

**Troubled Writing: Cultural  
Responses to Trauma  
in Post-Apartheid South Africa**

**Faith Kent**

**Cardiff University 2008**



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## Summary

This thesis proposes that while the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) offers an official lens through which to read South Africa's traumatic past, it has generated a highly problematic historiography. I conceive of apartheid as posing a crisis of representation which presents literary authors, who both support and critique the "healing" process that the government wants to initiate, with a contradiction. In the light of this I argue that post-apartheid fiction writers' engagement with national history exceeds the placatory and symbolic agenda of the TRC, to restore a necessary element of violence to South Africa's process of decolonisation.

The first two chapters of the thesis illustrate that the TRC (an institutional response to trauma) attempts to fuse nationalism and psychotherapeutic principles in a hegemonic spectacle of confession, which aims to construct a new national imaginary based on a collective approach to apartheid as historical trauma. I examine testimony, the TRC's published Report and entries to the Register of Reconciliation to show how the form and content of memorial texts are manipulated to predispose public responses to the past, and that it is necessary to go beyond their words to read apartheid's ongoing trauma.

The final three chapters analyse fiction and autobiography by André Brink, J M Coetzee, Antjie Krog, Rian Malan and Zoë Wicomb, who respond to apartheid's crisis of representation by deliberately agitating the metanarratives of South African literature. The writers use various strategies to restore some of the missing violence to national political transition: a range of literary devices indicates the texts' function as national allegories, in Fredric Jameson's sense. These enable a democratisation and honouring of the past that troubles the grand narratives of nation and affirms the transhistorical potency of literature.

## **Acknowledgements**

I am grateful to the Centre for Critical and Theory at Cardiff University for providing the research studentship that made this thesis possible. Special thanks go to my supervisor, Ian Buchanan, whose support and encouragement enabled me to complete this project. Within the department at Cardiff I have also especially valued friendship and academic discussion with Elaine Brennan, Andrea Ochsner and Judith Pryor.

The inspiration for this thesis came from time I spent in South Africa in 1995, when I stayed for several months with the Pewa family in Johannesburg's Soweto township. While I was in South Africa many people shared with me their stories of the apartheid years. I rarely initiated these conversations and was frequently moved by their frankness. The family's request that I passed their stories on when I returned home in many ways motivated this study: while I have not retold their stories here I hope that I have communicated some of their faith in the role of storytelling within a transitional society. So, a big thank you to Rose and "Tata" Pewa and their extended family and friends in Soweto, kwaZulu-Natal and New Brighton, for their unconditional welcome.

In my non-academic world I would like to thanks Rachel Mortlock, Liz Rose and Mark Seed for making the time to proofread my final drafts alongside their own busy lives and commitments. It also means a lot to have had their friendship, as well as that of Kim Breaks, Alex Harrison, Jo Harrison and Shelby Wigmore, who have helped maintain my sanity over the last few years. Denzel Cat, of course, is aware of the contribution she has made. Sue Ryall has been part of this journey in a different kind of way, and for that I am deeply grateful. Love also to Phil, who has been around for the last part of things and helped make finishing possible: he's just got to complete his now! However, my biggest thanks and love are due to Jan and Stanley, who have supported me through this endeavour in more ways than it is possible to list, and are possibly even more pleased than me that it is finished at last.

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## **Chronology**

- 1877-1880 British conquest of Transvaal, Sekhukhuneland and Zululand.
- 1886-1888 Discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand.  
De Beers monopolises the Kimberley diamond mines.
- 1899-1902 South African War.
- 1905 Report of the South African Native Affairs Commission published.
- 1904-1911 Johannesburg becomes region's largest city.  
African employment on mines exceeds 200,000.
- 1910 Union of South Africa formed.  
South African Party government led by Generals Louis Botha and Jan Smuts.
- 1912 Foundation of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) (later African National Congress or ANC).
- 1913 Natives Land Act passed.  
Gandhi and 2,500 Indian miners march to the Transvaal.  
African women march against passes.  
White workers strike in gold mines.
- 1914 General J.B.M. Herzog founds National Party.  
Newspaper Die Burger launched.
- 1916 Native Affairs Administration Bill institutes segregation.
- 1918 Formation of Afrikaner Broederbond.  
ANC Women's League launched.
- 1919 Botha dies and Smuts becomes Prime Minister.  
Clements Kadalie founds Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU).

- 1920 Native Affairs Act creates separate administrative structures for those living in African reserves.
- Sol Plaatjie completes Mhudi.
- 1922 Rand rebellion of white mine workers; 214 die as the strike is crushed.
- 1923 Natives (Urban Areas) Act extends segregation to urban areas.
- SANNC becomes ANC.
- 1924 Herzog's National Party wins election.
- Sarah Gertrude Millin publishes God's Stepchildren.
- 1925 Afrikaans adopted as an official language.
- 1925-1930 Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union becomes a mass movement and spreads to rural areas.
- 1930 White women enfranchised.
- Plaatjie publishes Mhudi.
- 1930-1934 Depression and drought.
- 1931 Wives of full members of ANC granted auxiliary membership.
- 1932-1940 Rapid expansion of gold mining; high employment; beginning of manufacturing boom.
- 1933-1934 Hertzog and Smuts form United Party in response to the Depression; purified National Party under D.F. Malan breaks away.
- 1935 All-African Convention is founded.
- André Brink born.
- 1939 South Africa enters Second World War.
- Hertzog resigns and Smuts becomes Prime Minister.
- 1940 Afrikaner paramilitary movement, Ossewabrandwag, founded.
- J.M. Coetzee born in Cape Town.
- 1940-1946 Wartime industrial expansion.

Increasing African militancy: leads to 1941 formation of the African Mineworkers' Union, strikes and the launch of squatters' movements on the Rand.

1943 ANC Youth League formed.

Women granted full membership and voting rights within ANC.

1946 Mineworkers' strike.

Peter Abrahams publishes Mine Boy.

1947 Security Branch of the South African Police (SAP) formed.

1948 Malan and Nationalists win election.

Zoë Wicomb born.

1949 Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act.

1950 Population Registration Act.

Suppression of Communism Act.

Group Areas Act.

Immorality Act.

Beginning of "The Drum Decade".

1952 ANC launches Defiance Campaign.

Antjie Krog born.

1953 Public Safety Act passed in response to the Defiance Campaign.

Bantu Education Act passed.

CPSA reconstituted as the South African Communist Party (SACP).

1954 Rian Malan born.

1955 Freedom Charter adopted by the Congress of the People in Kliptown.

Eviction of Sophiatown begins.

1956 Coloured voters disenfranchised.

Treason Trial begins (ends 1961).

- 20,000 women march to Pretoria to protest against extension of passes to African women.
- 1958 H.F. Verwoerd becomes Prime Minister.
- 1959 Black opposition peaks: Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) under Robert Sobukwe splits from ANC.
- Extension of the University Education Act.
- Pass laws officially extended to women, opposed by the ANC and PAC.
- 1960s Rapid economic growth; white incomes increase as apartheid becomes established; forced removals policies implemented; black population growth outstrips white.
- 1960 **Mandate Period of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission begins.**
- 69 killed and 186 wounded during Sharpeville Massacre when police open fire on marchers protesting against pass laws. 2 killed and 49 wounded in a similar protest in Langa, near Cape Town.
- National state of emergency declared (lasting from 24 March until 31 August).
- ANC and PAC banned.
- The African Resistance Movement (ARM) formed.
- The South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) formed.
- Breyten Breytenbach goes into exile in Paris.
- 1961 South Africa withdraws from Commonwealth and becomes an independent Republic.
- South African Defence Force (SADF) formed as a military intelligence operation.
- Albert Luthuli, ANC President, wins Nobel Peace Prize.
- ANC and PAC missions-in-exile open in Tanzania.
- Poqo, armed wing of PAC, formed.
- Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), armed wing of the ANC launches sabotage actions.

- 1962      General Law Amendment Act (Sabotage Act).  
Poqo initiates armed attacks.
- 1963      Publications and Entertainment Act.  
General Law Amendment Act.  
Rivonia Treason Trial.  
Organisation of African Unity (OAU) founded.
- 1964      Armaments Board established to work towards South African self-sufficiency in arms manufacture.  
Mandela sentenced to life imprisonment.  
Three MK members executed following conviction on sabotage charges.
- 1965      Bram Fischer of SACP sentenced to life imprisonment.  
Criminal Procedure Amendment Act.
- 1966      Prime Minister Verwoerd assassinated in House of Assembly; B.J. Vorster replaces him.  
SWAPO and SAP clash in Namibia: SWAPO's armed struggle begins.
- 1967      Terrorism Act.  
SAP counter-insurgency training begins.  
Compulsory military service for white males extended, and ex-servicemen become eligible for recall over a twenty-year period.  
Azanian People's Liberation Army formed.  
SAP units deployed in Rhodesia following local MK actions.
- 1968      Prohibition of Political Interference Act.
- 1969      Robert Sobukwe released after six years in detention.  
The South African Students' Organisation (SASO) formed and led by Steve Biko.
- 1970      Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act.

- 1972      Black police trained in anti-terrorist techniques and deployed in Namibia.
- Conscription extended from nine to twelve months.
- 1973      African and Arab states impose oil embargo on South Africa.
- Andre Brink publishes Looking on Darkness.
- 1974      UN withdraws credentials of South African delegation, which loses voting rights. ANC and PAC granted observer status within UN.
- Cross-border killings begin: SASO founder Ongkopotse Abraham Tiro killed in Botswana, and John Dube in Zambia.
- Saartjie Baartman's genitalia removed from public display in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris.
- 1975      Inkatha Cultural Liberation Movement launched.
- Angola and Mozambique achieve independence, instating socialist governments hostile to apartheid. South Africa invades Angola with US support.
- Special Task Force formed, and eighteen full-time Riot Units set up across South Africa.
- 1976      Soweto students protest against Afrikaans-medium education; police open fire on 10,000 pupils. Ongoing resistance spreads nationwide; there are 575 official deaths and over 2000 are injured.
- Television introduced.
- 1977      Steve Biko dies in detention; numerous other deaths in detention follow.
- Conscription increased to two years.
- ANC establishes guerrilla training camps in Angola, instructing the large influx of youth from the 1976 student uprisings.
- SASO banned.
- Winnie Mandela banished to Orange Free State for eight years.
- 1978      Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) launched.
- B.J. Vorster forced to resign following Information Scandal.

P.W. Botha becomes Prime Minister and implements 'total strategy' policies.

1000 killed in SADF raids on SWAPO camps.

1979 Security Branch Vlakplaas unit established by Colonel J.J. Viktor.

Koevoet formed.

Inkatha and ANC sever links.

Eugene Terre'Blanche founds AWB (neo-Nazi) resistance movement.

1980 Zimbabwe gains independence.

MK blows up Sasol 1 oil refinery plant in Secunda.

1981 SADF occupies one third of Angola and carries out cross-border raids in Mozambique, Lesotho and Zimbabwe.

Lawyer Griffiths Mxenge assassinated.

1982 Trade unionist Neil Aggett dies in detention.

Conservative Party launched by right-wing white splinter group from National Party.

ANC London offices bombed by South African security police team.

Ruth First assassinated in Mozambique by South African security police.

Nelson Mandela transferred from Robben Island to Pollsmoor Prison in Cape Town. Worldwide "Free Mandela" campaign begins.

MK bombs Koeberg nuclear power plant.

Conscription extended again.

Internal Security Act.

Andre Brink's A Dry White Season is banned.

1983 Two-year Ciskei bus boycott begins.

Republic of South Africa Constitution Act establishes the Tricameral Parliament.

Whites opposed to conscription launch End Conscription Campaign (ECC).

Coetzee wins Booker Prize for The Life and Times of Michael K.

1984

Frustrated MK soldiers at ANC camps Viana and Pango quelled: seven mutineers executed, others imprisoned in Quatro Camp.

South Africa announces withdrawal from Angola, although does not do so.

Mozambique and South Africa sign Nkomati Accord and Mozambique agrees to expel all ANC military personnel.

Under new constitution, P.W. Botha becomes State President.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu awarded Nobel Peace Prize.

Huge student protests and disruptions intensify existing community unrest.

ANC publish Stuart Commission Report.

1985

Rand slumps as disinvestment campaign commences.

Mandela and other prisoners offered release if they renounce violence: most refuse.

Nationwide attacks commence on “collaborators”: these killings lead to many death sentences.

Conflict between AZAPO and the UDF begins.

MK blows up Umtata fuel depot and water pipelines, which leads to nightly curfew. Amanzimtoti shopping centre also bombed.

SADF carry out raids in Botswana.

State of emergency lasting nine months declared, and blanket censorship is imposed on press coverage.

Eugene de Kock takes command of Vlakplaas.

Theologians sign Kairos Document.

Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) founded.

Tensions rise between Inkatha and the UDF.

1986

Commonwealth Secretariat peace mission (Eminent Person’s Group) terminated following South African Air Force (SAAF) raids on Botswana, Zimbabwe and Zambia.

**Inkatha receive substantial covert state funding to launch United Workers Union of South Africa (UWUSA).**

**Nationwide state of emergency reimposed.**

**Mozambican president Samora Machel dies in air crash.**

**US passes Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act (over Reagan's veto) which imposes sanctions on South Africa.**

**Special state of emergency media regulations impose news blackout prohibiting reporting of unrest incidents.**

**Pass laws, Mixed Marriages Act and Prohibition of Political Interference Act repealed.**

**1988 UDF, COSATU and sixteen other organisations placed under severe restriction orders.**

**Dulcie September assassinated in Paris.**

**Concert at Wembley Stadium, London, celebrates Mandela's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday and protests against his continuing imprisonment. It is televised worldwide.**

**ANC publishes constitutional guidelines.**

**South Africa agrees to withdraw troops from Angola and Namibia.**

**1989 First known meeting between President Botha and Nelson Mandela takes place.**

**Peace March protesting against police repression permitted to take place in Cape Town.**

**F.W. de Klerk becomes President and introduces a series of reforms.**

**Walter Sisulu and seven other high profile political prisoners released by de Klerk.**

**Berlin Wall falls.**

**1990 Mandela released from prison.**

**Over 200 people die in "Seven Day War" near Pietermaritzburg in March.**

**Police injure over 300 people at protest march in Sebokeng.**

Exiles permitted to return to South Africa.

Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) launched.

The work of many writers becomes readily available in South Africa.

Conscription ends, SADF withdrawn from townships.

Political violence in Natal escalates.

Rian Malan publishes My Traitor's Heart.

1991

Group Areas Act and Land Act repealed.

Government funding of Inkatha and UWUSA for anti-ANC activities exposed: de Klerk establishes Kahn Committee.

Winnie Mandela found guilty of kidnapping and assault.

Nelson Mandela elected president of the ANC, Oliver Tambo chairperson.

Patriotic Front (including ANC, IFP and other organisations) launched to oppose government.

The government, ANC, IFP and other organisations sign National Peace Accord.

Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) meets to negotiate South Africa's new constitution.

Nadine Gordimer awarded Nobel Prize for Literature.

1992

Violence in black townships continues to increase.

ANC establishes the Skweyiya Commission of Inquiry to investigate human rights violations in ANC detention camps.

The state and ANC sign Record of Understanding.

Ordinary police relieved of riot duties as SAP set up Internal Stability Unit.

1993

**Mandate Period of Truth and Reconciliation Commission ends.**

Assassination of Chris Hani sparks countrywide violence.

ANC appoints Motsuenyane Commission to additionally examine human rights abuses in ANC detention camps. ANC accepts conclusions and alleged perpetrators are named.

Mandela and de Klerk receive Nobel Peace Prize.

Agreement on constitutional issues reached after three years of negotiations and Interim Constitution is finalised.

- 1994 Political tension between Inkatha and ANC increases: 55 die and hundreds are injured when IFP members march in Johannesburg.
- South Africa's first democratic election takes place on April 27: ANC wins with 62.6% of the vote, and a Government of National Unity is constituted.
- Nelson Mandela inaugurated as President of South Africa on May 10.
- 1995 South Africa wins Rugby World Cup at home.
- 1996 First hearings of Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) held.
- Breyten Breytenbach publishes Confessions of an Albino Terrorist.
- 1998 TRC submits five-volume final report to Nelson Mandela.
- Coetzee publishes Boyhood
- 1999 Thabo Mbeki replaces Mandela as President.
- Coetzee wins Booker Prize for Disgrace, becoming the first writer to win twice. ANC publicly criticise novel's content.
- 2000 Brink publishes The Rights of Desire.
- 2001 Zoë Wicomb publishes David's Story.
- TRC dissolved.
- 2002 France agrees to repatriate Saartjie Baartman's remains to South Africa; her state funeral is held in Gamtoos River Valley on National Women's Day.
- Coetzee emigrates to Australia.
- 2003 Coetzee awarded Nobel Prize for Literature. He publishes Elizabeth Costello.

## Introduction

For many, post-apartheid South Africa's management of complex political transition, symbolically defined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has been heralded as an international success story. The ANC is widely credited with the avoidance of a costly and bloody civil war, and its model has even been exported. Desmond Tutu has travelled to Northern Ireland to oversee part of the post-conflict reconciliation process there, facilitating TRC-style meetings between victims and perpetrators of sectarian violence. Yet, South Africa is far from stable. It has some of the highest crime rates in the world, with around 20,000 murders a year, a rape allegedly taking place every twenty seconds, and a 'serious crime' every seventeen seconds (BBC 1999: 1). Naomi Klein cites some horrifying economic statistics: that since 1994, the number of people living on less than \$1 a day has doubled to over 4 million in 2006; that in 2002 the unemployment rate for black South Africans stood at 48% (23% in 1991); that only 5% of the country's 35 million black citizens earn more than \$60,000 a year, while over twenty times this number of whites fall into the same income bracket; that in 2006 more than one in four of the population lived in informal shantytowns, often without electricity and running water (Klein 2007: 215).

This inequality is reflected in popular culture. While white writers such as André Brink, J.M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer have established international reputations, few outside South Africa's literary circles have heard of the contemporary African writers Phaswane Mpe<sup>1</sup> or Kgafela wa Magogodi.<sup>2</sup> Concern also extends to sport as a

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<sup>1</sup> Phaswane Mpe died in 2004, aged 34. He is known for the novel Welcome to Our Hillbrow (2002) which addresses the huge changes that have occurred in South Africa's urban areas since the end of apartheid.

cultural sphere, where perceived racial inequality has raised international eyebrows. South Africa's recent success in the 2007 rugby World Cup has been accompanied by an abundance of journalism focusing on the racial composition of the national squad. In The Observer Alec Colquhoun laments that long-standing white members of the cup-winning squad stand as 'a link to a time that South Africa wishes to forget' (2007: 5); in The Guardian Donald McRae gives voice to 'some quite legitimate reservations... about the composition of this World Cup side' (2007: 5). The Springboks' 2007 World Cup winning squad contained just two non-white players. McRae is at pains to point out that one of them, Bryan Habana, attended a school that is 'one of the most prestigious in the country', speculating that Habana would not have made a place in the squad if he had gone to a township school (McRae 2007: 5). Whether or not this is the case, the articles raise several salient points. Firstly, they demonstrate that despite the ANC's pledges to the contrary, economic stratification and inequality of opportunity in South Africa are thriving thirteen years after the nation's first democratic election in 1994. Secondly, they suggest the desirability of forgetting the past. Thirdly, they complicate this by raising the thorny issue of the historical dimension of racial representation: the inference is that contemporary cultural institutions in South Africa have a moral responsibility to use the multicultural symbolism of the "New" South Africa to redress the country's traumatic past, which then keeps elements of that past alive.

South Africa's past is traumatic. The twentieth-century has witnessed the transition from colonialism to apartheid, followed by that from the violence-riven years of apartheid to multiracial democracy. Throughout the century, writers of all races have

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<sup>2</sup> Kgafela wa Magogodi is a poet, whose work addresses issues pertaining to sexuality in post-apartheid South Africa. His best-known collection is Thy Condom Come (2000).

been immersed in this trajectory, as the following pages will demonstrate. At different stages, fiction writers have engaged with the nation's political circumstances in different ways, whether that be to describe what surrounds them, or to support or challenge political authority. If white writers are considered, the early adventure stories of Rider Haggard proffered a masculinist response to the early encounters between coloniser and colonised, and the realist narrative of Olive Schreiner has left behind accounts of early twentieth-century settler life. Sarah Gertrude Millin was noted as an apologist for segregation in the 1920s, writing after the government had formalised its blueprint for separate development in the Native Affairs Act. Later in the century, novelists such as Alan Paton, Nadine Gordimer, Andre Brink and J.M. Coetzee formulated a range of literary responses to both apartheid and the national consciousness that followed it.

Black writers' work has been similarly entwined with national politics. Sol Plaatjie, widely regarded as the founding father of African literature in South Africa (and also founding member of the ANC), wrote in direct relation to the Land Act of 1913. Subsequent generations of African writers have continued to interlace fiction and nation. These extend from writers associated with the African magazine Drum, whose political heyday is associated with the Sophiatown township in the 1950s; the Soweto poets of the 1960s; those who answered the call of the ANC to write in a show of solidarity towards the anti-apartheid campaign in the 1980s and the new generation of post-apartheid writers like K. Sello Duiker,<sup>3</sup> Mpe and wa Magogodi, who represent issues such as sexuality and post-apartheid urban degeneration. Writers and their works were regularly banned between 1963 and 1993 if the National Party's

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<sup>3</sup> Kabelo 'Sello' Duiker committed suicide in 2005, aged 30. His published novels are Thirteen Cents, The Quiet Violence of Dreams and The Hidden Star, which focus on the post-apartheid urban environment and issues relating to homosexuality.

increasingly repressive censorship laws deemed them to undermine the moral or political hegemony of the apartheid state; novelists and poets have gone into exile and been imprisoned because of the nature of the relationship between their creative work and national politics. In an affirmation of the role literature can play in galvanising politics, the ANC government now offers funding to writers, artists and choreographers in exchange for creative representations of the rainbow nation in the form of the 1994 Draft National Culture Policy, discussed in Section 3.2.

