became the head of their households and rich slave owners. Most of the slave houses still to be seen on the island belonged to *Signare* ladies. The infamous *Maison des Esclaves* with its dungeons and 'Door of no Return' giving

onto the sea belonged to Anne Pépin. It was quite deliberately chosen by the late Joseph Ndiaye to emblematically illustrate the history of iniquity. Symbols are important pedagogically and to build a collective memory. It is, however, unlikely that the Door was ever used to take captive and sold slaves to the ships. The house abuts a particularly rocky part of the coast and the relatively safe bay, later a harbour, is only a few hundred metres away.

It is important to keep this intricate thread of living history alive. We cannot learn to live together if we do not know where we and our ancestors came from. The Slave Museum is thus a well-documented place of memory, a reminder of the horror inflicted on people by other people, of the inhumanity we are capable of. But, also as the evidence of resistance, of redress, of self-sufficiency, of a refusal of dependency, and the entitlement that comes with the perpetuation of a sense of being disabled forever as victims. Ultimately, it embodies the capacity for agency and, of course, for the tolerance that is based on an experience of how we are intertwined. And the respect of mutual and shared responsibility.

There are now several other institutions like the Gorée Institute based on the island. The island is, first of all, the habitat of a vibrant and complex society with a good infrastructure of public services and education. It should never be seen as a museum only. But it is evident that more can be done, and more consistently so, to translate and bring to value its specific and exemplary history as reflected also through its changing status through the ages. The dream would ultimately be for Gorée Island to be an important link in 'a rosary of islands' around the continent, as with the Cape Verde archipelago, for instance, but also Lamu and other islands in the Indian Ocean, where centres of interaction (cultural creativity, research) could be established to exchange programmes and share experiences, to explore our inner Africa. In short, to collectively imagine an Africa of ethical probity, of taking profound responsibility not only for our past but also collectively for our future. And to do so from within the African social and even economic realities and not according to the dictates of foreign powers, of colonial dispensations, of home-grown warlords. The island could even more clearly symbolise the living truth that if we suppress or try to eliminate diversity, from whatever weakness and even with the best excuses of homogeneity, we weaken everybody, we weaken ourselves."

Breyten, a wise sage once said that, "One and the same is the knowledge of opposites". How would you say that a life geared towards protest and resistance to injustice, that initially

included the prospect of violence, morphed into a life of non-violence along Buddhist principles and the recognition of *dharma*? In *Self-Portrait/Deathwatch* you wrote, “The practice of beauty shapes the private parts of ethics” and that this “flow(s) into ethics which leads to action. An act of beauty is a political statement.”

“South Africa, it is claimed, is after Brazil the most brutally violent state or society in the world not actually at war. It is clear that violence - systemic, every day, largely condoned or excused or justified, abetted by a corruption that is so widespread it can hardly be called 'corruption' - has infested every aspect of communal life. Even though wise leadership made it possible for the country and the people by and large to lay the foundations of a nation (a 'nation of peoples') to become liberated whilst forswearing a recourse to war, and even to capital punishment, the lack of moral leadership and of ethical vision and the horrendous indignity of inequality and poverty have allowed violence to flourish. We have no collective clarity. We do not even have a shared commitment to decency and respect, let alone an understanding of how excesses and tolerated homophobia, and an absence of citizenship engagement, must lead to the violence we see as an everyday occurrence. And yet - if only through the examples of Mandela and Gandhi and so many more humanists who did not consider the capacity to destroy the other (and ultimately the self) as a solution or even as achieving freedom - it could have been so different. South Africa embodied the dreams of the responsible and imaginative emancipation of a continent, and of many outside Africa however starry-eyed they (or we) may have been.

I was lucky to come into contact with Buddhist teaching and then training, essentially in the person of Sensei Deshimaru, a Soto Zen master who had a dojo in Paris, at an age when everything - including the sense of 'self' and of purpose and 'life' - was a burning concern also intimately embedded in the need to create, to 'make other', to communicate (or not), to understand through the matter of imagination and the umbilical cord of memory that there may ultimately be nothing to 'understand'. To live vigorously without harming that and those around you may be enough. An act of beauty - and one soon learns to recognise it, not necessarily by the norms and strictures of an established aesthetic - is indeed a statement of consciousness about our shared human condition. Or, about being an ongoing expression of life in the way the planet and vegetation and our dreams and wind... constitute life. An 'act of beauty' is also an affirmation of being part of, of caring for the

other and for 'self' as if for 'a person with nine wounds' - that is, without becoming besotted with one's own involvement and compassion. How could that not be political?