This introduction will detail the historicity of the relationship between literature and national politics in South Africa, from colonial times through to the early twenty-first century. This offers the background to a thesis that will demonstrate overwhelmingly that, as literature has clearly “mattered” throughout the nation’s colonial and apartheid histories (and the extent to which it has done so can in part be gauged by the alacrity and severity of the state’s responses to those who have produced it), it has continued to matter hugely within the very specific historical context of post-apartheid South Africa. The fictional and political intertext has presented major challenges for writers of fiction. In their engagement with the massive social and economic change undergone within South Africa, which has manifested in the public domain primarily as a racial dynamic, fiction writers have faced an ongoing crisis of representation. How, precisely, can fictional forms “cope” with political transition? How is it possible to represent change without erasing a traumatic past? Because the social injustice evident in contemporary South Africa is founded on institutionally-enshrined historical inequality, it is impossible to separate past and present in any analysis or representation of the present. I suggest that, in precisely the same way as

commentators on the racial compilation of the South African rugby squad are unable (and/or unwilling) to do this, so are South African writers of fiction.

To write exclusively about the present, or to judge it in temporal isolation, is to imply that the past no longer matters, is “finished” and can be laid to rest. The political pragmatism of the TRC endeavoured to achieve exactly this; to “raise” enough of the past and answer enough questions to placate its victims without jeopardising the national future. Fiction writers, I argue, have a more moral engagement with the past. They share with the TRC the goal of a stable national future; yet they also seek a means of keeping the wounds of the past open in order that their impact on the present and future is honoured. The specific nature of South Africa’s colonial past, combined with the methodology adopted by the state to process it, has engendered a crisis of representation for fiction writers.

While writers are used to engaging with a political and moral context, the South Africa characterised by the TRC presents a specific dilemma relating to how traumatic and painful aspects of the past can be represented in the present without jeopardising political stability. Violence is part of the colonial relation and in many parts of the world it has been part of the process of decolonisation. However, the TRC removed the potential for such violence from South Africa’s political transition, rather aiming to lay the trauma and brutality of the past to rest.

Writers, I argue, keep elements of this violence alive, both to honour the past and to acknowledge that South Africa’s trauma has not made a miraculous disappearance. As was the case through the segregation and apartheid eras, fiction writers have

developed strategies with which to make a political point. Because of the banning laws enacted by the apartheid state, writers remaining in the country resorted to a range of tactics through which to represent the nation, such as the allegorical structure of J.M. Coetzee's novels. Recourse to these devices is no longer required in that restrictions on publication are no longer active, yet the national allegory continues to be used as a means critiquing the post-apartheid state. Whereas in areas like Latin America the literary transition has in very general terms been from magical realism to the testimonial form, in South Africa the shift has been towards writing that uses the national allegory to play out and comment on very specific aspects of the post-apartheid state. For example, the portrayal of sexual relationships within post-apartheid communities in Coetzee's Disgrace is used as a means of exploring wider social relationships in the nation, and university committee of inquiry in the same novel is used as an allegorical representation of judicial structures within South Africa. The dysfunction that is presented through this allegorical route goes some way to resolving the crisis of representation, which is posed with regard to the way writers can retain some of the violence and discontent inherent in the national past without betraying its future. The structure and form of novels and autobiographies also represents the disruption of social structures that still remains.

This thesis studies in detail post-apartheid fictional and autobiographical work by André Brink, J.M. Coetzee, Antjie Krog, Rian Malan and Zoë Wicomb, using the first three chapters to place them in the social and economic context of post-apartheid South Africa. Their work stands as testimony to South Africa's traumatic past as the various chapters will show, representing this through disrupted content and form. I have chosen works by these writers because they offer a diverse, yet in some ways

unified, perspective on South Africa's past. Brink and Coetzee, while sharing some biographical traits, "write history" in different ways, and their novels The Rights of Desire and Disgrace are the main subject of Chapter Three. Both have borne the brunt of state criticism: Brink's 1973 narrative Looking on Darkness was the first novel written in Afrikaans to be banned by the apartheid state (his early writing was all in Afrikaans); Coetzee was criticised by the ANC government following the publication of Disgrace and emigrated to Australia in 2002. Krog and Malan are both of Afrikaner heritage: Krog has remained in South Africa throughout the apartheid years; she worked for the SABC covering the hearings of the TRC, and Country of My Skull weaves fragments of this reportage into her autobiography. Malan, a descendant of D.F. Malan, left to live in New York, became involved with South African liberation politics there, and wrote My Traitor's Heart on his return to Johannesburg. I have included Wicomb's David's Story because it offers a female and a coloured perspective not afforded by the other novels: as Chapter Four argues, it provides contrapuntal balance to Brink's and Coetzee's novels, which narrate female experience from male perspective. Additionally, it directly criticises practices within the ANC, thus adding perspective to fiction that examines the apartheid past and its legacy. It is also more overtly postmodern than the other novels, and thus provides interesting structural comparison.

I am aware that it may appear to be an omission not to have included studies of any novels by black South African writers. I did not select writers on the basis of their race, so this was not a conscious decision; in fact, an earlier draft included analysis of

novels by the black writer and playwright Zakes Mda<sup>4</sup> and senior ANC member Mandla Langa.<sup>5</sup> These, along with novels by Sello Duiker, however, did not prove to be central to what I am trying to show here, and would probably warrant their own future study. Equally, I am not seeking to reproduce the rainbow nation in microcosm, rather to compare some post-apartheid writers' treatment of the national past to specific effect. Nor have I included any commentary on works by Nadine Gordimer, Nobel Prize winner, and possibly the country's most famous writer: likewise, although her work is massively important in terms of South African literary history, it is not fundamental to my thesis.

All the texts I have chosen are in the novel form, although the novelists also write in other genres. Brink, Coetzee and Wicomb are academics and have published theoretical writing; Krog has an established reputation as a poet (published in Afrikaans) and as a radio journalist, and Malan is a print journalist and musician who has additionally written commentary to accompany photographic testimony to South Africa's past. Narrative fiction is obviously not the only creative literary medium through which the nation can be represented. Poetry has long been an important genre in South Africa, as will be shown in the chronological narrative that follows. I have not included analysis of poetry in this thesis as my temporal focus is the post-apartheid era, in which poetry does not have the same cultural impact as it did, say, in the South Africa of the 1960s and 1970s, when its rhythm and orality rendered it an accessible and powerful medium in the African townships. Although film dominates current popular culture, along with the novel, and many films have been produced out

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<sup>4</sup> Mda was born in 1948. His key novels are *Ways of Dying* (1995), which addresses South Africa's transition to democracy, and *The Heart of Redness* (2000)

<sup>5</sup> Mandla Langa was born in 1950. He is a former member of MK, and is best known outside South Africa for his novel *The Memory of Stones* (2000).

of post-apartheid South Africa, those in Hollywood style, such as Catch a Fire,<sup>6</sup> and In My Country<sup>7</sup> are not useful in terms of this thesis. Others, like Long Night's Journey into Day<sup>8</sup> and Fools,<sup>9</sup> do not have international distribution and therefore have limited accessibility. Drama has also been an important genre in South Africa and a thriving cultural scene has revolved around, for example, Johannesburg's Market Theatre for many years including the apartheid period.<sup>10</sup> However, much of the impact and message of drama is missed if it is not seen on stage, and while plays by prominent South Africa dramatists such as Athol Fugard are performed in Europe,<sup>11</sup> there is little opportunity for the diverse experience of staged drama that would be required to consolidate a thesis.

The relationship between the creative arts and politics has been established in South Africa through centuries shaped by racialised economic domination. South Africa was first colonised by Europeans when the Dutchman Jan van Riebeeck landed on the Cape coast in 1652. The introduction of slaves to the nascent Cape Colony can be considered South Africa's first systematic human rights violation: the slaves were imported from all around the Indian Ocean basin, from countries such as Madagascar, Bengal, Malaysia, Indonesia. They introduced racial diversity to the Cape and supported its economy until slavery was abolished in 1834. One significant figure from this time, represented in David's Story, is Krotoa. Renamed Eva by the Dutch,

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<sup>6</sup> Catch a Fire, produced by Shawn Slovo, was released in 2006 and dramatises MK's attack on the Secunda Oil Refinery.

<sup>7</sup> In My Country, released in 2004, is based on Antjie Krog's Country of My Skull.

<sup>8</sup> Long Night's Journey into Day, released in 2000, is a documentary that tells the stories of four cases that were heard by the TRC.

<sup>9</sup> Fools, directed by Ramadan Suleiman in 1997, is based on Njabulo Ndebele's novella and focuses on life in African townships.

<sup>10</sup> The Market Theatre in Johannesburg was established in 1976 as an independent, non-racial theatre. In the 1980s it provided a space where blacks and whites could mix freely.

<sup>11</sup> The Afrikaner playwright Athol Fugard was born in 1932. He writes in English, and has worked with black actors and theatre companies during the apartheid years. He has written prolifically, and his plays are widely performed outside South Africa.

she was employed in van Riebeeck's castle as a servant and was the first Khoi woman to be represented in Dutch literature (Driver 2001: 230). Being fluent in several languages and a skilled interpreter, she refutes popular stereotypes of Khoi intellectual inferiority. The relationship between a succession of colonisers and the Khoi, who along with the San were South Africa's aboriginal inhabitants, played a formative role in Cape and national history. The two races were derogatorily referred to as the Bushmen or the Hottentot by early travellers to the region, and have more recently been designated the Khoisan by historians. They were granted first nation status in 2004. As stereotypes, they have featured in texts throughout the twentieth century: Wicomb rewrites aspects of their history in David's Story.

The first war between the colonisers and the Khoisan initiated a succession of wars of dispossession which continued in the form of frontier conflicts as white settlers moved further north. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were characterised by racialised violence, as the nomadic Khoisan were systematically hunted down and eliminated by the Boers and later the British, who had taken control of the Transvaal, Sekhukhuneland and Zululand by 1880. In the years immediately following this, economic motivation consolidated colonial expansion as gold was discovered on the Witwatersrand and the De Beers mining company gained monopoly over the Kimberley diamond industry. The foundations were thus laid for ongoing economic exploitation. In literary terms, this period was accompanied by the first fictional works to emerge from South Africa, largely authored by immigrants voicing insecurities triggered by the meeting of European and African populations. The adventure stories of Rider Haggard (King Solomon's Mines [1886], Allen Quartermain [1887] and She [1887]) follow the colonial venture into the hostile territories of the South African interior, stereotyping indigenous Africans as either

dangerous enemies or loyal servants. Olive Schreiner also wrote at this time. She worked as a governess on isolated farms in the Karoo and her novel The Story of an African Farm (1883)<sup>12</sup> presents a realist account of contemporary South African rural society. Schreiner's interest in the land led her later support of the Boers against the British.

Political rivalry between the Boers and British became more intense, and the turn of the twentieth century was marked most prominently with the violence of the South African War of 1899-1902. Over a period of three years, Boer women and children were driven into the world's first concentration camps by the British: some 20,000 Boers died in these camps, and evidence exists to suggest that a similar number of black people were also exhumed from British concentration camps.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the Herero people of South West Africa fell victim to a genocidal war directed against them by the Germans, which almost took them to extinction. The racial and ethnic violence that opened the century continued, systematised and sanctioned by a succession of racist colonial governments, motivated by capital gain rather than human rights.

With a burgeoning economy based on mining, Johannesburg overtook Cape Town as the region's largest city in the opening years of the twentieth century, with African employment in the mines exceeding 200,000 by 1911. In a legislative move that stands as a powerful symbol of what would become an ongoing dialectic between the expansion of white capital and systematised racism in South Africa, the government's programme for racial segregation was published as the Report of the South African

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<sup>12</sup> Schreiner published the novel under the pseudonym Ralph Iron.

<sup>13</sup> To support this, the TRC Report cites the evidence of Ron Viney, who testified to a TRC workshop on reconciliation (Report, Vol. 1:26).

Native Affairs Commission. In 1910, white domination of a majority African population was consolidated, as the Union of South Africa was formed. This united the British-administered Cape Colony and Natal with the Boer republics of the Transvaal and Orange River Colony (which later became the Orange Free State). Popular perception of South African history usually restricts an association with social engineering to the apartheid era, although the foundations were laid well before this. The 1909 South Africa Act, passed by the British Parliament, established a constitutional arrangement 'that transferred power in perpetuity to a minority of white voters' (Report, Vol.1: 28). Yet it is the 1913 Land Act, one of the first pieces of legislation passed by the post-unification South African Party government that the TRC Report cited as standing alone in the way that it 'dramatically and drastically re-shaped the social map' of South Africa (Report, Vol.1:27). It allocated 7% of the country's land to designated reserves, and prohibited Africans from owning land outside these areas. This instigated huge population removals to urban areas and a massive shift in the economic basis of African communities, who could no longer sharecrop or pursue other non-tenancy arrangements on white farms.

The Land Act was met by popular resistance: the forerunner of the ANC, the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), had been founded in the preceding year. In 1913 Ghandi's historic march of Indian miners took place in the Transvaal, and African women rallied in Bloemfontein to protest the introduction of passes (required by males seeking work in urban areas following the destruction of the African landowning economic sector). This period also marks the first fiction writing by black South Africans, a creative response to systematic domination which inextricably linked literature and politics. Mission-educated Sol Plaatjie was a founding member

of the SANNC, and its first secretary general in 1912. His seminal text Native Life in South Africa was published in 1916, in response to the Land Act, and condemns land dispossession. His novel, Mhudi, traces the history of the Tswana people, recounting their initial encounters with the white people who moved into the African interior. Although written in 1920, it was not published for ten years. His contemporary, Thomas Mofolo, had written Chaka in 1910, although the novel was not published until 1925, or translated into English until 1930. He “rewrites” the simplistic portrayal of Africans by novelists such as Haggard, by developing a complex portrayal of the character of the Zulu King Shaka.

Just three years after the introduction of the Land Act, the Native Affairs Administration Bill established racial segregation. In 1920, the year that Plaatjie wrote Mhudi, the Native Affairs Act created separate administration for the African population living in the reserves. In 1923, the year that segregationist legislation was extended to urban areas, the SANNC reformed as the ANC amidst increasing unionisation and unrest in the Witwatersrand mining communities. Although the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act was not to be passed for a further quarter of a century, the enforced separation of racial communities raised the issue of miscegenation which was reflected, like other political issues, in a realist form in contemporary literature. Sarah Gertrude Millin’s racist novel God’s Stepchildren perhaps pre-empts later writers like Coetzee by creating a structural as well as content-based connection between literature and politics. The novel supported popular opinion in the white communities by using the tragic form to portray miscegenation, relying heavily on the racial stereotyping of groups such as the Khoisan. These were

popularised in Victorian Europe by racial science and the exploitation of figures such as the Hottentot Venus, to perpetuate racial hierarchies.

The 1930s, characterised in the earlier part by drought and economic depression, triggered a schism in Afrikaner politics. The future architect of apartheid, Daniel Francois Malan, formed the “purified” National Party, which broke away from Hertzog and Smuts’ United Party that had been instigated in response to the Depression. In the second part of the decade gold mining expanded, and employment rose as a manufacturing boom began. Women’s political rights increased across the colour bar: white women were enfranchised in 1930, and a year later African women, who had hitherto been denied official status within the ANC, were granted auxiliary membership. The novelist André Brink was born into a conservative Afrikaner family in Vrede, Orange Free State, in 1935. His future colleague at Cape Town University, J.M. Coetzee, was born in 1940 in the rural Eastern Cape.

South Africa entered the Second World War in 1939: industry continued to expand in the war years, although was accompanied by increasing African militancy, culminating in the unionisation of African mine workers and a large-scale strike in 1946. This was violently suppressed by Smuts’ government, which went on to create the Security Branch of the SAP in the following year. One literary response to this was Peter Abrahams’ Mine Boy, published in the same year: like much of the preceding work by black or coloured writers, the novel is a realist account of the issues faced by rural Africans living in the depressed urban environment of the mining communities. Abrahams, the first black author to achieve financial success through his writing, had left South Africa in 1939, and wrote the novel whilst living in

Britain. His 1948 novel The Path of Thunder, published just a year before interracial marriage was outlawed, took interracial love as a theme. Alan Paton published Cry, The Beloved Country in the same year, adding a dissenting white liberal voice to the South African literary canon. This novel built on Abrahams' reputation to place South Africa on an international literary map, and presented a liberal-humanist view of South Africa's racial politics, drawing the situation in the country to the attention of a worldwide audience for the first time. This was also the year in which Zoë Wicomb was born, into a coloured community in Namaqualand in the Northern Cape.

The ANC finally granted women full membership and voting rights, and additionally formed its Youth League in 1948. In the same year that Malan's National Party came into power on the apartheid slogan, and a plethora of additional repressive legislation was passed. The Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act built on the foundations of the 1913 Land Act to further restrict the movements of the African population. All South Africans were classified into one of four racial groups: white, black, coloured and Indian, and were compelled by law to live in an area designated for the racial group into which they had been classified. The most intimate areas of private lives fell under state control as the Immorality Act was passed to prohibit sexual relations across the colour bar. Additionally, the Suppression of Communism Act banned the Communist Party of South Africa, although it declared such a vague definition of communism, extending the term to anyone who wanted any kind of legislative change, that it was able to ban virtually anything and anyone.

Culturally speaking, 1951 marked the beginning of what is often referred to as "The Drum Decade", in honour of the popular multicultural magazine Drum. This gave a

voice to urban African communities. Drum still exists, in a considerably diluted form, but at that time the magazine reflected the energy and politics of Sophiatown, a vibrant Johannesburg township that was home to gangsters, shebeens and jazz. Sophiatown was founded in 1899, one of Johannesburg's four original freehold townships, and because of this status, was one of the city's few multicultural residential areas. Trevor Huddleston lived in Sophiatown,<sup>14</sup> as did the jazz musicians Dollar Brand and Hugh Masekela, and black writers and poets. Figures like Ezekiel Mphahlele, Can Themba, Lewis Nkosi, Alex La Guma, Bloke Modisane, Richard Rive and Nat Nakasa used fiction to report both on the conditions of their own lives and their visions for black South Africa. Most of the pieces were written in a blend of English and Tsotsitaal, a contemporary pidgin language of the African townships. The state responded to this literary threat to its hegemony by beginning the eviction of Sophiatown in 1955, before razing the township to the ground in 1963.

The ANC launched its Defiance Campaign, a peaceful programme of civil disobedience designed to destabilise white supremacy, in 1952. The government retaliated by passing legislation banning public gatherings and meetings, and permitting the detention of any person deemed to be jeopardising public safety. The Bantu Education Act was devised in order to create an instrumental system of African education that would train workers in specific skills required to support the white economy, their education being restricted to an elementary, fundamental level. In 1959 this was extended to provide segregated ethnic universities. In Kliptown in the Transvaal, in 1955, the Congress of the People took contributions from all over the country to write the powerful anti-racist document, the Freedom Charter, that claimed

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<sup>14</sup> Trevor Huddleston (1913-1998) was Bishop of Sophiatown from 1943-1956.

South Africa as a multiracial, democratic state. The state initiated a series of Treason Trials in the following year designed to suppress dissenters. In 1956, the National Party disenfranchised coloured voters, and in 1958, following the election of H.F. Verwoerd as Prime Minister, the pass laws that had restricted the movements of black males were extended to African women.

On 21 March 1960, police opened fire on marchers protesting against the pass laws at Sharpeville, outside Johannesburg, killing 69 people and wounding 186. What has since become known as the Sharpeville Massacre marks the beginning of the mandate period of the TRC. The massacre triggered the declaration of the first of many States of Emergency in South Africa: in just five months in 1960, 11,503 dissidents were detained, and the ANC and PAC were banned. Organised resistance grew in strength, and the African Resistance Movement was formed by a group of young, radical whites. The profile of political resistance in South Africa was raised when Albert Luthuli, ANC President, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1961. South Africa withdrew from the Commonwealth in the same year, and the ANC and PAC both launched armed wings. Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), the military wing of the ANC, began violent sabotage actions, followed by Poqo, the PAC equivalent, the following year. Regional support also took shape as Tanzania agreed to host ANC and PAC missions-in-exile. This increasingly organised and militant African resistance was accompanied by the formation of a military intelligence unit of the South African Police and additional legislation designed to combat the threat of terrorism.

The repressive measures of the state continued to extend their remit, with popular media forms being specifically targeted by the Publications and Entertainment Act of 1963. The Act served to extend the state's control over the media and facilitated the banning of texts it deemed undesirable. By this time television had been widely available in Europe for a decade, yet the National Party refused to allow it to be introduced to South Africa, fearing that imported programmes would be difficult to regulate and would undermine apartheid ideology. Television finally became generally available in the country in 1976, South Africa being one of the last African countries to receive it despite its relative technological advancement. In the interim period the role of radio, still an important news medium, grew.

The 1963 Act also extended "banning" criteria to specifically include literature and the media. The banning of organisations or individuals was originally enforced by the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act: between 1950 and 1990 more than 2000 people were banned in South Africa. Banning removed a person from the public domain: they would be confined to their home, barred from receiving non-family visitors, speaking or writing publicly, and could not be quoted in any publication. They were also barred from holding office in any organisation. Banned items included anything bearing an ANC symbol, ranging from buttons and cigarette lighters to literature. The 1963 Act conferred the power to ban on the Minister of the Interior: criteria included obscenity, moral harmfulness and blasphemy amongst others. While some obviously political works were outlawed, such as Lenin's Left Wing Communism (banned 1992) and A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism (banned 1996), other texts met their fate due to the Dutch Reformed Church's extreme sexual morality. This latter category included titles like Sandra McDermott's British

Survey of Female Sexuality (banned 1973) and 10 ½ Inches and Other True Gay Encounters by Winston Leyland (banned 1992).<sup>15</sup>

This period in South African history led many writers into exile. In 1959 Breyten Breytenbach, the Afrikaner poet who was imprisoned on his later return to South Africa for his criticisms of the apartheid state, left the country, as did Alex la Guma in 1966, the Marxist and ANC leader who described the material conditions experienced by black South Africans. La Guma died in Cuba, and Breytenbach eventually had to re-enter South Africa on a series of tourist visas, having been refused re-entry in 1969 under the Immorality Act as he had married a French woman of Vietnamese descent. Breytenbach went on to spend seven years in prison, some of this in solitary confinement, and was only released following pressure from the French government. Brink established himself as a novelist during this period. His first works were published in Afrikaans, although his 1963 novel Die Amdassadeur alienated him from much of the Afrikaner community as it criticised religion. While his writing was criticised by the Church, his work was not actually banned in South Africa until 1973, when Kennis von Die (later translated into English as Looking on Darkness) became the first novel in Afrikaans to be outlawed under the 1963 censorship legislation. In the same year the well-documented Rivonia Treason Trial was held, which led to Mandela and other senior members of MK being sentenced to life imprisonment. The state increased legislation to extend the legitimate periods of detention, meaning it could now detain anyone for up to 90 days. It continued its offensive against dissenters in the wake of the Freedom Charter, executing three members of MK in 1964, and sentencing Bram Fischer of the SACP to life imprisonment in 1965.

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<sup>15</sup> Literally thousands of texts were banned by the South African state. For a comprehensive list see the website of the Beacon for the Freedom of Expression ([www.beaconforfreedom.org](http://www.beaconforfreedom.org)).

This period of increased government offensives within South Africa was marked by further amendments to the detention laws, which now meant that an individual could be held for up to 6 months in solitary confinement. At the same time the struggle took on more regional proportions as the SAP clashed with SWAPO in Namibia, and also began to deploy units in Rhodesia. Domestic legislation also took account of the increasing international awareness of repressive policies and passed the Prohibition of Political Interference Act, which outlawed foreign investment in non-racial political parties (it also made it illegal to form these parties in the first place). Increased popular resistance to apartheid was marked by Steve Biko's formation of the South African Students' Association in 1969. He was murdered in police custody just eight years later. His life was the focus of the white journalist Donald Woods' Biko, which was published in 1978, a year after Woods and his family were forced into exile in Britain. The subsequent film Cry Freedom, released in 1987, was not officially banned in South Africa, although cinemas that attempted to screen it reportedly fell victim to bomb attacks.

South Africa's African population were soon to be further dehumanised. The 1970s opened with the passing of the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act. This rendered Africans citizens of one of ten homelands, effectively divesting them of national citizenship. In military terms, the state increased conscription, and started to train black police in anti-terrorist techniques, deploying them in Namibia. The SAP began cross-border raids, in 1974 killing SASO founder Ongkopotse Abraham Tiro in Namibia, and longstanding ANC member John Dube in Botswana. In this decade, international awareness and condemnation of the apartheid regime increased, with the UN withdrawing voting rights from the South African delegation and granting observer status to the ANC and PAC in 1974. The preceding year, Arab and African

states had imposed an oil embargo on South Africa. The French also deemed it inappropriate to continue to display the genital organs of Saartjie Baartman, the Hottentot Venus, removing them from the public section of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris in 1974.

The political situations in surrounding countries began to have an impact on South African domestic politics in the mid 1970s. Angola and Mozambique achieved independence from Portugal in 1975, and installed socialist governments hostile to the apartheid system. South Africa utilised American support to invade Angola, the contested territory of which then became home to ANC guerrilla training camps two years later. The Soweto student uprising of 1976, a seminal moment in the non-South African consciousness of apartheid, brought apartheid once again to the attention of international media. Following protests against the introduction of education in Afrikaans, the SAP (who had, in the preceding year, set up a Special Task Force and eighteen full-time Riot Squads across the country) opened fire on 10,000 school pupils. 575 died in this and associated unrest around the country, and thousands were injured. The Soweto uprisings led to an increase in organised violent resistance to apartheid. Many of “the class of ‘76” left South Africa, pouring into ANC training camps in Angola, and violence increased on both sides.

The decade is widely considered a defining period in the development of black consciousness, and was marked in more cultural terms by an upsurge in literary production by black writers. In the wake of the Black Consciousness movement's privileging of black cultural values and racial solidarity, literature started to be used as a medium for the promotion of anti-apartheid cultural ideals. Poetry became especially important for its rawness and imagery. I have chosen not to study poetry in

this thesis, because it has less of an impact on post-apartheid audiences, for whom the novel form is a more accessible and culturally prevalent medium. However, poetry at the time was frequently performed at political rallies, the most notable voices at the time being those of Mongane Wally Serote and Oswald Mtshali. It afforded the possibility of graphic imagery which could easily arouse the emotions of crowds. Serote went on to become an ANC leader and also published novels later in his literary career, the most famous being To Every Birth Its Blood, published in 1981, which graphically recounts 1970s political activities. In a similar vein, Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane's The Children of Soweto reconstructs the Soweto student uprisings, and Njabulo Ndebele's 1985 Fools collection recounts stories of life in the urban townships,

When P.W. Botha acceded to power in 1978 (following the forced resignation of the corrupt Vorster), a new era in apartheid policies had begun. Botha implemented "total strategy" policies, which led to increased militarisation of the state. One of his first acts was to authorise the killing of 1000 in SADF raids on SWAPO camps. The Security Branch Vlakplaas unit was established the following year and became responsible for large-scale torture. Also in 1999 Koevoet, a police counter-insurgency unit for operations in Namibia, was established. Koevoet operated on a bounty system, with members being given cash bonuses for capturing and killing "terrorists".

Continued cross-border affronts took place in the 1980s, a decade opened by the independence of Zimbabwe. The 1980s were known in South Africa as the "emergency years" because of continual states of emergency declared during that

period: white troops entered the townships, and the country remained in a state of virtual civil war for the majority of the decade. The state imposed special media regulations in 1987, enforcing a news blackout prohibiting reporting of disturbance incidents. In the state of emergency in 1986 alone, over 25,000 people were detained. By 1981, the SADF occupied a third of Angola, and regular cross-border raids were being carried out in Mozambique, Lesotho and Zimbabwe. The South African security police bombed ANC offices in London. Prominent opposition members were killed: the lawyer Griffiths Mxenge was assassinated in 1981, and the following year the academic and SACP activist Ruth First, wife of Joe Slovo, was murdered in Mozambique by the security police. The trade unionist Neil Aggett died in detention. In 1986 the socialist Mozambican president Samora Machel died in suspicious circumstances in an air crash over South Africa. MK increased violent action, blowing up the Secunda oil refinery in 1980, the Koeberg nuclear power plant in 1982 and the Umtata fuel depot and water pipelines in 1985.

International pressure against apartheid mounted with the “Free Mandela” campaign, which began following his transfer from Robben Island to Pollsmoor Prison in Cape Town. The state responded to this rise in international pressure by extending conscription again and passing the Internal Security Act, which increased the criteria for banning publications and people. It also provided the legislative justification for indefinite preventive detention and solitary confinement. Economic sanctions were imposed from the international community, theologians signed the anti-apartheid Kairos agreement and writers joined the struggle by depicting the reality of life under apartheid. International interest in South African literature was consolidated when J.M. Coetzee won the Booker Prize for The Life and Times of Michael K in 1983. He

had published Waiting for the Barbarians in 1980, an allegorical representation of South African politics. It tells of an official working at the frontier post of an unnamed empire, posted to respond to the perceived threat of unspecified barbarians. During the 1980s schisms also arose within the resistance movements. The ANC, ironically perhaps, began to imprison dissidents who sought greater democracy within its structures in Quatro Camp in Angola; AZAPO and the UDF entered into conflict, and tensions rose between Inkatha and the UDF.

The international community passed judgement on white South African politics by awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 1984. In 1986, however, South African Air Force raids on Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe led to the termination of the Commonwealth Secretariat peace mission. The United States, despite Reagan's veto, imposed economic sanctions on South Africa via the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act. In 1988 a huge concert in London's Wembley Stadium celebrated Mandela's seventieth birthday and protested against his ongoing imprisonment. In the same year, South Africa agreed, under international pressure, to withdraw its troops from Angola and Namibia.

Almost at the end of a turbulent decade, the newly elected F.W. de Klerk introduced a series of reforms. Although a conference earlier in the year between Botha and Mandela had been the first meeting between the government and the ANC to be made public, covert negotiations had been taking place since 1985. The government allowed a Peace March protesting against police brutality to take place, and de Klerk began to release political prisoners taken during the Treason Trials. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked the end of the symbolic communist "threat", and this

became de Klerk's justification for the introduction of a series of liberalisation strategies. He unbanned the liberation movements, lifting restrictions that had previously been imposed on many organisations and individuals. He also released political prisoners, permitted exiles to return to South Africa and passed a moratorium on judicial executions. Conscription ended and white troops withdrew from the townships. In that year Nelson Mandela was also released from prison. However, the violence of the apartheid years was not over. In the "Seven Day War" near Pietermaritzburg over 200 people were killed, and a further 300 injured by police at a protest march near Sebokeng. With the launch of the Inkatha Freedom Party, violence escalated in Natal. With regard to literature, the new regime was reflected in that, with the unbannings, the work of many writers became readily available in South Africa. Rian Malan published My Traitor's Heart in 1990, a reflective novel that uncovered aspects of South Africa's past in investigatory journalistic style.

The early nineties were accompanied by an increase in ANC organisation. Mandela was elected its president, and Oliver Tambo chairperson. The ANC joined with other organisations, such as the IFP, to launch the Patriotic Front in opposition to the government. The climate of investigating and coming to terms with the past was also launched: when government funding of Inkatha and its associated trade union UWUSA (done covertly in 1986, at the height of the states of emergency) came to light, de Klerk established the Kahn Committee to investigate. In 1992, the ANC assembled the Skweyiya Commission of Inquiry to investigate human rights violations in the ANC detention camps. As violence in the black townships continued to increase, the state and the ANC signed a Record of Understanding. In 1993, the year that the mandate period of the TRC ended, the ANC convened an additional

body, the Motsuenyane Commission, to continue investigation of human rights abuses in ANC detention camps: this time the ANC accepted the commission's findings, and named alleged perpetrators. Mandela and de Klerk were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993, and the ANC finalised the Interim Constitution after three years of negotiation. However, violence continued. The assassination of Chris Hani, widely tipped to become Mandela's successor, sparked countrywide violence, and in 1994, just prior to the country's first democratic elections, political tension between the ANC and Inkatha rose. Fifty five died and hundreds more were injured when IFP marched in Johannesburg. Yet, the election took place on April 27: the ANC won with 62.6% of the vote, and a Government of National Unity was constituted.

Social and political change in South Africa since the end of the nineteenth century has been massive. Literature has accompanied its journey. It is clear that, while the TRC may have placated many and has provided some much-needed answers to questions about the past, it has not transformed the economic or social reality of post-apartheid South Africa. The economic legacies of segregation and apartheid continue, and the poor management of national resources by a succession of ANC governments means that the populist visions articulated in the 1955 Freedom Charter are far from realised.<sup>16</sup> As is shown in Chapter One, the ANC has not made the money for meaningful reparations available, and this has limited the efficacy of the TRC. The twenty-first century nation stands on the verge of economic and social collapse. The traumatic past that created this flux and insecurity has left gaping wounds. The psychic wounds left by apartheid are difficult to define and quantify since the state left so little of its citizens' lives untouched. The limited mandate of the TRC focuses

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<sup>16</sup> I am not offering an economic treatise here: the chapter on South Africa in Naomi Klein's Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism (pp 194-217) puts forward a clear thesis regarding the ANC's mismanagement of capital.

on physical rather than systemic harm caused to individuals, and post-apartheid criticisms of the nation not unreasonably tend to concentrate on its economic shortcomings. South African literature, I argue, has at its disposal a gamut of tools and techniques with which to address the psychological and emotional residue of apartheid. While post-apartheid institutions such as the TRC have attempted, in the words of its chairperson, to 'prescribe the correct medicine' to heal the past, I will show in the latter part of this thesis that the nation's writers, as has been the case through recent history, are unable and unwilling to contribute to this mode of engagement with national history (Report, Vol.1: 17). By resisting this they draw attention to the uncertainty of their country's future and pay tribute to aspects of its past in a way that others cannot, rising to fulfil a very real role not required of their counterparts in more secure parts of the world.

## Chapter One

### **“Revealing is Healing”: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Memory and the Transition to Democracy in South Africa<sup>1</sup>**

*We become afraid of our own remembering. It gives us squamas and eczema and migraine, unusual anxieties and asthma and nightmares, and sometimes we wake up all wet with perspiration because we have smelt the moon (Breyten Breytenbach).<sup>2</sup>*

*...the past refuses to lie down quietly. It has an uncanny habit of returning to haunt one (Desmond Tutu).<sup>3</sup>*

#### **1.0 Introduction**

When I left South Africa in October 1995 the family who had hosted me in Soweto made one request. They asked me to tell people in Britain the stories of their lives under apartheid. When I asked why this was so important to them, various members of the family told me this would enable them to put the past behind them and move on to the future. They expressed no bitterness, simply the desire that people in another country should be able to hear and understand a personalised version of recent South African history.<sup>4</sup> Following this conversation some members of the family then said they would like to show me something of their family’s past, so that I would have something to remember. This took the form of a chronological narrative performance

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<sup>1</sup> The slogan “Revealing is Healing” was widespread during the proceedings of the TRC, and was written on banners that were hung around the public halls in which the victim hearings took place.

<sup>2</sup> This quotation is from Breyten Breytenbach’s autobiography, *Return to Paradise*.

<sup>3</sup> This quotation is from Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s forward to the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report* (Vol. 1: 7).

<sup>4</sup> The Pewa family did not intend to make any representation to the TRC, as they had not experienced any bereavement directly attributable to apartheid. Various members of the family had, however, been active in the struggle against apartheid and had experienced degrees of personal trauma. Throughout my stay in South Africa they were keen for me to meet members of their local community who had suffered under apartheid, and for me to take photographs of relics of the apartheid past as well as their present living conditions.

of Zulu history, in song and dance, beginning with warrior dances predating apartheid by centuries and moving through expressions of the resistance movement to celebrations of liberation.<sup>5</sup>

### **1.1 Healing as Spectacle**

I was struck both by the simplicity of the family's request and the mode and historical scope of their narrative expression, which blended the confessional and spectacular forms. This led me to question the role and potential power of telling and witnessing in healing the wounds of the past, from the point of view that the family seemed to want to create a form of memory through performance, inherent in which was a dialogic relationship with the audience. Why were these acts of telling and retelling so important? What therapeutic value could they hold? Was there any significance in the situation of the originary point of the narrative prior to apartheid, a feature common to many public testimonies and post-apartheid novels that will be explored in subsequent chapters of this thesis? Was it the storytelling alone that was crucial, or did the fact that this kind of public telling meant that the stories might be sympathetically witnessed and disseminated to a wider audience matter more? Could some combination of the acts of telling and listening in some way enable a transition between past and future for individuals? If this were possible, could this process also function effectively on a national/political level as claimed by the African National Congress government when it established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The family were Zulu, originating from Adam's Mission in KwaZulu-Natal, and had moved to Johannesburg in the 1950s in search of employment. They were relocated to Soweto from Sophiatown following demolition of the township: there was a strong history of political and economic resistance within the family, sustained across several chapters of colonial and apartheid history.

<sup>6</sup> The African National Congress will hereafter be referred to as the ANC, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as the TRC.

Assuming the latter, then perhaps strands of national allegory, confession and spectacle can be seen as inherent in the proceedings of the TRC. These are all features of the psychotherapeutic relation that drives the TRC and form part of the political transition in South Africa. The TRC, through its bridging, multi-institutional function, stands very clearly as an allegory of the hopes and projections of policy makers and nation builders, providing a highly public arena in which the structures and tensions of nation formation are played out in microcosm.

The spectacular mode of the TRC afforded a public domain in which to potentially work through the national past. The future of South Africa was based on a vision of coming to terms with the violence of apartheid through exposing individuals and institutions that had been involved in that past in oppositional roles to the suffering associated with historical trauma. William Warner presents a reading of the Rambo films as a way of “working-through” aspects of the American past associated with the Vietnam War (Warner 1992: 672-688).<sup>7</sup> Working-through, the subject of Freud’s 1914 article ‘Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through’ is defined for the purposes of this thesis as psychic work that allows the subject to accept certain repressed elements of a traumatic past, therefore preventing their repetition. It is assisted in a therapeutic relationship by the analyst, who interprets contributions from the analysand to expedite the healing process. Given the interventionist role played by the TRC and the ANC government, both in facilitating hearings and selecting material

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<sup>7</sup> Warner’s essay argues that action films like Rambo use media technology to support the function and virtue of the hero figure in the present whilst publicising the pain associated with the past (1992: 673). He suggests that it is during the process of re-composing the nation (an entity that has been damaged by past trauma) that history becomes distorted: the white, masculine heroic figure of Rambo turns the devastation of the Vietnam War into a kind of nostalgic heroism. As the past is brought into the theatre of the spectacle, the “truth” of past trauma engages with the arena of popular culture, and the audience is invited to assume a specific subject position in relation to its ethos (1992: 674). While a sustained direct comparison between Rambo and the TRC is interesting, but perhaps tenuous, both present examples of the way that the spectacle is used as a means of working-through, which is what I find pertinent in relation to this chapter.

from them to produce a summative report, there is validity in considering what is said about the past in relation to political authority.<sup>8</sup> In the context of Warner's reading, it is plausible to consider the South African public as being in a similar position to their American counterparts, who needed to work through the loss of a dominant white political power. To this end the TRC claimed iconic status in South Africa, using the cohesive structures of mass media technology to disseminate the past, increase the extent to which it could be witnessed and literally and symbolically re-member the structures of the fragmented apartheid nation. Not everyone in South Africa chose to accept the ethos of the TRC, yet it became an important site for the construction of national truth in the 1990s.<sup>9</sup> The narrative space it created did not permit an ambivalent audience, in that it created a dichotomy between those who believed in its mission and those who did not, and became a powerful public symbol of the distinction between past and present ideology on which the nation-building project was founded.

Post-apartheid South Africa can be characterised to a large extent by the emphasis placed on the state on the importance of healing the nation through coming to terms with the past. Created by the government as the institution principally responsible for instigating and overseeing national catharsis, during which process the state applied psychoanalytic principles to political methodology, the TRC became a formative and substantial element of the national therapeutic initiative. Its stated primary aim was to enable the nation to 'leave behind the past of a deeply divided

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<sup>8</sup> The Report, which is a product of institutional intervention in individual trauma, will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two. The interventionist element of the TRC's role as interlocutor will be analysed later on in this chapter.

<sup>9</sup> There was, though, significant opposition to the TRC, which will be dealt with more fully in the next chapter. However I am thinking specifically here of the family of Griffiths Mxenge, a murdered lawyer, who actively opposed the TRC in favour of retribution.

society characterised by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and commence the journey towards a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence’, in other words to move towards a new national imaginary (Report Vol.1: 48). The TRC tried to disseminate this future vision largely through media publicity, yet what is arguable is whether it did indeed focus its energies and processes on the future of the nation as a whole, and whether its effect was entirely constructive and benign.

The remainder of this chapter will analyse the therapeutic function of the TRC as a spectacle of national healing. My point of reference here is Foucault’s discussion of the confession in The History of Sexuality: Volume One, specifically the essay ‘Scientia Sexualis’ which analyses the relationship between sex and political power in Western Europe (1979: 53-73). The TRC’s premise was that a full confession from perpetrators would establish the truth about the past and that this knowledge would facilitate abreaction of historical trauma, providing a basis for the definition of a new national consciousness distinct from that which had preceded it. From that, I will evaluate the role and function of the TRC as a spectacle of confession that has the specific aim of (re)creating national narrative. Spectacle, like confession, requires the participation of an audience. Thus a confessional spectacle like the TRC, by bringing together two parties who may not necessarily have come together of their own volition in more ordinary circumstances, can enable a collective approach to the past through dialogue between audience and protagonist. Chapter Two will then focus in detail on the content and significance of confessional narratives to the TRC (in that narration and reconciliation were founding tenets of the new nation) in the form of oral testimony to the Commission, entries to the Register of Reconciliation and the

published summative document, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report.<sup>10</sup>

## **1.2 Confession and the National Imaginary**

Confession is any process by which “private” matters are voluntarily made public and laid open to external moral scrutiny and judgement. The fact that through history confession has often been accompanied by torture as a method of coercion signifies, however, that the confessional arena is not entirely benign and contains a power relation. The TRC did not use torture but, in that it operated as an institutional gateway to a new nation that functioned under moral conditions that were defined by their difference from those that preceded it, it used the threat (reality) of social exclusion as a means of compulsion. Foucault identifies confession as the main ritual by which truth is produced in western society, although as one that unfolds within a complex set of power relations which define and impose normativity on the incumbent transaction (1979: 58). Foucault’s specific focus is of course the history of sexuality within a western European context, but the points he makes regarding the deletion of information and sections of confession from final dossiers and public reports have disturbing familiarity in relation to the TRC (Foucault 1979: 56). They are also relevant in the sense that its proceedings provide an example of intimacy and interiority being brought into a public arena, and used as a means of determining normativity. Systematic “blindness”, which may also be regarded as a kind of imposed forgetting, can also be identified within the TRC’s processes in that not everyone who applied to do so was actually able to give oral testimony to the TRC, and that many of the testimonies given were edited out of the final version of the

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<sup>10</sup> The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report will hereafter be referred to as the Report.

Report.<sup>11</sup> The Report is one of the means by which individual testimonies are given voice and brought into a social world. However, John Frow in his essay about the Australian Stolen Generations rightly points out that a report such as this, while standing as an attempt to transmit stories about the past to a wider audience by incorporating them into a larger narrative, also exhibits the tensions between ‘speak[ing] on behalf of’ victims and ‘restor[ing] a voice to them’ (Frow 2001: 334). The silence and absence of certain past truths signifies the presence of this tension.

Foucault argues that the “truth” is constituted in two stages: first it is present but incomplete in the confessional subject, and second it gains wholeness as it is assimilated and recorded before a witness. In other words, the revelation of what has been confessed only becomes whole when it is coupled with the deciphering and dissemination of what has been said: this occurs within the dialogic relation of the confessional space. It is during this process, according to Foucault, that confession and its effects are recoded as a therapeutic operation. What is confessed falls under the rule of the normal and the pathological, and takes on its meaning through the sequence of therapeutic interventions. The confessional, then, becomes a site for the construction of a version of historical truth which, in the form of a public document like a Truth Commission report can go on to form the semantic basis of the new nation. A document like the Report is a product of authoritative intervention: in constructing the Report, the Commissioners enacted value judgements in deciding what was and was not worthy of inclusion, supporting Foucault’s assertion that confession is ‘a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not

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<sup>11</sup> The Report clarifies that out of 20,000 submissions made to the TRC, only 2,000 were actually able to give public testimony. While all of these were transcribed and archived (and are freely available via the TRC website <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/trc> ) they are by no means all mentioned in the final summative documentation published by the Commission.

confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge' (1979: 61).

The dynamic of the confessional is such that, as a symbol of an individual's acknowledgement of his own actions and thoughts, it becomes an emblem of the process of individualisation itself. Yet the extent to which individual interpretation of the circumstances of the confessional is permitted is defined by dominant power relations. Because confession is always made to an audience, the content of the confessional becomes part of a dialogue. Even if the partner in the confession, the interlocutor or the authority which has demanded the confession, is simply an extension of the self (in that sometimes people confess to themselves in the form of, for example, a diary entry), the material of the confession is aimed at producing 'an intrinsic modification in the person who articulates it' (Foucault 1979: 61). The TRC was trying to effect modifications within the speaking subjects of the national confessional arena in order to create change within individual subjects in terms of their relationship to the past so that the state, or collective entity, might be exonerated from the burden of a traumatic history. A text like the Report in effect becomes an archive of confession, and as it is published and disseminated, new "knowledge" can be created around it, and it is then 'solidified' by the state and enters official historical discourse (Foucault 1979: 63).

### **1.3 Trauma and the Nation**

In the context of South Africa and the TRC, both victims and perpetrators confessed to their individual involvement in the traumatic national past. However, there is a

distinction to be made between trauma that pertains to an individual and that which relates to a collective entity such as a nation. A national initiative like the TRC builds on Freud's work on trauma and the individual subject to assume that a nation possesses a psyche capable of experiencing and processing trauma in a similar way. To this end, Brandon Hamber and Richard Wilson argue that national and individual methods of dealing with the past are 'largely equivalent and concurrent', and that national processes for recovering the past can function as a means of achieving national unity through the articulation and construction of shared memory (1999: 1). However, by extension, the premise of psychologising the nation can become an ideological justification for subordinating individual needs to the dominant rhetoric of national unity and reconciliation (Hamber and Wilson 1999: 1). Hamber and Wilson endorse Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma and collective subjectivity to argue convincingly that, in post-conflict societies like South Africa, memory is constructed as a collective object rather than a political practice, and remains subject to preconditions for psychological closure that are determined by a political agenda.<sup>12</sup>

In order to successfully construct a national past (in the sense that the national imaginary, such as that personified by the TRC, is based in part on shared perception of the past), the range of 'permissible historical revisionism' (Hamber and Wilson 1999: 2) has to be reduced to a minimum. In other words, perceptions of experience have to be homogenised as much as possible, and fissures in the national identity caused by differences in factors such as ethnicity, class and gender need to be minimised. The potential for tension between national and individual goals is clear:

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<sup>12</sup> Caruth, like Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, whose work is also referred to in this thesis, theorises trauma as a shared experience. Her work therefore provides a useful theoretical perspective from which to analyse the TRC, whose foundations acknowledged apartheid as shared historical trauma for which a collective solution could be sought. Apartheid functions as a verifiable, external traumatic event which has produced a range of traumatic effects within the South African nation and individuals.

the presentation of trauma at a national level can never be equal to the sum of the individual experiences that comprise it precisely because the experience of the “truth” of the past is so highly individual. Yet for the nation to heal, survivors and their experiences must be integrated into its identity in order that they can function as national subjects: this goal may not be the same as that of individual subjects who seek full psychological closure of the past, and cannot be accompanied on this process of grieving by a truth commission operating within a limited time period and to a nationalist agenda. The TRC seeks to make these processes compatible through, publicly at least, promoting individual needs as being the same as those of the nation. However, a clear pressure-point can be identified as nation-builders, who seek cohesion through the management of collective memory, cross purposes with individuals, who desire information and closure regarding historical trauma which may not be achieved at the same procedural or chronological point as political unity.

While the TRC attempts to unite these two strands, there exists very clear tension between trauma that affects individuals, and trauma as applied to a collective entity such as a nation. Is it possible to invest a nation with a psyche that is capable of being damaged and healed in a manner to that concurrent to its individual subjects? In language that resonates with corporal images, Tutu states that the mission of the TRC is to heal the sick national body: ‘however painful, the experience, the wounds of the past must not be allowed to fester. *They must be opened. They must be cleansed.* And balm must be poured upon them so they can heal’ (Report Vol.1: 7 my emphasis). The metaphor is extended in his later reference to faith communities, NGOs and citizens as the ‘organs of civil society’ (Report Vol.1: 49). Whilst metaphorical references to the nation as a body are abundant within contemporary political and

cultural theory, theory and imagery regarding the psychological health of a nation are far less prolific, possibly because the concepts at stake are less concrete and material, the less “visible” and interior and “individual” realm of the psyche being harder to confine within an image. In South Africa, the “mental health” of the nation can be clearly aligned to the nature of the prevalent moral order, and the manner in which the nation has been cleansed of past corruption and unethical practices. The role of the TRC in the construction and dissemination of a new national morality is self-evident, although this kind of state intervention that merges morality, health and public policy is not without problematic historical precedent.<sup>13</sup>

As representative of the normalising aspect of the power dynamic within Foucault’s confessional arena, the South African government attempted to apply psychoanalytic principles when it instituted the TRC as an attempt to heal the nation damaged by apartheid (in that it aimed to construct a “healthy” nation by working through repressed material from a traumatic past). The post-apartheid rhetoric of truth and reconciliation was hegemonic and constitutionally enshrined and demonstrates the state’s motivation in establishing the TRC to be simultaneously therapeutic and nationalist. The psychoanalytic model was put into practice through the extensive national and international media coverage used to broadcast hearings as microcosms of national healing and reconciliation, which placed the wider population in the role

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<sup>13</sup> I am thinking here, amongst other things, of the American Psychiatric Association’s notorious declaration of homosexuality as a mental disorder in 1952 which provides a useful point of comparison as a case study of the hegemonic role that a state can play in the construction of a dominant moral discourse. Ronald Bayer’s account of events (1981) is useful reading when considering the implication of what has been declared a therapeutic stance with a defined cultural perspective. While both the American and South African governments sought to include or exclude based on an individual’s relationship to a politically-sanctioned moral perspective (in the American case with regard to sexuality, in South Africa in terms of complicity with TRC rhetoric), a sustained comparison is invalid since the dominant focus in America was so clearly to normalise the state through exclusion, whereas the South African mandate was political stabilisation through inclusion. Yet there are clear and useful parallels when considering the historical use of psychoanalysis as a mode of political intervention.

of analysand and witness.<sup>14</sup> As the new national truth is mediated across cultural, linguistic and territorial boundaries, an idealised conformist subjectivity is constructed under curative auspices “Revealing is healing”.<sup>15</sup>

#### 1.4 The TRC and Representation

Issues of representation frame the meanings that can be made within the confessional arena afforded by the TRC. The TRC investigated only events which took place within the fixed time period 1960-1994, and was selective in its determination of victimhood.<sup>16</sup> In restricting the opportunity to give testimony to those it determined as victims of ‘gross human rights violations’ it limited the number and range of individual pasts that could enter the public arena (Report Vol.1: 59). Although a strong case could be made that apartheid violated the human rights of the majority of South African citizens, which is the argument that permits the generalisation inherent in the assumption that the trauma of apartheid is collective, the TRC’s mandate limited its focus significantly,<sup>17</sup> and this led to several omissions/silences in terms of the truth that came to be represented in the national narrative.<sup>18</sup> The TRC did not give

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<sup>14</sup> Tutu states: ‘a distinctive feature of the Commission was its openness to public participation and scrutiny... People saw, for example, a former security officer demonstrating his torture techniques. They saw weeping men and women asking for the truth about their missing loved ones’ (Report Vol.1: 104).

<sup>15</sup> To this end, Tutu writes on media involvement in the TRC proceedings: ‘The media also helped generate public debate on central aspects of South Africa’s past and to raise the level of historical awareness. The issues that emerged as a consequence *helped the nation to focus on values central to a healthy democracy*: transparency, public debate, public participation and criticism’ (Report Vol.1: 104, my emphasis).

<sup>16</sup> The use of the term “victim” is problematic, carrying connotations of passivity, and to many people “survivor” is preferable. This issue is also foregrounded in the Report (Vol.1: 59). I have decided to continue to refer to “victims” in this thesis for the same reasons as the TRC continued to use the term: in that ‘when dealing with gross human rights violations committed by perpetrators, the person against whom that violation is committed can only be described as a victim, regardless of whether he or she emerged as a survivor’ (Report Vol.1: 59).

<sup>17</sup> This is fully acknowledged in the Report which states that ‘the Commission’s focus was, therefore, a narrow or restricted one, representing what were perhaps some of the worst acts committed against the people of this country and region in the post-1960 period, but providing a picture that is by no means complete’ (Vol.1: 29).

<sup>18</sup> This position is upheld by Tutu’s recourse to the African discourse of *ubuntu*, which is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

official space to those who had suffered from the daily racial and ethnic oppression associated with apartheid. It took on only cases where ‘bodily integrity rights’, defined in the South African constitution and recognised under international law as ‘the right to life, the right to be free from torture, the right to be free from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and the right to freedom and security of the person, including freedom from abduction and arbitrary and prolonged detention’ had been violated (Report Vol.1: 64). The TRC also did not allow children to testify, limiting the documentation of children’s trauma to adults’ accounts of what had happened to them as children. Hence, hundreds of thousands of traumas that do not meet these criteria have remained undocumented within official procedures and therefore unpublicised. Additionally, while some 20,000 written statements were taken from survivors or families of victims of political violence, only around 2,000 were selected to be heard in public. A much smaller number of amnesty applications, approximately 7,050, were submitted by perpetrators, and the majority of these were not processed before the intended closing date of the TRC.

The composition of the TRC itself, which highlights the state’s intention to present a microcosm of its vision of the ethnic composition of the new nation in its choice of commissioners, can be seen as an attempt at representation. Nelson Mandela selected the commissioners from a shortlist of nominees who had been suggested by NGOs, churches and political parties. The final seventeen comprised seven black commissioners (Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Revd Bongani Finca, Ms Sisi Khampepe, Revd Dr Khoza Mgojo, Ms Hlengiwe Mkhize, Mr Dumisa Ntsebeza and Dr Mapule Ramashala), two coloured members (Ms Glenda Wildschut and Adv Denzil Potgeiter), two Indians (Dr Fazel Randera and Ms Yasmin Sooka) and six whites

(Adv Chris de Jager and Mr Wynand Malan [Afrikaner background], and Dr Alex Boraine, Ms Mary Burton, Mr Richard Lyster and Dr Wendy Orr [English background]). Two of these commissioners (Mgojo and Potgeiter) were appointed directly by Mandela ‘to make the TRC more representative of the general population’ (Graybill 2002: 4). This move made apparent the government’s commitment to the representation of a perception of national unity (over that of total transparency of process). Ideologically, a broad political spectrum was represented.<sup>19</sup> In keeping with the wider socially representative intention of the TRC, seven of the commissioners were selected from a legal background, four were ordained ministers and the others from the medical and NGO fields (Graybill 2002: 4). Archbishop Desmond Tutu chaired the Commission and Alex Boraine, a former president of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, took the post of vice-chair. This clearly carried implications for the symbolism and procedure of the TRC hearings and led to a not ungrounded public perception of their being framed in religious discourse. The pastoral element to proceedings that was personified by Tutu offering breaks, prayers and comfort to distressed witnesses becomes quite a visible substitute for psychiatric care in an arena where religion to a large extent has “depoliticised” politics.

Organisationally, the TRC was subdivided into three committees, each with a different area of responsibility: the Human Rights Violations Committee, the Amnesty Committee and the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee, with a separate Investigation Unit with quasi-legal status that was invested with powers of

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<sup>19</sup> Tutu is at pains to point out (in response to public criticisms of political bias) in his foreword to the Report that the commissioners were ‘nominated in a process open to anyone – whatever their political affiliation or lack of it. We were interviewed in public sessions by a panel on which all the political parties were represented’. Interestingly he goes on to state that ‘I am, myself, even today, not a card-carrying member of any political party. I believe, on the other hand, that some of my colleagues may have been chosen precisely because of their party affiliation *to ensure broad representivity* (Report Vol.1: 9, my emphasis).

subpoena and search and seizure. In order to increase geographical representation and access the TRC maintained regional offices in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban and East London. The Amnesty Committee was based in Cape Town and the other two committees in Johannesburg.

The TRC's therapeutic stance was exhibited in its hope that traumatic events from the past might be appeased within the psyche of an individual subject through the process of intrasubjective reconciliation, in other words operating from the premise that the individual can heal *because* the social group or nation has. However, it is this attempt to translate conciliatory processes onto a national, intersubjective level that tempts the problematisation of psychoanalysis as a mode of political intervention. The proceedings of the TRC were enacted very much as an expression of political compromise, and effectively served to delay or inhibit material demands through a process of national therapy, in essence allowing reconciliation to stand as a public symbol for reparation. The ANC took power in South Africa following the nation's first democratic election on 27 April 1994. In keeping with the global shift towards negotiated settlement, the peace process in South Africa had begun with discussions framed within a discourse of human rights, identified by Richard Wilson as 'the language not of principle, but of pragmatic compromise, seemingly able to incorporate any moral or ideological position' (Wilson 2001: 5). Compromise and negotiated settlement were crucial to the ANC as the success of a new, multiracial society depended on the retention of South Africa's hitherto white-dominated infrastructure and avoiding the very real possibility of civil war.

Because of its determined adherence to the middle ground of political compromise, the TRC is difficult to classify as a cultural or institutional category. It exists at the point where private memory and public discourse meet, comprising a social institution that offers a site where the politics of the past can be relived and reviewed through a personal lens. Further, it operates at the point of intersection between politics and psychoanalysis. Whether or not it can be concluded that the efforts of the TRC can be judged as genuine and relevant therapeutic intervention or simply function as a kind of social placebo, this positioning certainly enables personal stories of trauma and loss to be placed in the wider political context of the national body, and to an extent to be subsumed to the needs of the *socius*. As Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari say, drawing attention to the narcissistic process inherent in this, ‘the individual fantasy is itself plugged into the existing social field, but apprehends in it the form of imaginary qualities that confer on it a kind of transcendence or immortality...: what does it matter if I die, says the general, since the Army is immortal?’ (2004: 70). Yet, while there may be a perceived loss of individual direction as the human stories are overtaken by social identification, national political history is at the same time personalised through individual narrative, and marked with subjective meanings as sectors of the population are given voice for the first time within a public national arena. A degree of individual suffering is therefore encouraged in order to minimise suffering to the social whole, with the TRC taking on a kind of “inoculation effect” in a process where, in Roland Barthes’ words, ‘one immunises the contents of the collective imagination by means of a small inoculation of acknowledged evil; one thus protects it against the risk of a generalised subversion’ (Barthes 1972: 150).

Socially, the TRC was wedged between existing state institutions, and balanced historically and ideologically between the apartheid and post-apartheid ages (Wilson 2000: 19). Whilst nominally independent, like most previous truth commissions in other countries, it was sponsored by the government and had an explicitly constitutionalist agenda.<sup>20</sup> Institutionally it occupied an interstructural position for, although the TRC's mandate, composition and hearings adopted a framework of religious symbolism and rhetoric, it could not be classified as a religious institution. And, while it differed from preceding truth commissions in that it possessed some legal powers, such as subpoena, and utilised some of the conventions of a court of law, it was not a legal institution and was not invested with judicial powers.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the hearings before the Amnesty Committee effectively inverted the processes of traditional institutionalised justice in that full disclosure of involvement in a criminal activity could lead to amnesty rather than the more usual route of prosecution. Healing is not arrived at through vengeance, rather from the classical biblical paradigm "turn the other cheek" which is used in this instance to break the cycle of violence in the name of political expediency. It is in this sense that the religious rhetoric of forgiveness assumes political connotation as it enters the global space of legal human rights discourse. While what might be considered here as a kind of multiple liminality allowed the TRC to mix the genres of law, politics and religion to sometimes powerful effect, Wilson suggests that this multiplicity also had a

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<sup>20</sup> National truth commissions are usually government-sponsored, or if sponsored internationally, financial responsibility tends to be taken by the United Nations or nongovernmental organisations. The previous ANC-sponsored truth commissions, the Motsuenyane, Skeyeywa and Stuart Commissions, stand as examples of the latter arrangement (Hayner 1994: 603-4).

<sup>21</sup> The TRC was able to subpoena witnesses to appear before its hearings and in this sense differed from, for example, the Chilean Truth Commission, following which José Zalaquatt noted that 'subpoena powers would have been an effective tool [in forcing witnesses and possible perpetrators to testify]' (Zalaquatt, cited in Shea 2000: 16).

limiting function that was further exacerbated by the temporary nature of the Commission.

### **1.5 Religious Symbolism and Ritual within the TRC**

Christianity has long been put to use in South African nation building projects.

Religious discourse, in the form of Afrikaner Christian-Nationalism, was used to justify the country's first segregationist legislation as well as the subsequent apartheid state. Tutu, as the symbolic figurehead of the TRC, Christianised the approach and language of an institution that was originally designed to deal with politically motivated crimes, and as a consequence the vocabulary of forgiveness and repentance has entered the lexicon of an otherwise explicitly political discourse. The religious framework of the TRC, perhaps presupposed in the appointments of Tutu and Boraine in senior roles, has met with the disapproval of secular critics within the country, yet remains evident in the structure of the hearings themselves and in Tutu's particular philosophy of reconciliation (Graybill 2002: 27).

The hearings were conceived with an obvious sense of the symbolic dimension of their role in contributing to national healing. The first hearing was held in the city hall of Mdantsane, a township near East London in the Eastern Cape Province, on 15 April 1996. East London was selected as the venue for this first hearing, 'because of the very special place this area occupies in South African history' (Tutu 1999: 87). The territory of the Eastern Cape had been contested by the British, Boers and indigenous San peoples, and went on to become one of the main geographical sites of anticolonial resistance. In the same way that the historical period covered by the TRC's mandate, the period between the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960 and Mandela's inauguration as

President in 1994, carried symbolic resonance as the ‘last great chapter in the struggle for African decolonisation’ (Report Vol.1: 25), so the topographical space that had been ‘the birthplace of white learning’ became the site of a staged, ritualised exorcism of white hegemony (Tutu 1999: 87). Within the spectacle of the TRC, this white political domination was replaced by that of the rainbow nation, represented visually at least in the racial composition of the commissioners, and upheld through the ritual performance of the hearings.

As in all subsequent hearings, the opening session in East London was conducted with religious symbolism and ritual. Tutu, robed in purple, presided over the hearing from the front, facing the crowd assembled as members of a church congregation. A candle was lit ‘in memory of all those who had died as a result of the conflict of the past’; a commissioner read out a litany of the names of the dead; a hymn was sung, and Tutu prayed for divine ‘wisdom and guidance’ to ‘bless this Truth and Reconciliation Commission’ (Tutu 1999: 86) before welcoming the attendant witnesses and general public.<sup>22</sup> Using high religious rhetoric, Tutu spoke of the shared suffering of ‘all of us in South Africa’ as ‘wounded people’ to create a shared subjectivity to the proceedings about to take place, and reiterated the TRC’s goal of ‘national unity and reconciliation’ through ‘the healing of a traumatised and wounded people’ (Tutu 1999: 87).

Ironically perhaps, aspects of this ritual such as the liturgical reading, candles and prayers, are reminiscent of a funeral or memorial service, and have a clear function in

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<sup>22</sup> Tutu’s use of prayer in the TRC hearings was challenged by non-religious Commissioners, but with little effect. Fazel Randera, head of the TRC’s Johannesburg office, objected specifically to the use of prayers at the start of hearings. Tutu agreed to substitute a minute’s silence, but at the beginning of the first subsequent hearing stated, “...this won’t work! We really cannot start like this. People, close your eyes so that we can pray!” (Tutu, cited in Graybill: 1992: 28).

the construction of a collective subjectivity. Belinda Bozzoli's study of the ritualised structure of the TRC hearings that took place in Alexandra Township, Johannesburg, sheds useful light on the nature of ritual within public hearings such as these. Bozzoli draws on Durkheim to assert that ritual creates a space where 'the worshipper is brought face to face not just with himself but with his society' (1998: 169). She identifies a parallel between the ritual function of TRC hearings, that are enacted before an assembled crowd in a prepared space, and what Durkheim terms the 'piacular rite', normally enacted to mark "negative" occasions such as death, drought or plague (1998: 169). In the same way that TRC hearings brought individual experiences of trauma and grief to the collective stage before an agenda of national historicism and reconciliation, the piacular rite 'allows for the replacement of individual representations by collective beliefs' (1998: 169). To this end, Durkheim regarded the rite as 'a deeply social institution' (cited in Bozzoli 1998: 169) that was capable of creating and recreating beliefs and sentiments, such as that of the new South Africa's vision of reconciliation.

This framework, especially when evaluated within the context of Foucault's analysis of the relationship of the spectacle to hegemonic power, may help to explain statements such as that by Jeanette Fourie, whose daughter Lyndi was murdered in an attack on a pub in 1993.<sup>23</sup> Fourie testified at the killers' amnesty hearing and was able to offer forgiveness. At the end of the hearing she met privately with the three men who had confessed to carrying out the attack, and hugged each of them, later stating that this gesture "indicated the depth of community we had entered into in this short while" (Fourie, cited in Graybill 2002: 45). Here Fourie alludes to the specific

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<sup>23</sup> Several people, including Lyndi Fourie and Quentin Cornelius, were killed during an attack on the Heidelberg Tavern in Cape Town on 30 December 1993. Vuyisile Madasi, Zola Mabala and Luyando Gqomfa confessed to the attack and requested amnesty from the TRC.

nature of the space of the amnesty hearing and the depth of communality afforded by the ritual experience of the hearing. In her statement she expressed regret over her inability to speak to the men in Xhosa (Graybill 2002: 44), which may have functioned as a further gesture or signifier of reconciliation.

How might the space of a ritual be able to effect the expression of emotions that an individual, like Jeanette Fourie, might otherwise be unable to enact? The liminal space of the TRC provides a staged and “safe” setting where victims and survivors can remember and tell the stories of their past out of a chronological narrative sequence. Similarly, the piacular ritual is identified by Durkheim as allowing the individual participant to ‘bridge the gap between himself and the “object” of his cult, by encouraging recall and the construction of myths’ (Bozzoli 1998: 169). To take this further, Hamber and Wilson critique ritual as a state-sanctioned means of constructing memory as a ‘unified, static and collective object, not as a political practice, or as a struggle over the representation of the past that will continue to be vigorously contested after the [TRC’s] existence’ (1999: 1). Survivors and perpetrators tell their stories of the past in a ritualised setting that stands outside of narrative time, their goal being the restoration of these events to their place on a linear national narrative. In this sense the heavily Christianised theatre of the confessional perhaps assumes carnivalesque qualities. In his study of the carnival Bakhtin cites the sacred season of ritual as a time that does not adhere to accepted conventions or chronology: rather it functions as a separate zone where dominant conventions and hierarchies, such as those pertaining to traditional versions of retributive justice, are suspended in ‘temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and the established order’ (Bakhtin 1984: 10). The space created through the quasi-religious ritual of the

TRC is removed from the chronology of the national history and is left open for national resolution and reconciliation: it may, however, not attend to individual needs as the priority is the construction of the national imaginary on the assumption that this will also heal the individuals who participate in it.

## **1.6 The Nature of Trauma**

A traumatic event and its aftermath are quite specific in nature. The original meaning of trauma as a blow to the tissues of the body is not without its psychological implications in terms of the suffering that can be inflicted by psychic violence. While the Chambers Dictionary defines trauma as ‘a wound; an injury; an emotional shock that may be the origin of a neurosis; the state or condition caused by a physical or emotional shock’ (1997: 1844), this elides the relationship of the trauma to the ongoing psychic disorder caused by the original mental and/or physical injury.

The term “traumatic memory” was coined by Pierre Janet, and refers to memories of painful events that have been sealed off within the psyche, their recall being too disturbing for the conscious subject. Trauma theories, that arose from nineteenth century European neurology and were popularised in Freud’s work, hold that these memories, exiled to a realm beyond the normal waking consciousness of the subject, can spontaneously reappear as hallucinations, nightmares and flashbacks. These symptoms are now commonly accepted as responses to trauma. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) formally acknowledged post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in 1980, and in so doing constructed a new diagnostic category that challenged previous conceptions of pathology (Caruth 1995: 3). In much the same manner as a traumatic memory, or flashback, the new diagnostic category announced

by the APA can be interpreted as interrupting the ongoing narrative of trauma theory demonstrating that the historical narrative itself can display characteristics of disruption.

The discipline of trauma studies dates from the 1860s, when trauma was first identified in the victims of rail accidents who later died of fright. Freud, Breuer and Janet were among those who developed what had primarily been a physiological perception of trauma to include a new emphasis on the shattering of the personality that was epitomised by studies of the hysterical female. Trauma studies gained new popularity in the US after the Vietnam War when catharsis, which had been rejected as a treatment methodology after the First World War, was reinstated. Signs of shell shock that had been previously associated with female hysteria were newly read as bodily signs of repressed emotion. These, however, were signs of individual trauma, which do not translate directly onto the traumatised national or collective body, which displays more complex signs of repression and needs to be analysed within a different framework.

Unlike other forms of disease, trauma defies traditional definitions of pathology in that it does not have a solid, corporeal form, and thus lies outside the usual, quantifiable range of experience. Additionally trauma is subject to distortion by desires, wishes and repressions that relate to the social realms. And, unlike other pathologies, trauma cannot be defined by the original causative event itself (this may be small, not easily identifiable as the source of the neurosis and may not affect everyone equally). Neither can it be defined in terms of a distortion of the original event, but more simply exists in the reception of the event, which may be belated. The

delay means that the event is accessed through language, such as that which exists within the structures of the confessional, which loads it with the values and distortions of the surrounding culture. The goal of therapeutic intervention in PTSD, as per the goal of the TRC in terms of healing what it perceived as the damaged national psyche, is to assimilate annexed material into the psyche and to free the victim from what might be considered the unwelcome hold of the past. The clinical and the social, then, are linked in a manner not presupposed by earlier notions of pathology. The TRC, as a national response to collective trauma, aims to incorporate marginalised and unspoken material from the past into the present, and in so doing applies psychoanalytic principles to the social realm.

Individual trauma, such as that suffered by many South African citizens under apartheid and experienced as a huge psychic blow with ongoing effects, is an experience that can differentiate between one person and another (in the sense that a traumatised subject is rendered different from someone who has not experienced that trauma). However, trauma does not only affect the constitution of individuals. It can function as a possible source of communality in the same way as more widely recognised cohesive factors of shared language, mutual historical experience or social vision. The mutual experience of a collective solution to communal trauma can also have a cohesive function within a nation or other social group. Inter- and intra-subjective reconciliation, as possible solutions to communal and individual traumas respectively, can serve to define and bind communities through their shared subjectivity to past events, such as those experienced under apartheid. A traumatic event can serve as a binding experience in that a collective solution, such as a national memorial day like ANZAC Day in Australia, might be sought to an event that has or

could damage the community as a collective entity, like a flood or territorial invasion. There are dangers inherent in assuming that this would always be the case. Under apartheid, non-white communities in South Africa share a response to the past in the sense that they suffered more systematically under apartheid than whites. However, the range of subjectivities apartheid produced through other variable factors such as ethnicity, gender and sexuality means that historical experience cannot be fully generalised. The common subjectivity to the trauma of apartheid requires the prioritisation of a shared response to this although, of course, each individual will experience the truth of an event in a different way.

The TRC aimed to heal the individual and collective traumatic residue of apartheid through the production of truth and reconciliation within a confessional relation. The trauma of apartheid was borne individually, in terms of the death and disappearance of loved ones and restrictions on individual liberties as enforced by the myriad of racial legislation, and also collectively in the sense of the damage that was inflicted on communities. In that South Africa's non-white communities suffered the most tangible trauma from the blow that apartheid inflicted on national social and economic structures, these groups can be regarded as the primary object of collective trauma. However, as apartheid damaged the fundamental structures of the nation as a whole, its trauma can be seen to affect all South Africans, even though whites clearly benefited from many of its manifestations. Tutu's emphasis on *ubuntu*, the theory of the interconnectedness of all human subjects which stresses that if one part of the human network is damaged then so are others, supports the notion that South Africa's white communities, as reciprocal participants in the same historical event, also suffered and sustained structural damage. In other words, the dominant community

are damaged by their position as dominators.<sup>24</sup> So the trauma of South Africa's past can be seen as doubly residing in the original blow struck by apartheid to the physical and psychological tissues of the nation, as well as in the subsequent structural and psychic damage inherent in its survival. Yet, as individual members of different communities within South Africa are severally bound by disparate experiences of the past and its survival, responses in the form of conciliatory or other initiatives will also vary. This would imply that reconciliation within South Africa is confined to the realm of the symbolic, and that more material forms of reconciliation are therefore inhibited.

Caruth's study focuses on the ongoing impact of trauma on the subject in the present, hence providing a useful springboard for analysis of the implications of the continued effect of the trauma of apartheid. Memory and consciousness of the past are a crucial part of the constitution of both individual and national subjectivity. Caruth draws on neurobiological theory to suggest that, when an individual experiences a traumatic event, its perception is "etched" onto the brain in a particular way that bypasses the conventional coding of the event in memory (1995: 153). She argues that it is because of this that traumatic recollection cannot take the form of a simple act of memory, but rather has to manifest through the symptoms of PTSD which are difficult or impossible to manage (these are commonly accepted as flashbacks to a traumatic event, nightmares triggered by particular images or associations as well as disrupted sleep patterns and seemingly irrational fears). Survivors affected by PTSD variously experience and are possessed by past events: Caruth observes that in these situations traumatic memory does not function simply as a record of the past, but registers in its

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<sup>24</sup> See The Human Condition by Hannah Arendt for more detailed explication of this.

various present manifestations the force of the negative experience that, crucially, is not fully possessed by the subject. Trauma thus contains a central paradox: it demands historical awareness in that it requires acknowledgement of past events, but simultaneously denies access to this past via the usual mode of narrative memory (1995: 151). It is precisely this paradox, I will go on to argue in Chapters Three, Four and Five, that is addressed by post-apartheid fiction and autobiography. A new means of accessing the past is required, which fictional texts are able to provide in a way that more factual responses cannot.

Trauma theory holds that control of past events will be regained when an individual subject is able to access their troubled history and restore the events of the past to the sequence of narrative memory that was interrupted by the traumatic event. Yet the restoration of trauma to narrative memory has implications for the way that the event is presented in the present. Traumatic memory that manifests as a flashback is likely to be a very precise, almost photographic recollection of the original event both in terms of vividness and retention of detail that would not normally be available to narrative memory. (This is exemplified in several of the testimonies analysed in Chapter Two). Caruth argues that it is partly this precision of recall that denies a place in narrative sequence to the traumatic memory, which is denied a comfortable location in either past or present. The unassimilated memory is situated at the paradoxical point of intersection between precision of recall and denial of access. It can thus be defined in relation to history as 'the trauma that... seems to evoke the difficult truth of a history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence' (Caruth 1995: 153). The integration that is required if the subject is to be healed, in that healing in the context of the TRC can be read as remembering in order

to forget, is therefore likely to be at the cost of the precision and the force of the flashback, and could then go on to have implications for the validity and empirical accuracy of the testimony (Caruth 1995: 153). So a loss is therefore inherent in the healing process.

Narrative memory, conversely, is voluntary and selective and is managed by the subject who can choose to a degree whether to remember or forget an event or parts of an event, and can adapt the content of recall to a particular context of retelling: some detail may be lost, consciously or otherwise, but the event becomes comprehensible within the present and can fit into a defined place in narrative history. Recall is further managed outside the subject, in that it is adapted to the narrative framework presented by the interlocutor, and to subject categories constructed by the narrative and social context of retelling. In South Africa this subjectivity is created in part by the therapeutic stance of the TRC's authority, and by the structure of the hearings themselves. The TRC divided the population very crudely into the categories of victim and perpetrator: these labels, part of the narrative framework imposed by the TRC as a national site of remembering, may well impact on the content and structure of individual memory. However, it is worth considering, in the context of the TRC, what the purpose of memory actually is. If the objective is to lay the trauma of the past to rest, then the reason for remembering, paradoxically, is to forget.

### **1.7 The Role of History in the Construction of Nationalism**

Remembering and forgetting are part of the formation of the modern national consciousness, and the way in which events from the past are processed becomes implicit in the construction of national identity. The Report refers to changing

national identity as a 'journey from the past marked by conflict, injustice, oppression, and exploitation to a new and democratic dispensation' (Report Vol. 1: 5). This supports Benedict Anderson's assertion that nations are continuous entities that are embedded in secular, serial time, their identities encompassing all the implications of this continuity to draw on past tradition, present experience and future aspirations (1991: 205). Using this model, memory and past events can be seen as especially important in the construction of national identity in transitional South Africa, which Tutu claims could not have occurred 'without coming face to face with our recent history' (Report Vol. 1: 5). To support the concept that the past is incorporated into contemporary perceptions of the nation, Anderson cites examples from America and France regarding the state manipulation of public memory in relation to past events such as civil wars and revolutions, where a whole pedagogical industry has formed specifically to effect 'a deep reshaping of the popular imagination' (Anderson 1991: 201).

Anderson's reference to this kind of initiative as a 'systematic historiographical campaign' is usefully applied to South Africa and clarifies the extent to which the processes of the TRC were mediated through the state's media and television facilities (1991: 201). The stated intention of involving the tools of mass media in this way was so that 'even the illiterate did not miss out... The media helped to ensure that the Commission's process was as inclusive and non-elitist as possible' (Report Vol. 1: 20). Memory and acknowledgement of the truth of the past and participation in the new national history were therefore equated, in the terms of the 'New' South Africa, to national belonging.

Anderson's study of nationalism identifies the use of media technology as a strategy in the construction of national identity. He argues that in countries with a diversity of national languages, it is 'print-language [that] invents nationalism, not *a* particular language per se', drawing attention to the fact that it is a common language as subject to capitalism that contributes to the construction of a dominant national identity (Anderson 1991: 134, original italics). The widely mediated TRC hearings can therefore be seen as having an explicitly nationalist and political purpose (as opposed to one that is simply moral or reconciliatory) that is especially expedient in a culturally diverse and multilingual nation like South Africa. For, to quote Anderson, 'multilingual broadcasting can conjure up the imagined community to illiterates and populations with different mother-tongues' (1991: 135). Furthermore, Anderson observes that 'the idea of "nation" is now nestled firmly in virtually all print-languages; and nation-ness is virtually inseparable from political consciousness' (1991: 135). However, not everyone in South Africa had access to print languages or other media by which the TRC proceedings were disseminated: indeed, many of those who testified to the Commission were illiterate, meaning that their initial submissions had to be given orally and transcribed in writing by an amanuensis, taking a good deal of control away from the individual. Tutu, in his foreword to the Report, states his gratitude 'for the work of the SABC radio, which communicated in all our official languages to ensure that even the illiterate did not miss out' (Vol.1: 20).<sup>25</sup> While the illiterate did not "miss out", their participation was, however, restricted to specific media.

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<sup>25</sup> The SABC is the South African Broadcasting Corporation, which took responsibility for radio and television coverage of the TRC.

The simultaneous broadcasting of TRC hearings on national television and SABC radio in all of South Africa's national languages,<sup>26</sup> as well as the synchronised translation of testimony in the hearings themselves all contribute towards a sense of concurrence that in turn creates community.<sup>27</sup> Theoretically, people who have never met before can listen to the same piece of testimony being broadcast at the same time, and because of this technical intervention the hearings become 'occasions for unisonality, for echoed physical realisation of the imagined community' (Anderson 1991: 145) as a wider community is bound by the experience of witnessing. Prior to this intervention, the remembered experience of apartheid's traumas had existed on the margins of the old national identity, permitted to reside only within individuals and communities isolated by state policies.

Similarly, the traumatic recall of events experienced by the individual subject during the apartheid era was annexed to the peripheral regions of the unconscious, unable to return to a centralised narrative without the intervention of psychoanalysis, or therapeutic witnessing. Thus, through the wider political intervention of the state, through the TRC which aimed to construct a new national identity based on a significant rupture from past practices, and the stated intention of the hearings as means of healing individuals damaged by the past, the parallels between therapeutic intervention on a political and subjective scale become clear. The TRC's objective to revise national memory, through creating a new national identity that is based on a history no longer relegated to the margins of the national archive, works in

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<sup>26</sup> Eleven national languages are officially recognised in the Interim Constitution, which goes on to state that 'wherever practicable, a person shall have the right to use and to be addressed... in any official South African language of his or her choice' and that government legislation is committed to 'the promotion of multi-lingualism and the provision of translation facilities' (Interim Constitution 1: 3).

<sup>27</sup> Implications of this policy will be discussed in Chapter Two.

conjunction with the process by which past experiences are rendered coherent events within the consciousness of the subject. In theory, citizens become the authors of history, and the publicised and idealised conditions of the present are reworked as the antithesis of the past: in practice, citizens become the vehicle for the expression of certain aspects of a past that is scripted by the interlocutor and subjectivity is therefore removed from the individual by the TRC. In South Africa post-apartheid fiction and autobiography, as aesthetic responses to the past, aimed to “open up” the past that the TRC was attempting to lay to rest and restore this by other means, the processes of which will be discussed in detail in Chapters Three and Four.

The trauma of apartheid has engendered such a profound rupture with the past that the moral and political basis of the New South Africa can be seen to exist in clear opposition to that of the old nation. The new narrative of national identity triggered by the schism with the past differs significantly, according to Anderson, from the narrative of a subject, for nations rarely have identifiable births, and never undergo natural deaths (1991: 205). South Africa, however, does not fit this model: while the death of the apartheid state was politically and economically engineered, the beginning of the New South Africa is identifiable in the enactment of the Interim Constitution and the inauguration of Mandela as president. While this may not actually be described as a birth, the rhetorical schism with the past that signals a new beginning makes it clear that the TRC was attempting to accord the new nation a symbolic beginning, a version of a birth. The declaration of the new South African nation, first proclaimed in the Interim Constitution, marks not only an ideological watershed, but also supports Anderson’s suggestion that the structures of a nascent

nation also mark 'rhetorically a profound rupture with the existing world' (Anderson 1991: 193).

Ernest Renan, in his seminal lecture 'What is a nation?' delivered at the Sorbonne in 1882, asserts that the past is crucial to the formation of the modern nation. However, in opposition to the revelatory rhetoric of the TRC (although possibly in line with its practical or unstated purpose), Renan claims that 'forgetting... is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality' (Renan 1990: 11). He justifies this claim by stating that all nations are founded on a degree of brutality and that over-scrutiny of this aspect of the past can be fragmenting and in contradiction of the national aim.

While historical inquiry is a formative and well-publicised part of the TRC's ideology, it is obvious that the degree of inquiry is limited partly by the representative sample of cases examined in detail, and partly by the strict time limitation of the TRC itself. The decision to limit the temporal nature of the TRC's inquiry was taken specifically as a result of the realisation that extended historical awareness and inquiry into past events can distract the focus from the present and the future, and damage the fragile political unity of the present. The TRC is an institution dedicated to remembering, but not, as is implied rhetorically, to remembering everything. The question then arises regarding what can justly be forgotten, and who has the authority to determine what is forgotten and what is remembered. And what, in point, would be the effect if everything from the past were remembered? Justice does not serve reconciliation: rather it goes hand in hand with vengeance, the antithesis of the TRC. Probably the "best" that the TRC can hope for is the middle ground of ongoing

peaceful co-existence, in other words the reintegration of the perpetrators into the community that is the practical rendition of Tutu's *ubuntu* philosophy.

Can what is not remembered, which as clearly relates to power relations within the confessional space as much as what is articulated, have a unifying function in any way, as is the case in many communities where trauma has been experienced, or will the unremembered or unsaid remain divisive? As Renan states, 'the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things' (Renan 1990: 11). The basis of this forgetting may be conscious, or it may be that the traumatic nature of the event means that it has never been remembered, yet it can form the basis of communality and national identity in the same way as the clear narrative memory of events from the past. Therefore, a nation that proclaims its origins as being based on remembering the past can clearly be seen as doing so only selectively. The revision of the nation's past is based on the truth, but not necessarily the whole truth or a truth that is universally accessible, and consequently not all of the national margins will be centralised, and not all of the narratives of the past will be rewritten. But, a central and ostensibly cohesive narrative will have been produced that represents the nation in a wider community.

### **1.8 Freud and Individual Trauma**

In the scenario of public testimony, the telling of an event from memory is problematic. Memory is unreliable, and can lose some of the precision and vividness that typically characterises the original traumatic recall. The "remembering" of imaginary constructions as real events is common, as is the manipulation of visual images to fit with contemporary knowledge and beliefs. Social institutions, rituals and

practices like museums, truth commissions, memorial days and monuments serve this end, supplying and constructing collective memory (and thus also ensuring collective amnesia with regard to the history that is not memorialised). These artifices can be beneficial in the way that they can reinforce or ground personal experience and memory in that of the community, and in South Africa have become a valuable means of individuals locating their experiences of trauma and violence within a broader national experience. But they can also serve to distort recollections of individual experience, as hazy personal memories are adapted to fit the framework offered by the national response to the past.

Like other forms of memory, traumatic memory is encoded and shaped by the emotions present at the time of the original event. This can influence or taint memories, and can isolate traumatic memories from others stored by the subject. Traumatic memory can also be affected by emotions present at the time of recall, and more importantly by the form of the larger narrative that the individual trauma is located within. The matrix of reconciliation as a national narrative of reconstruction framed all of the individual experiences recalled and mediated within the TRC hearings, thus lending an explicitly political agenda to subjective recall. Because of the destabilising nature of trauma, traumatic memories are likely to be more malleable and prone to distortion than other forms of memory, with the context of recall playing an important part in this.

While Freud's theory of individual trauma is helpful as a means of understanding the process undertaken within an individual psyche in response to a traumatic event, it is insufficient as a framework within which to consider the healing mandate of the TRC,

which relates to the nation and its subjects. Is there a link between theories of individual and collective trauma? Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud's theory of individual trauma, was written during a traumatic period of history, the aftermath of the First World War. At the beginning of the essay, Freud considers the intrusion of historical events, in the form of war neuroses, on the individual psyche. While the subject experiences the symptoms of past trauma as a neurotic pathology, or illness, they are in fact the unmediated events of the past. Their intrusion shapes the life of the traumatised individual, with the flashbacks, or neuroses, providing clues to understanding individual histories. A traumatic neurosis does not result from any event, or even any negative event, only from those that have constituted a risk to life in some way. It is from this that Caruth is able to conclude that the traumatic event exceeds the simple capacity of a reaction to a negative event, but exists as the ongoing experience of having survived it (Caruth 1995: 60). So as consciousness exists to place events within narrative chronology, traumatic events that exceed consciousness are those that cannot be ordered within a linear sequence of events.

Freudian psychoanalysis posits that the goal of mental or psychic activity is to experience pleasure and avoid the encounter with unpleasure, and Freud calls this guiding principle 'the pleasure principle'.<sup>28</sup> His theory holds that the pleasure principle is in turn moderated by the reality principle, which takes account of external conditions and regulates the psyche's leaning towards pleasurable activity in accordance with these. In other words, the reality principle can delay the search for immediate pleasure, in order that greater pleasure might be gained later on.

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<sup>28</sup> Freud illustrates this through the example of a small boy, who continually repeats through play the distressing experience of his mother leaving the house. Through repetition of the traumatic event, Freud argues, the child is re-enacting the departure of the mother (unpleasure) in order to re-experience the joy of her return (pleasure). By bringing past trauma into the present, the child is able to place it into a chronological framework and begin to take an active role in its psychic integration.

In terms of post-apartheid South Africa, the pleasure principle of both the individual and collective subject might seek participation in a rebalanced or reconciled society that is uninterrupted by its traumatic past. At the level of the subject this pleasure might be most readily and immediately achieved through satisfying the desire for revenge: yet undergoing the ordeal, or unpleasure, of reliving past trauma through testimony can ultimately lead to greater satisfaction in terms of the promise of equal participation in a structurally reconciled society. The reality principle in action here takes account of external factors, such as the (as yet undelivered) assurance of reparations and other societal improvements as laid out in state rhetoric, and thus regulates the subject. In the South African context, then, the pleasure principle can be read as an individually motivated drive whereas the reality principle, which hopefully takes effect in later stages, has a greater degree of social conscience and takes into account the political and economic implications of life in post-apartheid South Africa. The “deferred gratification” promised as the greater pleasure is that afforded by social, or intersubjective, reconciliation, and integration into the new nation. The individual, then, seeks the material reconciliation of reparations, whereas the collective entity desires a more symbolic form of reconciliation, which is the “immediate gratification” provided by the TRC. The promise of material reparations is the “delayed gratification” for which the ground is prepared by more symbolic processes which encourage support for the processes. The repetition of the trauma of apartheid through public testimony can be seen then as a source of unpleasure with a clearly advertised potential outcome that offers more pleasure than the experience of telling.

Because traumatic history is not subject to the same conventions as narrative history, the experience that returns to haunt the traumatised subject exceeds the scope of individual history. Freud illustrates, via the example of the small boy, his understanding of the history of trauma as the history of survival in Beyond the Pleasure Principle. The theory of individual trauma holds that survival contains the core of a larger history, for the subject is newly able to reference history within a broader, collective past. In South Africa, when stories of trauma are told, survivors are able to put them into the wider story of the past of apartheid, and use them in the construction of a new national narrative that looks to the future whilst remaining grounded in, although separated from, the past. It is not possible, then, to see trauma within the context of the TRC as an exclusively individual entity, for when it starts to be processed, or referenced, it automatically makes reference to a wider social and moral framework.

### **1.9 Collective, or National, Trauma**

Not all traumatic experiences are recalled or repeated. Some are unrepeatable, and others are not afforded an arena for recollection. Material that is not remembered or retold, which might be thought of as psychic residue, is held in Freud's theory of traumatic memory to be at the root of present distress. The psyche can seal off traumatic memories to the edges of the consciousness in order to protect the subject from their force, yet these memories can manifest themselves as outbursts of hysteria or nightmare. The goal of therapeutic intervention is to process these events and assimilate them within the conscious realm of the psyche, thus liberating the subject from the hold of the past. At the level of the subject this process is relatively contained: however, if the notion that unassimilated traumatic memories, such as

those relating to the past of apartheid, remain stored in an inaccessible part of their subject's psyche, then the widening of this process onto a wider, social scale, holds serious implication for the nation.

Given the proliferation of analogies between nation and body, it is tempting to continue the association and endow the nation with a psyche like that possessed by the individual. Yet, if the unconscious of the community is bound, as previously discussed, by shared trauma, then this space of the collective unconscious must be regarded as a cultural construct. If this is the case, this unconscious, as part of the collective subject, becomes subject to the therapeutic intervention of the mass-mediated rhetoric of the prevalent culture. In the New South Africa, "Revealing is healing", and the dominant rhetoric of the nation divides subjects into the categories of victim and perpetrator. In this sense, Caruth's warning of the possibility of projection into the collective unconscious needs to be considered (1995: 154): in the face of dominant cultural rhetoric and mass-mediated proceedings that draw the whole population into a dependent role, a situation could be created where perpetrators "confess" to crimes they did not commit in order to gain amnesty. Victims can experience a whole range of post-traumatic psychological effects they have unconsciously suffered as members of a community whose collective unconscious is defined by trauma, without having necessarily experienced them in their individual histories.

If Beyond the Pleasure Principle is read as the story of individual survival, then Moses and Monotheism can be read as the story of the survival of the Jewish people, and may provide a better, although still imperfect, framework for analysis of the

representation of trauma in South Africa. Freud's 1937 essay tackles the subject of national or collective memory, and what it means for this memory to be based on trauma. As with the authors of testimonies that have contributed to the revised version of South African history, it can be hard to separate Freud's personal historical trauma and the context of the text's production from the traumatic nature of its content and the politics of its reception. Discussion of these will be saved for Chapters Three, Four and Five, where the impact of trauma on textual form and content will be analysed.

We mediate our histories through language rather than having direct access to them: the questions we ask of the past are informed by our present subjectivity and consequently our relationship with the past is dialectical. When a relationship, or encounter, with the past is shaped by trauma, and the subject's response to the event is marked by delayed or intrusive phenomena, the relationship with the past becomes especially strained. Because of the indirect nature of our relationship with the past, and the fact that it has always to be filtered through present subjectivity, Caruth questions our ability to make value or ethical judgements based on that past (1995: 10). However, when a subject's past is characterised by trauma, that referential distance between past and present is eroded (Caruth 1995: 11). Because the response to the event does not occur in the immediate historical vicinity of the event, rather revisiting the subject at a random point in the future, history is permitted to occur, where understanding is not (Caruth 1995: 11). Moses and Monotheism is presented as a version of Freud's Jewish history, perhaps to preserve some of the separating distance, and it is here that useful parallels can be drawn with the political rupture that separates the apartheid state from contemporary South Africa. It is difficult, if not

impossible, for a traumatised subject to write the history of a trauma which is still being inhabited: for this reason, perhaps, Freud needed to go further into the past of the Jewish nation, in order to articulate a version of present trauma.

Freud deals in the text with the contemporary historical events of racial persecution and exile: but, because they are presented as in the distant past, the reader is able to formulate an ethical and political reaction to the events. Tutu's words echo this as he proclaims the past to be another country (Report Vol.1: 4), and defining the history that has been rewritten by testimony as something separate, as a means of 'weav[ing] into this truth about our past some essential lessons for the future of the people of this country' (Report Vol.1: 4).

What is the impact of Freud's presentation of Jewish national trauma? Firstly, Jewish history is available to the reader through trauma, rather than as the history of liberation. Secondly, because Freud has displaced one version of history to another, he is denying historical reference. Caruth claims that it in fact constitutes a 'double denial' of historical reference, firstly in that Freud (like several post-apartheid novelists) has replaced factual with a seemingly fictional history (Caruth 1996: 11) and secondly in that his assertion that Jewish history must always be filtered through the lens of trauma means that the events are not directly available. Narratives presented to the TRC were mediated through collective pain and suffering, and through the ritual of the confessional, were remembered in a communal way that removed some of the impact from the recall of individual experience.

The impact of traumatic history, that the TRC tried to reduce in its bid to restore narrative chronology to the past, lies not in what is accessible to the subject, but in what cannot be grasped by consciousness. The impact of a rail accident on its apparently uninjured survivor as discussed by Freud, lies not in what is remembered by the subject, but in what is unassimilated and returns to haunt later. The period of latency, or unconscious space of the event, is what constitutes its traumatic nature. This latency is also evident in the history of the Jews, who experience the murder of Moses only when they have moved to a different place, and after a gap of two years. So, the impact of history is that which cannot be grasped, that which exists in the gaps between conscious experiences. This is exemplified in Freud's text itself, in the gaps between writing and publication. The history of Freud's trauma, and indeed contemporary Jewish trauma, lies in the gaps created by exile and relocation that exist between the different sections of the text.

While Freud's examples generally relate to individuals such as the boy and the rail crash victim, catastrophic events that have affected an entire community are especially incomprehensible. As will be discussed further in Chapter Two, the trauma of an event like apartheid or genocide often exceeds the signifying capacity of language: the essence of trauma is that which defies language. Words simply do not exist, in many cases, to describe the experiences of survivors, and it is in this sense that Caruth points to the way in which the alienated event on the fringes of the psyche is isolated still further by the limitations of language that 'undermine the possibility of coherent narrative' (Caruth 1995: 174). When the gaps in linguistic signifiers are filled by the state, which creates the linguistic, and social, categories of victim and perpetrator, the agency of the subject within the collectivity of the nation is further

questioned. The images and slogans of rhetoric have to a degree filled the narrative gaps that language cannot, further aligning the unconscious of the subject with that of the nation. The TRC provides the framework for survivors' stories to be narrated as whole stories rather than fragmented narratives on the outer limits of consciousness, the edge of language, and the margins of official history. It offers the rhetoric of inclusion, and the opportunity to give and receive mass-mediated testimony enables these stories to be integrated into the new national consciousness of memory and reconciliation.

However, when a story told as testimony to a traumatic past is recalled as to the TRC, there is the possibility of what Caruth terms 'conflation between what is regarded as "memory" and what remains in the psyche as the residual experience from the event itself' (1995: 7). The narrative of the survivor, as the story of a trauma, is illustrative of the way that the subject lives through the event twice, once through experience and once through its retelling. Trauma narratives, such as those presented to the TRC, constitute what Caruth calls a 'paradox of double telling' (1995: 7): the paradox lies in the way that these narratives question whether the trauma resides in the original event, or 'the ongoing experience of having survived it' (Caruth 1995: 7). For a survivor of a huge event like apartheid, the story of survival cannot be separated from the story of the near death of the subject.

There are no opportunities to polish or edit the stories told to a testimonial committee, and in this way testimony differs greatly from the written narrative of a traumatic event. While Freud's Moses and Monotheism and the texts that will be discussed in Chapters Three and Four exhibit signs of trauma, the narrative of oral testimony is not adapted to the audience, rather reflecting the 'cascade of experiences' that Laurence

Kirmayer identifies as traumatic memory 1996: 181). The chaos contingent in testimony relating to apartheid atrocities is likely to reflect the chaos and unassimilated disorder of the event itself. Because the history of apartheid is so recent and so “lived”, unlike Jewish history as written about by Freud, there are few opportunities for dissociation or abstraction, and survivors have exhibited a strong desire to tell their stories. However, they have to be selective in what is told and retold (and in many cases the state was selective on individuals’ behalf) in order not to corrode the new moral order. Tutu states that it would have been ‘*counterproductive* to devote years to hearing about events that, by their nature, arouse very strong feelings. *It would have rocked the boat massively* and for too long’ (Report Vol.1: 5, my emphasis). The stories of certain events from the past, such as murders committed by and on behalf of members of the ANC parliament become as “unsayable” as the original event itself once was, in that they might deconstruct the new climate of democracy and reconciliation.<sup>29</sup>

Other moral issues surround the circumstances in which the stories of the past are retold. Within the context of a national act of remembering, survivors may find it easier to tell their stories than perpetrators, as the moral framework of reconstruction is biased towards their cause, and those deemed as committing crimes against humanity can find themselves in a kind of ‘moral quarantine’ (Kirmayer 1996: 189). A huge difference between the moral encoding of the political and historical space in which the trauma was experienced and that of the context of its narration is apparent. The contemporary space of publicly sanctioned reconstruction exists in clear opposition to both the politically marginalized context of the original trauma, and the

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<sup>29</sup> The TRC granted blanket amnesty to 37 ANC leaders, although Tutu goes to great lengths to point out that this was a ‘completely autonomous’ decision on the part of the Amnesty Committee, and that the TRC itself was prevented by law from ‘interfering in any way in the process’ (Report Vol.1: 10).

private space of individual shame and reflection. This public endorsement of the space of retelling combined with the degree of national and international mediation utilised by the TRC has the dual effect of restoring South Africa as a nation from the political and moral isolation imposed by the international community's sanctions against apartheid, and of creating a theoretical consensual reality within the nation that allows for the inscription of newly articulated collective memory on the narratives of the past. The "space" of the TRC, the theoretical space of the people, creates the possibility for democracy in the form of individual voices to disrupt the social order intended by the ANC government when it called the Commission into existence. The subsequent chapters of this thesis will explore some of the narratives of those who lived under apartheid from the perspective that they in some way disrupt and challenge the democratising agenda of the TRC and discourage the trauma of the past from entirely being laid to rest.

## Chapter Two

### **Witnessing National Transition: the Testimonies and Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and their Roles in National Historiography**

*Why did they just kill everyone, absolutely everyone? Not to even leave one to give witness. Now nobody knows... knows the real-real story... That's precisely why I am here.<sup>1</sup>*

*So why do I say that the story is chief among his fellows? The same reason I think that our people sometimes will give the name Nkolika to their daughters – Recalling Is Greatest. Why? Because it is only the story that can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story, not the others, that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us. It is the thing that makes us different from cattle; it is the mark on the fence that sets one people apart from their neighbours.<sup>2</sup>*

#### **2.0 Introduction**

The TRC, as perhaps the most visible and public sign of political transition in South Africa, illustrates the delicate nature of the balancing act between past accountability and future reconciliation (Attridge and Jolly, 1998: 3). In Western societies justice is usually seen as a prerequisite of reconciliation, yet its effective bypassing by TRC procedures has meant that the structure of economic power in South Africa remains largely unaltered and that social change in the country is largely symbolic. The reasons for this are several. The state, rather than intending to fundamentally change the nature of power structures, has striven to preserve the existing apparatus whilst broadening the franchise to include those elements of the population that had hitherto

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<sup>1</sup> This quotation is from the testimony referenced CT/0010, given by Cynthia Ngewu regarding her son Christopher Piet on 23 April 1996, the second day of TRC hearings.

<sup>2</sup> This quotation is from Anthills of the Savannah by Chinua Achebe.

been excluded, thus avoiding mass white flight and loss of accompanying capital investment.

## 2.1 The Texts of Testimony

The TRC as a public ritual marks the extent to which this symbolic social change is facilitated by stories of the past: in this sense it is regarded by many as the means by which the goal of a more egalitarian future state will be achieved. This chapter seeks to analyse the ways in which this vision of the new South Africa, the national imaginary, was constructed in an oppositional relation to the past, through the texts of testimony. I will use the assertion made by Chinua Achebe in Anthills of the Savannah that ‘the story is our escort; without it we are blind’ as a springboard to evaluate the roles played by the different stories offered by individuals to the TRC, as oral testimony and as entries to the Register of Reconciliation, in the construction of a new national identity.<sup>3</sup> In particular, then, this chapter investigates the way the Register is assembled as a means of constructing a national imaginary (see discussion pertaining to Benedict Anderson’s theory in section 1.5). I will then analyse the Report of the TRC, the edited and polished “national story” that was subsequently published as the official version of a national traumatic past.

The oral testimony submitted to the TRC cannot be determined raw discourse as it takes on a form defined by linguistic structures, but it differs from written texts in that it is not edited by the speaker once it has been delivered. When giving testimony individuals speak spontaneously in front of a predominantly local audience, and the resulting transcripts contain visible signs of relatively unprocessed trauma.

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<sup>3</sup> The Register of Reconciliation will hereafter be referred to as the Register.

Contributions to the Register, in that they are submitted online in written form, are different in that they are edited by the individuals who have produced them and contain less structural evidence of psychic trauma. I will argue, however, that their self-conscious modes of representation (like the novels and autobiographies that will be discussed in subsequent chapters of this thesis) offer some resistance to TRC hegemony. However, the Report, which the Commissioners have composed and edited, has the explicit agenda of ironing out signs of trauma and fragmentation from the postapartheid nation. Given this, I will argue that the pragmatism that has informed the TRC (and that has prioritised a quasi-biblical form of reconciliation at the expense of material justice) explains certain aspects of the Report's construction. The Report represents a version of South African reconciliation that is defined in terms of truth and is symbolic rather than material: one of the purposes of the Report is to encourage members of the public and the international community to accept this version of the past in the spirit of *ubuntu*. However, my belief is that if we are able to understand the performative aspect of the text of the Report and "hear" its silences, then our reading can extend beyond its symbolic function to the potentially destabilising voices it attempts to conceal.

Contributions to the Register of Reconciliation are written rather than spoken texts, and are to a degree practised and edited testimonies. They do not contain obvious gaps, and words can be chosen for conscious effect without the influence or participation of an audience. Yet they do still represent the voluntary and in that sense spontaneous contributions of individuals to the revised national narrative: beyond the fact that they can be read together as a continuous text, literary devices are not employed to edit them together, and individual authors are credited with their own

contributions. This is in contrast to the Report of the TRC which stands as an edited and polished text, where individual stories of the past are condensed and represented as contributions to a wider collective story. Its meta-narrative affirms its place in a linear historiography, in much the same way as some fictional texts by postapartheid writers (see discussion relating to Hayden White's theory in Section 3.1).

I will examine the texts from the premise that these stories of individuals' experiences of the trauma of the apartheid regime were intended as the new nation's 'escort' into the previously uncharted waters of democratic government. With this in mind, I will use a selection of transcripts of oral testimony given at TRC hearings,<sup>4</sup> entries submitted to the Register of Reconciliation that was established by the TRC, and the five volumes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report to read the record of the past. I will explore the nature of what is recorded as traumatic memory enters the public domain as oral testimony and is then transformed into a published document that aims, through historiography, to create a collective subjectivity. As I will show, this process forgets, excludes and changes individual narratives of the past as the national discourse is constructed from the diversity of experience and subject positions that constitute, or reconstitute, the nation. I will analyse the role played by the Register as a supplementary historical record that is not subsumed into official historiography and that stands as a representation of "popular" history.

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<sup>4</sup> I have used the transcripts of testimony available on the official website of the TRC ([www.doj.gov.za/trc](http://www.doj.gov.za/trc)), and have made a random selection of transcripts for the purposes of this thesis. As the transcripts run into several thousand pages in total, it was impossible for me to read more than a sample, although I have included testimony from each of the TRC's regional hearings, and have attempted to retain some balance regarding gender and age of witnesses.

## **2.2 Truth and Reconciliation**

“Truth”, in the form of storytelling, is regarded by the TRC as the route to social reconciliation in South Africa. As such, the various texts produced by the TRC have a broadly conciliatory function, although the concept and definition is by no means uncontested within the nation. Several visions, or versions, of reconciliation can be identified in post-apartheid South Africa, and the differences between them are a site of conflict. As the Chair of the TRC, Tutu espouses a brand of theological reconciliation that focuses on harmonising after difference, in accordance with the biblical paradigm for forgiveness. In contrast to the current ANC President Thabo Mbeki’s version of reconciliation that can only take place after substantial social and economic transformation, Tutu fetes individual reconciliation (forgiveness) as the beginning of an idealised and highly symbolic wider transformative process, and cites popular support:

It is quite incredible the capacity people have shown to be magnanimous – refusing to be consumed by bitterness and hatred, willing to meet with those who have violated their persons and their rights, willing to meet in a spirit of reconciliation, eager only to know the truth, to know the perpetrator so that they could forgive them... forgiveness will follow confession and healing will happen, and so contribute to national unity and reconciliation (Tutu 1999: 91).

For Tutu, reconciliation functions as a national-political synonym for forgiveness, and incorporates components of restoration and acceptance. In a biblical context forgiveness functions as part of an exchange: in the confessional scene it is either given freely when asked for, or offered when the guilty party shows repentance. So in prioritising a goal of national reconciliation through individual healing the TRC disseminates religious rhetoric through the explicitly political context of post-conflict social transformation. It is in this context that Wilson cites reconciliation as ‘a quasi-

religious term that became a guiding principle for new rituals of civic nationalism’ (Wilson 2001: 98).

In the biblical paradigm of forgiveness, truth (in the form of confession) brings about reconciliation (either state-sanctioned amnesty from prosecution, or forgiveness at the level of the subject granted by survivors or relatives of victims). The theory is that this in turn effects reconciliation on a national level. A not insignificant level of sacrifice is also involved: the victim, through participating in Tutu and the TRC’s version of reconciliation, cedes the right to retribution (either legal-judicial or self-motivated) to the broader social goal of national reconciliation. In accepting the token reparations offered by the state, the right to claim any more significant compensation is lost.<sup>5</sup> Symbolic justice, then, takes the place of material justice, and the TRC can be seen to stand in the place of more structural change. Tutu lauds what he regards as this additional sacrifice undertaken by victims, seeing it as further evidence of the spirit of reconciliation.

Tutu uses the African concept of “*ubuntu*”, referred to throughout TRC procedures, as a means of theorising and linking individual and social reconciliation. There is no incontrovertible definition for the term, although it is enshrined in post-apartheid legislation. It appears in the postamble to the 1993 Interim Constitution, which states as part of its vision for the new South Africa ‘a need for *ubuntu* but not for

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<sup>5</sup> In his reflection on the TRC, No Future Without Forgiveness, Tutu is open about the token nature of reparations, stating that it was really meant to be symbolic rather than substantial’ (Tutu 1999: 57). He goes on to state the Commission’s dissatisfaction at the lengthy process that victims had to go through in order to get any financial reparation: the consequence of pressure from the Commission was that the government agreed to pay ‘urgent interim relief’ to the 20,000 victims who testified. This was ‘usually no more than R2,000 per victim’ (Tutu 1999: 58). However, he TRC also recommended in the Report that most victims should qualify for final reparation grants of R23,000 payable annually for six years. At the time he writes, the government had only budgeted for a total of one fifth of this, payable over just three years (Tutu 1999: 58).

victimisation' (Interim Constitution, Chapter 16), as well as the preamble to the 1995 Act. Tutu champions *ubuntu* widely, and equates it with a vision of a compassionate and inextricably reciprocal humanity stating his belief that 'a person is a person through other people' (1999: 35). His vision is that a person's humanity exists as a direct result of membership of a wider humanity, or community, and that if individuals are oppressed or treated as if less than human in any way, then any member of that community will suffer some degradation of selfhood.

Tutu's theology allows him to see all South Africans as members of God's community, rather than as members of discrete racial communities, and as a result he is able to identify even the white supremacist perpetrators of apartheid as victims of a system that has caused them to lose their humanity. To support this, he cites the example of Jimmy Kruger, the Minister of Police at the time of the death of Steve Biko. Tutu recalls how, at a party rally, Kruger had joked that Biko's death represented the freedom afforded to blacks within apartheid South Africa in that he had had the freedom to starve himself to death. He then went on to state that Biko's death had 'left him cold', a demonstration of the loss of his own humanity subsequent to the death of another human being (Tutu 1999: 36). In the context of *ubuntu*, then, forgiveness and reconciliation are altruistic acts: they benefit the community at large through maintaining its harmony and integrity, and therefore are of benefit to the individual subject, victim or perpetrator. Forgiveness in the spirit of *ubuntu* would, according to Tutu's model, effect communal reconciliation and resilience. *Ubuntu* rejects vengeance as an acceptable form of justice<sup>6</sup>, and as such can be used as the

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<sup>6</sup> Indeed, *ubuntu* featured in the first Constitutional Court judgement on the death penalty, and was in this sense used to define "proper" justice in opposition to capital punishment: as Wilson claims, it 'implied that justice in the new culture of human rights would not be driven by any desire for retribution' (2001: 10).

justification of the TRC as the “third way”, or the path of restorative justice that provides symbolic reparation and rehabilitation rather than punishment. The model, then, that the TRC is adopting is that individual acts of both memory and reconciliation can contribute to a wider whole, which in this case is the national imaginary, the visionary future of the nation.

### **2.3 Bearing Witness to the Past**

The concept of the national imaginary in South Africa has to manage heterogeneity in the form of these individuals. The TRC, pragmatically and perhaps necessarily, restricted its focus to the resolution of a racially oppressive past. While race was the primary signifier of power in apartheid South Africa, and historically provided a plethora of substantiable criteria by which to define the centre and periphery of the nation, it is not the only site where power has been wielded and contested. The transition to a full franchise in South Africa, marked most visibly/externally by the movement towards a new society that is not organised racially, has created new centres and new margins, relating for example to gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity. As will be discussed later, these have been summarily acknowledged, but not explored in any detail by the TRC, which aimed to create a symbolically cohesive national discourse with unified subjectivity in relation to historical trauma which was defined largely according to race. In both past and present, in theory and practice, this concept of a fully cohesive national discourse is fundamentally contentious given that it relies on mutually accepted hierarchical categorisations of identity. It is only when these cease to exist and all oppressive discourses from the past are heard in the present that the arena of subjective identification can be opened. Until this is the case

unresolved historical trauma will continue to haunt the margins of the national, or collective unconscious.

From this premise, the first section of this chapter will examine testimony given to the TRC, arguing that the pre-discursive, unassimilated experiences of individual trauma are integrated into a perceived national psyche as they enter language, through being told and witnessed in a form that facilitates national identification. I will identify the distinctions between oral and written testimony, which are produced and witnessed in different ways. Going on to consider the published Report of the TRC as a summative, and nationalist, text I will question the method and means of the integration of psychic trauma into the nation. I will identify the role of the TRC as an editorial authority that has attempted to anthologise traumatic memory, considering the impact of additional layers of meaning upon these recently textualised memories that enter the national narrative as part of the process of “writing history”.

In order to attend to these issues it is necessary to identify the main features of witnessing, as the social interaction that validates personal experience and shifts it into the social realm of public discourse. Witnessing operates on several different levels within the TRC. Its first level, or the primary layer of integration, occurs when the survivor bears witness to a traumatic event or past experience by submitting it to language. This can take place either through telling the story of that event in an initial statement taken by TRC staff or, if selected to do so, orally before one of the regional hearings. As it is told and relived, the traumatic event is witnessed by the statement-taker, the audiences at the hearings, and by the South African and international public who hear the stories via radio and television or read them in the press. It is at this

point that the narrative cases to be the sole property of its speaker, and takes on meanings pertaining to its reception. For, once a story has been told and witnessed, the events of the past do not remain traumatic in their pure and inassimilable sense: they have been “corrupted” by language and by the contexts of their recall and telling.

The TRC has taken witnessing out of its most accepted context. In contemporary Western culture, witnessing is most routinely recognised and understood in a legal-judicial surrounding, and is called for in a court of law or other formal situation where, usually, oral verification of the facts of a past event is required (Felman 1992: 6). The testimony of the witness is usually a stage in the quest for justice that, in Western culture, is founded on truth. It is with regard to this function of witnessing that Shoshana Felman defines the everyday scenario of the judicial trial as one that ‘demonstrates an institutionalised crisis of truth’ (1992: 6). Crimes against humanity, in their scale and the manner in which they transcend established practices of law and order, effect a far greater ‘crisis of truth’ than would generally be evident in a court of law. In this sense they bring to new prominence the discourse of survivor testimony, which offers evidence of the unimaginable and unprecedented nature of these particular past events (Felman 1992: 6). It is in this way that witnessing signifies a rupture with the past.

Witnessing represents the breakdown of previous social structures that have kept suffering hidden from view, and signifies the imposition of the structures of language onto trauma. The fact that testimony to apartheid can be publicly delivered is itself indicative of profound social change, and is a form of survival to be witnessed in its own right. When the content of individuals’ testimony is examined more closely, it

can be seen that individual narratives can privilege subject positions previously relegated to the margins of national discourse. For example, while the narratives of women tend to focus on the domestic arena rather than directly alluding to political struggle, the fact that they can testify at all integrates the domestic sphere into the public discourse of national testimony, and is itself a political outcome.<sup>7</sup>

The TRC elevated testimony to the status of cultural discourse within post-apartheid South Africa, and enlisted it as an intrinsic part of the nation-building project.

However, as the TRC is not a judicial institution in the conventional sense, it used testimony in a different way from a court of law. Dori Laub, psychoanalyst and Holocaust survivor, posits that the only way to truly witness trauma is through testimony, even in a context like the Holocaust where historical documentation is prolific (1992: 57). However, the recall of the event is never reducible to what actually happened to the victim, because even without the problems associated with memory that are highlighted in the previous chapter, the language of the survivor's narrative can never (re)capture the original event, which lies beyond language.

It is through testimony that a traumatic event is made public, and becomes known to those who are listening and who become witnesses to the past. Laub states that it is this act of sympathetic listening or witnessing that is fundamental to the creation of new knowledge through testimony, as information about the past that has previously been hidden is revealed (Laub 1992: 57). It is in this sense that the dialectic between oral testimony and past trauma is highlighted as a process that leads to the affirmation of new knowledge about the past. This is not the same as witnessing that might take,

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<sup>7</sup> The role and content of women's testimonies will be discussed at greater length later on in this chapter.

for example, the form of a soliloquy in a court of law that is used to confirm hypothesis. It is the new knowledge gained from the social interaction of witnessing that forms the foundation of the post-apartheid nation, through allowing stories from a diverse range of subject positions to enter the national discourse.

## **2.4 The Mediation of Testimony**

The TRC has to manage the reception of testimony as the means by which historical trauma enters the social present. It is useful to use a Freudian framework to look at the psychological processes that are undergone as the past is documented and received, as adapted by Walter Benjamin in his study of Baudelaire's poetry. Freud holds (in Beyond the Pleasure Principle) that the function of consciousness is protection against internal and external stimuli (as opposed to receiving stimuli). As a protective shield, then, the consciousness maintains its defences against any threats, defined as shocks, which are presented by the outside world (Benjamin 1997: 115). If consciousness is able to register these threats within an existing framework, then they are less likely to have a traumatic impact on the psyche. Because psychoanalysis tries to understand shock as something that has broken through the protective shield of the consciousness, then preparation against anxiety will reduce the impact of the shock. Benjamin suggests that we are better able to accept and deal with (or, in other words, absorb) these shocks if we are trained in coping with the stimuli that produce them (Benjamin 1997: 116).

One means of absorbing shock is to prepare the psyche for its impact, which can be done in the case of testimony in various ways. I argue that the TRC itself functions as a mechanism for shock absorption that has an explicitly nationalist agenda. It needs to



absorb the potentially fragmentary and inflammatory shock of historical trauma in order to protect the existence (totality) of the imagined community (which also needs to be broadly disseminated in order to be successfully created). The framing of testimony within a biblical paradigm foregrounds its conciliatory function and promotes it as a process that will be concluded for the good of a wider community. The testimonies that are heard then become a necessary stage post on a route to social reconciliation, and the audience has this preconception of their function. I will argue later that the structures of the hearings and texts such as the Report and Register as well as the novels and autobiographies that are the focus of Chapters Three, Four and Five also take on a shock-absorption function.<sup>8</sup> Narrative structure additionally can act as a means of shock absorption in that it tells us how to respond to something, framing it so that we know how to process it and respond. The TRC Report specifically offers structure to its narratives, such as conclusions (that offer the possibility of the desired outcome of resolution), geographical and typical headings.

The mode of this collection, or representation, of memory is itself as much of a contestable, historical event as the events that are recalled. When the stories appear in the public domain they are organised according to the conventions of the media in which they are to be displayed. In the case of radio broadcasts from the SABC, for example, the pattern was to use a potentially shocking sound bite. In Country of My Skull, which is the detailed focus of Chapter Five, the SABC radio journalist Antjie Krog testifies to the process by which testimony becomes breaking news:

...it is crucial to us that the Commission and its narratives be captured as fully as possible on ordinary news bulletins. Even people who do no more than listen to the news should be given a full understanding of the essence of the

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<sup>8</sup> The process is somewhat inverted, however, in the fictional and autobiographical texts, which subvert preconceptions of aspects of their production, such as form, to offer resistance rather than support to dominant processes.

Commission, and hear quite a few of its stories. This means that the past has to be put into hard news gripping enough to make bulletin headlines...

A bulletin generally consists of three audio elements: ordinary reporting read out by a newsreader, 20-second sound bites of other people's voices, and 40-second voice reports sent through by a journalist. How can these elements be moulded to our aims? (Krog 1999: 46).

Krog goes on to offer examples of the process by which sound bites are created, citing the testimony by a fellow detainee regarding the missing hand of ANC activist Sicelo Mhlawuli:

We write the first lines of the hard copy... Then the recorded comment: 'I saw the severed hand of a black activist in a bottle at Port Elizabeth police station. The police told me it was a baboon's hand. They said to me: "Look here, this is the bottled hand of a Communist." But I know that Sicelo Mhlawuli, one of the Cradock Four, was buried with his hand missing.' This is a perfect sound bite (How quickly our own language changes – fantastic testimony, sexy subject, nice audible crying...) (Krog 1999: 47).

These sound bites precede the full transmission of a hearing in order to pre-empt the audience response and frame the event testified to in a particular manner. This had the additional effect of differentiating between the context of events from the previous political regime and the present, emphasising the degree of political shift.

## **2.5 Performativity and Oral Testimony**

The dialogic and interactive nature of witnessing is most evident when testimony is given orally. Oral testimony is traditionally regarded as 'people's history' or 'history from below', and in this sense is seen as a means of restoring democracy to the documentation of history (McClintock 1995: 310). In the case of South Africa, the very act of oral testimony is itself political as the people delivering it were previously denied the opportunity to speak out. The testimony is a product of the context of power that it emerged from, and uses its voices to redistribute power in the present. In this way it helps to construct a collective subjectivity to past events, and relies on collective identification to a much greater extent than other types of testimony.

Because TRC hearings were held locally, people were testifying in front of members of their own communities who had similar experiences of the past, and could “write” their own histories into the gaps or commonalities present in testimony. Langer develops this point by explaining that oral testimony, which is spoken simultaneously from the past and the present, constantly redefines the role of the audience (Langer 1991: 21). Through the creation of a collective identification and subjectivity a newly biased audience is created, that participates in the reciprocal construction of national identification. The authorial position is not completely fixed either, as audience input can contribute to what is stated by the testifier. Written records of the past, such as the text of the report, do not engender this kind of flux and insecurity, as they tell their stories from a fixed and biased authorial perspective, which shapes the story and its reception in a particular way. When narrative is performed, such as in the case of oral testimony, the performative element implicates the audience in the utterance. In Excitable Speech Judith Butler uses the example of a speaker’s declaration of sexuality to illustrate the relationship at stake, ‘If I say, “I am a homosexual,” in front of you, then you become implicated in the “homosexuality” that I utter; the utterance is presumed to establish a relationship between the speaker and the audience’ (Butler 1997: 114).

In this sense the performance of oral history constructs a greater collective identification than written testimony and both appeals to and constructs a sense of community in the audience. It does this through the use of culturally specific language and other nuances: in terms of an emotional response to the “live” rendition of the past, a unified identity is constructed around the reception of and participation in traumatic narrative. The process of history making can be seen as a product of the

interaction between levels of witnesses, reinforcing that history itself is a form of witnessing, and itself bearing witness to the potency of oral testimony as a means of reconstructing a version of the past. Oral testimony is particularly powerful in this respect as it is performed and performative, including nuances like facial expressions and gestures that cannot be recorded in a transcript, and the wider community of the speaker can relate to details included. Not all of the “truth” spoken is empirical or verifiable; however, through mass mediation and identification it goes on to constitute a significant part of the national imaginary. Thus, the texts and transcripts that form the historical basis of the new national identification can be seen as a product of the semiotic structures of trauma that have obscured the literal and the verifiable with the metaphorical and the symbolic (Quayson 2001: 203). In other words, as Freud would say, oral testimony is an outcome of struggle and of its own traumatic past.

As the personal and unedited version of the past, oral testimony is often unrehearsed and raw, frequently containing many silences, in the form of pauses and gaps, which are evident in the transcripts as suspension marks and ellipsis. These may well illustrate the inability of language to describe the events of the past, or the experience that exists outside Lyotard’s phrase, and they certainly stand as testimony both to the vulnerability of the witness and the traumatic nature of the past. Yet they also make an important contribution to the interactive nature of oral testimony. Ato Quayson argues that these gaps or silences in the text stand as symbolic representation of the unassimilated, unassimilable, unspeakable horrors of the past, and speak in this way to the imagination of the audience, who can then complete the unwritten and unspoken texts of history (Quayson 2001: 207). In this way the story of an individual becomes the story of many individuals and enters communal history. And because the

narratives are interacting with an unspoken, imaginary realm their conclusion is out of the government remit.

Some of these gaps may be attributable to the very specific form of oral narrative, which can be highly performative and reliant on the use, for example, of repetition and pause for dramatic effect, as a derivative of African “call and response” traditions. The specificity of geographical, economic and personal references within the texts of oral testimony appeals to the sense of community and shared knowledge amongst the immediate audience. In the cases of the audiences at the TRC hearings that were largely comprised of members of the same local community as those who were actually testifying, this meant that a large-scale identification could be constructed around the content of the narrative. Oral testimony uses culturally specific and nuanced language that the immediate community, such as women who lived under specific racial and economic restrictions in particular township at a given historical moment, can identify with. As the spoken text renders public past events that happened within that community, a shared identification and emotional response can be constructed within a large sector of the audience. A community can thus be seen to be created around the reception of texts. It is in this way that history making can be seen as a product of the interaction between different levels of witnessing the past. This in itself bears witness to the potency of oral testimony as a means of reconstructing and revising the past. Moreover, even though not all of the “truth” of the testimony may be either empirical or verifiable, as it is in part validated through consensus between witnesses whose specific relationship to a given past event may be variable, it is verified symbolically and as such comes to constitute a significant part of the national imaginary.

Witnessing is a participatory act with regard to oral testimony, and is as important in many ways as the actual delivery of the testimony. While Fiona Ross raises questions about how it might be possible to ‘witness effectively’ (Ross 1996: 4), Lawrence Langer claims that a witness to oral testimony has to do more than just listen, and should strive to become what he terms an ‘active hearer’ (Langer 1991: 21). He develops this point by explaining that oral testimony to a traumatic past, because it is spoken simultaneously from the past and the present, constantly redefines the role of the audience (Langer 1991: 21). Written records of the past, that tell their stories from a fixed authorial perspective (which is also culturally biased) do not engender the same kind of active response, or reception, which is what in turn facilitates the reciprocal construction of collective identification discussed above. Texts like the Register and the Report are structured to absorb the shock of what is being told, and additionally to shape the response of the reader, whereas oral testimony permits a more subjective response to what is spoken.

The act of witnessing can be experienced on different levels, and Laub’s categorisation of these (1992: 75) can usefully be applied to the TRC. The first is the act of witnessing to oneself within and during the experience, which was enacted by everyone who lived under apartheid, regardless of whether a submission was made to the TRC. The second is the act of witnessing the testimonies to the survival of others, which anyone who attended a TRC hearing did, alongside the national and international audience of the heavy media coverage of the hearings. The third is the act of bearing witness to the process of witnessing itself, carried out by the TRC as the report was compiled and published as an anthology of the statements and

testimonies of life in apartheid South Africa. In this sense, the text of the Report can be seen to bear witness to memory, rather than functioning as a form of memory itself.

## **2.6 Testimony as Historical “Truth”**

Testimony to trauma, as given to the TRC, differs from the testimony that is understood in a legal-judicial context in that it is often not possible to verify the information given as empirically true. The TRC attached great importance to truth as the route to reconciliation, the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act<sup>9</sup> stating that amnesty would only be offered to ‘persons who make full disclosure of all the relevant facts’ (Act: 1). To this end it attempted to cross-reference witness statements in order to validate as many testimonies as possible to truth criteria. Yet, empirically established truth is only one version of past events, and “accurate” history can never be more than a perspective on the past. Anne McClintock identifies empiricism as distinct from objective truth in that it ‘constitut[es] but one mode of ordering past experience, which is tied to certain rhetorical and disciplinary conventions’ (1991: 226). Testimony, as oral history, is a product of the unstable unconscious, and because of this it reproduces memories that are incomplete, imperfect and repressed. Traumatic memories are likely to be even more problematic than other versions of past experience as history, as they lie outside the conscious control of the subject and therefore cannot be arbitrated. While they do represent a version of the truth of the original event, it is crucial to remember that their reproduction and representation, as components of the new national imaginary, are

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<sup>9</sup> This will henceforth be referred to as Act when quotations are made.

informed and distorted by the power discourses at play in the contemporary political arena.

Laub gives an important example from the Holocaust to illustrate the multifaceted nature of truth and the role that testimony, as one version of historical truth, can play in shattering the framework of the traumatic event and releasing the survivor from its hold. He cites the example of a woman who, in recounting her experience of Auschwitz, claims to have seen a certain number of tall chimneys blown up at the camp, ““All of a sudden,” she said, “we saw four chimneys going up in flames, exploding. The flames shot into the sky. People were running. It was unbelievable”” (Holocaust survivor, cited in Laub 1992: 59). Her claim regarding the exact number of chimneys that existed at the camp was disputed, and it was finally proven through accumulated documentary evidence that only one chimney had been blown up. While, on a strictly empirical level, it may appear as if the woman had not been telling the truth about Auschwitz, Laub attributes truth-value to the woman’s testimony in that she testified in public to the existence of chimneys at Auschwitz. In so doing she broke the existing narrative framework of the event, this action in itself constituting, in a similar way as the testimonies made to the TRC by women and homosexuals, a historical truth:

The woman was testifying not to the number of chimneys blown up, but to something else, more radical, more crucial: the reality of an unimaginable occurrence. One chimney blown up in Auschwitz was as incredible as four. The number mattered less than the fact of the occurrence. The event itself was almost inconceivable. The woman testified to an event that broke all the compelling frame of Auschwitz, where Jewish armed revolts just did not happen, and had no place. She testified to the breakage of a framework. That was historical truth (Laub 1992: 60).

The woman testified to a historical event that had hitherto been unimaginable, and in making her testimony to her own survival of this past, she verified something more

than the simple facts of the event. The truth she testifies to is symbolic, and is indicative of the fact that truth can take different forms. To similar effect, Lawrence Langer cites Charlotte Delbo, Holocaust survivor and novelist, to make the point that truth can exist outside the verifiable facts of an event, and that time changes perceptions of the kind of truth that is important. Delbo wrote ‘today I am no longer sure that what I have written is true, but I am sure that it happened’ (Delbo, cited in Langer 1991: 42). In the case of the narrative of the Jewish woman cited in Laub’s writing, the truth that she was telling existed outside an existing phraseology, or linguistic framework. No precedent existed for the demolition of chimneys in an uprising at the concentration camp because this was not previously considered a semantic possibility. As Lyotard suggests in The Differend a sequence of phrases exists to designate meaning with the ‘regimen of the phrase’ providing the framework within which to understand this meaning (Lyotard 2002: 39-40). The information from Laub’s witness exists outside the regimen of the phrase, and is therefore difficult to believe in “normal” circumstances, as is Delbo’s testimony.

The truths that are understood and told by individuals enter the TRC processes through written as well as oral testimony (in the sense that all potential witnesses submitted written statements before some were selected to be presented orally, and that written transcripts of oral testimony were made publicly available). It is useful at this point to look in more detail at samples of testimony that were presented to TRC hearings, and to analyse the ways in which they have been incorporated into South African historiography. Victim testimony allows voices that have been previously unrepresented to enter the culturally and nationally validated discourse of official history and rhetoric, collectivising them as they participate in the nation-building

project. As Quayson rightly points put, it was the level of mediation intrinsic to TRC proceedings that led to the specific nature of its public addressivity and interlocution that enables individual traumas to become the subject of national identification and debate. (Quayson 2001: 207). If one regards mediation as a kind of multiple witnessing (and Laub's work would suggest that this could be so) then the importance of testimony to the construction of a new national identification and discourse becomes evident. However, the subjective (and therefore empirically unreliable) nature of testimony renders these processes problematic. The terms of the reproduction and reception of testimony also impact upon the relationship of the subject to the past. Testimony is reproduced and circulated via print and media technology, access to which are dependent upon a degree of literacy and other circumstances influenced by contemporary power relations. This in turn informs levels of identification and subjectivity, which can either shatter or perpetuate perceptions of national centres and peripheries.

One of the most striking things about the oral testimony given to the TRC is the level of detail recalled, especially given that many of the events took place as much as three decades prior to the hearing. Testimony often also focuses on details of the daily conditions inhabited by the survivor. This applies especially to the testimonies of women, which highlight the gendered nature of the material conditions created by apartheid. This enables, partly through the communality created by oral testimony and partly through the shared material experience of the past, audience identification with the speaker and the content of the testimony. It links individual stories into a collective subjectivity to the past, and in so doing helps to create a unified relationship with the present and the future. The details recalled very often relate to the

practicalities of everyday life. For example, Nelson Keobakile Colane, the first witness called to testify in Mmbatho, recalls details of the food he had been served when arrested in 1986: 'we only ate soft porridge for three days, which was not well prepared. When I got there I told them that I do not want to eat porridge any more' (Mmbatho: 1).<sup>10</sup>

There are links here with the testimony discussed earlier in relation to Holocaust survivors: time blurring memories of the past can make testimony unreliable in the sense that it is not empirically accurate. Colane was severely tortured while held in a rural farmhouse used for the purpose, and at the time the testimony he was still receiving treatment for ongoing medical problems, yet focussed on the minute detail of the food he was served and conversations that surrounded this. This pattern may on one level be indicative of the very precise nature of traumatic recall: it is perhaps more likely that the greater trauma of captivity was still too unbearable to be spoken and the prison diet provided a more accessible focus for the testimony. Like the testimony regarding the burning chimneys in Auschwitz, the description of the poor food signifies both the ability that the present affords to speak about the past at all, and to the framework of imprisonment and torture which symbolise the historical power context, as the far broader trauma that marks the difference between past and present. Other testimonies display similar patterns, in that they recall details of clothes worn on a particular day (GO/0133), the positioning of small items around the house, and events that had appeared on the television news that morning (GO/0121). These aspects of daily life contextualise the witness's life. They provide a point of identification between the witness and audience, and offer clear evidence of the way

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<sup>10</sup> The testimonies given in Mmbatho are referenced in a different way from the other testimonies, which are given numerical references. Colane gave his testimony on 8 July 1996.

that the traumatic event has been “frozen” at the time of occurrence, recalled like a snapshot in the present.

## 2.7 Selected Narratives

Oral history in itself is a form of history-making that avails the experience of giving voice to the past to the disenfranchised for the first time in South Africa, and is also a democratic mode of history-making. However, within the context of the TRC it did not remain democratic, as the Commission essentially made a selection of memories that would survive to shape the future. The TRC received some 20,000 statements from victims of apartheid, and less than ten per cent were subsequently delivered as oral testimony (Report Vol.5: 9).<sup>11</sup> The TRC trained statement-takers to witness sympathetically the stories that were told to them, and accord categories to the information given to them in order that it might be systematically logged onto a database.<sup>12</sup> The statements were categorised in a number of ways: by population group (African, Coloured, Asian or White); gender; age group (13-24, 25-36, 37-48, 49-60, 61-72 and 73+), by type of violation (in very general terms this pertained to whether the human rights violation was fatal or not, and to the gender of the victim) and by the historical period in which the violation took place (1960-1975, 1976-1982, 1983-1989, 1990-1995) (Report Vol.1: 168-73). This aggregation and categorisation of subjective experience is highly problematic in South Africa, in the way that it stands as a version of the hierarchies that informed and sustained apartheid. In the form of the published Report, it presents itself to the general public as the

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<sup>11</sup> The Report makes clear that each statement-giver was asked if they would be willing to testify in public, acknowledging that ‘the majority of them were willing, even eager, and many were angry or disappointed if they were not selected’ (Report Vol. 5: 6).

<sup>12</sup> This process itself was problematic: not all past events readily lent themselves to the criteria of a particular, or indeed single, type of human rights violation. See Volume Five of the Report for the way that individual events were aggregated into statistics.

authoritative version of past events, which is the cornerstone of new national identification, and from this perspective perpetuates the categorisations of the past. In this way the Report, to use Anne McClintock's phrase, begins to move away from the state of 'artificial purity' in which oral testimony preserves the voices of the past, and includes the imbalances and biases of the present power context (McClintock 1995: 328).

The TRC employed clear criteria when selecting those witnesses who would be invited to give public testimony. It aimed to maximise identification and representation, stating to this end in Volume Five of the Report, the section of the publication that summarises the TRC's procedures and achievements, that:

- i) The hearing should reflect accounts from all sides of the political conflicts of the past;
- ii) The entire thirty-four year mandate period should be covered;
- iii) Women as well as men should be heard, and the experiences of the youth should also be considered;
- iv) Finally, since not all the people of the area could be heard, there should be an attempt at least to provide an overall picture of the experience of the region *so that all people could identify in some way with what was demonstrated* (Report Vol.5: 5-6, my emphasis).

Broadly speaking, it can be seen that the TRC, perhaps in order to provide a framework within which the audience could begin to identify with and process historical events, represented the national population in terms of political affiliation, age, gender and regional differentiation.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the two thousand testimonies that were selected for public performance were intended as a sample that would facilitate the maximum degree of representation from within the general public, and therefore to bring as many subject positions as possible from the margins to the centre. The

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<sup>13</sup> This is very similar to the process by which the Commissioners themselves were selected, in order that their collectivity represented a microcosm of South African society.

Report cites the criteria by which some victims were selected to testify publicly as follows:

- a. The nature of abuse in the community or area: the Commission attempted to select a group of victims whose experiences represented the various forms of human rights abuse that had occurred in the area.
- b. The various groups which had experienced abuse: the Commission attempted to select a group which included victims from all sides of the conflict so as to present a picture of abuse from as many perspectives as possible. In many instances, this required that the Commission proactively seek out victims from particular communities.
- c. Representivity in relation to gender, race, age and geographical location in the area where the hearing was to be held (Report Vol. 1: 146).

The wording of this justification implies the representative function of performed testimony and its rhetorical impact, the intended construction of 'a picture of abuse' taking priority over the healing processes within an individual.

The full transcripts of the testimonies, accessible to the general public via the official website of the TRC, are preserved as historical documents and form part of the archive of the New South Africa. The trauma of history is preserved in its documentation, and is evident in the range of symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder that inhabit the transcripts. The gaps and ellipsis in many of the transcripts themselves offer testimony to the number of occasions when the framework of language was shattered in the face of traumatic recall, where the hearing was adjourned to give the witness time to recompose, where a break was taken for prayer or hymn, or where the chair stopped to offer comfort to the witness. These breaks or silences, that tend to occur when what has been spoken is very extreme in relation to the speaker, or in the Lyotardian sense that the existing framework of the phrase has been exceeded, keep alive the memory of what may otherwise be forgotten.

To borrow from de Certeau's study of the history of American Indians in Heterologies, I suggest that these silences preserve the primary text of historical trauma. The scars of the past that are exhibited in the human frailty displayed when a witness is unable to continue speaking stand as non-verbal testimony to the past years of hardship and resistance in South Africa. De Certeau argues that the Indians 'keep alive the memory of what the Europeans have "forgotten" – a continuous series of uprisings and awakenings which have hardly left a trace in the occupiers' historiographical literature' (De Certeau 1993: 226-7). He goes on to state that the 'history of resistance punctuated by cruel repression is *marked on the Indian's body* as much as it is recorded in transmitted accounts – or more so' (De Certeau 1993: 227, original emphasis). De Certeau claims that acts of violence like 'imprisonments, arson and even murder are doubtless less destructive than economic alienation, cultural domination, and social humiliation – they are less dangerous than the overall process of day-to-day *ethnocide*' (1993: 226, original emphasis). While the focus of TRC testimonies constructed by the state's categorisations in the Report is the more "tangible" aspects of violence, the dialogic aspect of oral testimony which creates community around the silences and gaps that are filled by the participants' imagination, is more focused around the systemic violence of apartheid as a daily source of oppression. This, like the acts of resistance from many black South Africans, is acknowledged through the silences in oral testimony and becomes part of historiography as it is recorded in the transcripts. The emotional response of victims in certain situations takes over the power of speech, as the body collapses into silence and trauma becomes part of public memory.

Testimonies reflect different aspects of the past. Many bear witness to the traumatic flashback to a specific event, like the acts of violence cited by de Certeau, where the traumatic event is revisited as if occurring in the present, and is recalled in precise detail. The testimony stands as photographic recall of the event, revisited and reiterated as it was imprinted on consciousness. Speech is often recalled directly, rather than being integrated into the main body of the testimony as reported speech, and there are numerous examples of witnesses recalling specific details that surrounded the past event, such as stories from the television news on the morning of a particular event, or the precise description of clothes that were worn or food that was eaten (CT/00302). In some ways these also tell of the general social framework that surrounds a particular historical trauma but others, however, testify to the more general 'day-to-day ethnocide' that occurred in apartheid South Africa. This is especially evident in the testimony of women, who rarely testified to their own suffering, and who related in a different kind of communal way to testimony about the conditions of life under apartheid. Ross's research shows that women's testimony in particular bears witness to the conditions of life that shaped and framed their suffering (Ross 1996: 13). While women's testimonies are not unique in that they tend to be firmly located in the domestic domain, this is a trend that itself witnesses the daily reality of life under apartheid. The wider identification that testimony to a public audience facilitates helps to construct a community that is based on common understanding or perceptions of the past. Additionally, in that oral testimony is a form of self-identification, or presentation of self, it is important to note that women who testify largely to the experiences of male relatives posit their social identity as being defined in relation to those men, an act which "locks" some women into a marginalised position.

Throughout the hearings the commissioners endeavoured to contextualise the events that were witnessed within a chronological and regional framework of human rights violations, and also locate the speaker within a specific time and space. In many cases this served to illustrate the specific political motivation behind each incident, which was crucial to amnesty applicants and allowed the testimony to fulfil the mandate of the TRC.<sup>14</sup> It also framed individual testimonies within the wider narrative of the nation, and enabled them to serve as a more powerful focus of representation and identification as they became linked to national rather than personal history. More problematically, testimonies to the past are framed within an ethical as well as historical and geographical bias: they reproduce events from the apartheid era from the moral stance of having survived it. The society that receives the testimony is able to pass a negative value judgement on past events, which offer another means of assimilating the past into a collective consciousness or identification.

## **2.8 Tension Between Individual and National Goals**

Tutu's theologically-inspired vision of reconciliation, institutionalised in the TRC's capacity to grant amnesty to perpetrators of politically motivated crimes, did not go uncontested in South Africa. The Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) and the families of prominent murder victims Steve Biko and Griffiths Mxenge registered their objection to the "second sacrifice" demanded so eloquently by Tutu by making a constitutional challenge to the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act in 1996. This was made on the basis that Section 20 of the Act (the clause that permitted

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<sup>14</sup> The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act states that one of the objectives of the TRC was 'the granting of amnesty to persons who make full disclosure of all the relevant facts relating to acts *associated with a political objective committed in the course of the conflicts of the past* during the said period' (Act 1995: 1, my emphasis).

the possibility of amnesty to perpetrators) denied victims the right to legal retribution in the form of prosecution. In uncompromising validation of the TRC as a national initiative, the Constitutional Court dismissed their objection (Hamber and Wilson 1999: 13).

Fieldwork by both Hamber and Wilson (1999) and Colvin (2000), illustrates that the moral compromise or “third way” chosen by the TRC is not the course of action desired by all survivors. Colvin’s post-TRC research into the activities of the Khulumani (Western Cape) Victims Support Group, an outreach project of the Cape Town Trauma Centre for Survivors of Violence and Torture, asserts that the TRC’s version of reconciliation fails to meet the ongoing needs of communities and individuals at grass-roots level. While the monthly meetings of the Khulumani Group served a therapeutic purpose in that they functioned as ‘institutionalised post-TRC spaces for South Africans to practically engage with personal memories and the apartheid past’ (Kayser, cited in Colvin 2000: 2), staff became aware at an early stage that the needs of their clients were not being met. Their material circumstances had not changed and they were lacking in both financial and practical support from the government (Colvin 2000: 2). In other words, in terms that echoed Mbeki’s, they lacked the material compensation they perceived a “just” solution would have afforded them in order to reconcile with the past.

The group distinguished between reconciliation and justice, and did not identify the TRC’s version of reconciliation as a priority. Colvin cites the majority of staff as broadly identifying their work as ‘healing’, an outcome that can be read as generally in line with the national goal. However, he goes on to maintain that ‘most committee

and group members of Khulumani identify “empowerment” and “justice” through fighting the government for victims’ rights as their main agenda’, which is clearly not aligned to the national programme. He subsequently observes that the group had ‘come to understand itself as largely based on the idea that the question of reconciliation is premature’ (Colvin 2000: 13-14). He goes on to explain that the logic underlying victims’ feelings is that they have been denied justice, which they view as a central prerequisite or springboard to reconciliation. He identifies two versions of justice within the group’s vision. The first, narrower, notion of justice focuses on victims’ struggles for reparations and pensions, which link both to the promises made by the TRC and the government’s legal obligations to victims. In a wider sense, their concept of justice comprises ‘structural, material and social transformations’ (Colvin 2000: 14) which, if actualised, would lead to a range of social improvements. Colvin identifies the delay or denial of these forms of justice as the group’s main priority, and suggests that the broader concept of socially transformative justice constitutes the victims’ vision of a reconciled society (2000: 14).

This vision of reconciliation effected by social transformation is clearly oppositional to Tutu’s theologically inspired belief that reconciliation will engender profound and widespread transformation. So, what is the vision of reconciliation aspired to by those who reject the TRC’s ideology? Colvin identifies three forms of reconciliation within the Khulumani Group’s sights: intrasubjective reconciliation, intersubjective or community reconciliation, and economic or social reconciliation (2000: 15).

Intrasubjective changes are those that occur within the person. They are often referred to as “healing” and can have either a psychological function, where the victim

reintegrates experiences of traumas into the psyche and thus becomes reconciled with them, or a theological function, where the victim is released from the destructive anger associated with the trauma following forgiveness of the perpetrator. While it is unclear whether the TRC's broad goal of national reconciliation can be directly linked to intrasubjective healing, Colvin's fieldwork shows that therapeutic intervention at the level of the individual subject cannot be seen as extant from social change on a grander scale: the immediate physiological needs of victims, in terms of food, shelter and employment, need to be met before they can even begin to consider the implications of direct reconciliation with perpetrators. He reports that the act of repentance, desired rather than required by the TRC, is of great importance to the Khulumani Group members as a tangible signifier of reconciliation:

When speaking of perpetrators in particular, they repeat the view that the great majority of perpetrators have not repented and are still living a good life without any trace of remorse. When speaking of the white community in general, they frequently use the concept of "understanding" and the white community's lack of understanding as an index of the still-present division between the two groups (Colvin 2000: 17).

Intersubjective reconciliation is concerned with the re-establishment of bonds within an otherwise identifiable social group (for example between ANC and IFP supporters), of different social groups (such as residents of formal or informal settlements within a township who might find themselves in highly disparate economic circumstances), or between conflicting communities (such as community members and policemen, or community members and askaris) (Colvin 2000: 17).

Economic, or structural, reconciliation (which may also be considered as social justice) is signified by the establishment of new and more just social, political and

economic structures. Essential to this new order is equal access to representation and decision-making for all South Africans, both at the site of production of political power and at the level of the assignation of political rights. It is in this sense that, in the eyes of the group, “real” change or reconciliation has been restricted, for members view their material circumstances as barely having changed. Colvin observes that:

One of the most common refrains from group members when asked about reconciliation and how things are progressing in South Africa is that “things have not changed, we are still like prisoners, we are poorer than we were before”. They argue that white South Africans have not “changed their hearts” and that they are “living the same as before, while we still have nothing” (2000: 19).

It is clear in this instance that the kind of reconciliation perceived as meaningful justice is linked to the very real issues of repentance and material change, beyond both the ideologically driven mandate of the TRC and the value of the reparations it was able to award. Structural reconciliation requires the gap between blacks, as holders of political power, and whites, as majority holders of real economic power, to be closed. On a national scale, it deconstructs the racial categorisations of the past by instituting the legal and social structures aimed at granting and protecting equal access to social, political and economic rights.<sup>15</sup>

The feeling amongst members of the Khulumani Group that economic reconciliation functions as a necessary stage on the route towards other types of reconciliation has been more formally and publicly stated by Thabo Mbeki. In contrast to Tutu, Mbeki has stated that meaningful reconciliation can only take place once social transformation has occurred, asserting that:

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<sup>15</sup> It is also important to be aware of the new gap that has widened between the emergent black middle classes and the large numbers of black South Africans still living in extreme poverty. It is doubtful whether large sectors of the population will be able to move towards either intersubjective or intrasubjective reconciliation until this schism has narrowed.

Real reconciliation cannot be achieved without a thorough transformation and democratisation process... true reconciliation can only take place if we succeed in our objective of social transformation. Reconciliation and transformation should be viewed as an interdependent part of one unique process of building a new society (Mbeki cited in Krog 1997: 2).

What comprises Mbeki's vision of a transformed and reconciled South Africa? He looks forward to an "African" South Africa that is built on the past, a new nation that is 'a synthesis of the rich cultural strains which we have inherited... It will not necessarily be all black, but it will be African' (Mbeki cited in Krog 1997a: 2). While Mbeki's brand of visionary cultural essentialism may not outwardly appear to be reconciliatory, Krog's theory of reconciliation may be used in his defence. Further to Colvin's more sociological interpretation of reconciliation, Krog applies a more psychological approach to assert that reconciliation is a process consisting of several distinct phases rather than one single, identifiable act.

She suggests that the first stage of reconciliation consists precisely of the acknowledgement that the process embarked upon will take time. The second stage is to accept that a clear improvement in material conditions needs to occur before there can be general faith in the success of a reconciliation project. Krog argues that, while blacks and whites may outwardly appear to be withdrawing from each other, each group believing that the other holds real power, this is actually the first stage of reconciliation, and constitutes a necessary and healthy response to trauma. Mbeki's call for an "African" South Africa is a reaffirmation of the identity of black South Africans, that restores self-esteem and group identity, and should enable the black nation to move on to the next stage of the reconciliation process (Krog 1998: 2). Krog claims that the white nation enacts the same process in reclaiming national symbols such as anthems and flags, and in remaining loyal to its own linguistic traditions.

Notably, Colvin cites one of the main points of grievance for the Khulumani group as the refusal of white communities to cross established and protective communal boundaries, this being interpreted as unwillingness to empathise:

Most whites, they do not understand us. They do not understand our lives and our suffering. They cannot feel our pain. Even D. [a white ex-MK soldier] who is a comrade, he fought with us, but he cannot understand our pain. They do not want to come to our houses to see our suffering. And they won't learn Xhosa (K.N. cited in Colvin 2000: 18).

If Krog's model were to be adopted, then the actions of these white communities would constitute a stage of genuine national reconciliation, which might be measured in terms of economic reparation and reorganisation, rather than direct hostility.

From this stage, the theory holds that each group should be able to make a conscious and intellectual decision to move into a renegotiated and reconciled relationship with their former adversaries. In theory this model, which promotes reconciliation as compensating injustice, is very smooth; in practice the economic inequality evident in South Africa presents very real problems, promoting dissatisfaction within disadvantaged communities alongside some of the highest crime rates in the world. This threatens the "safe space" that previously antagonistic social groups require in order to withdraw and redefine (Kraybill cited in Krog 1998: 3), and upholds the assertion that structural reconciliation is a prerequisite to other forms of reconciliation.

## **2.9 Testimony, Healing and Revenge**

It can be argued that, through its denial of justice (in either a social/economic or more personal sense) to individual victims, the TRC ' could run counter to the individual

psychological healing process and ask another sacrifice from victims' (Hamber and Wilson 1999: 13). Hamber and Wilson argue that truth commissions host a whole range of discourse that might be deemed acceptable: this comfortably accommodates truth and reconciliation but excludes vengeance on the grounds that it falls outside the parameters of Christian-based rhetoric (1999: 3). The TRC denies victims the possibility of legitimate revenge (in the form of traditional, retributive justice) in that a perpetrator could claim amnesty from prosecution following application to the TRC in return for satisfying criteria that they had acted under orders and had told the complete truth. Judicial recourse remained available in situations where a perpetrator was either refused amnesty or an application was not made. This is arguably a pragmatic solution and necessary to assure future peace on psychological and practical levels, for the South African judicial system simply could not have dealt with the huge number of cases that would have been brought if all alleged perpetrators were subject to criminal hearings.<sup>16</sup>

Victims are being asked to make a "second sacrifice" in rescinding the opportunity of revenge, as it would seem that in the South Africa characterised by the TRC that revenge and healing remained mutually exclusive. Materially, they lose the right to any substantial financial compensation for injury or death, as participation in the TRC entitled victims to symbolic reparations only. Ideologically, they reject traditional justice as a means of meting out state-sanctioned vengeance, as well as any more personal forms of vengeance. Michael Ignatieff identifies the desire for revenge as

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<sup>16</sup> In his discussion of the options available to South Africa at the time of the TRC's establishment, Tutu explains the reasons for the government not taking a "Nuremberg" approach. These were: that there was no clear victor in South Africa who could enforce "justice"; that members of the security establishment in South Africa would not have supported a negotiated settlement had they known they were at risk of trial, and that South Africa simply did not have the material resources to cope with an operation like the Nuremberg Trials (Report Vol.1: 5).

‘the chief moral obstacle in the path of reconciliation’ (1999: 188), and goes on to reinforce the specific nature of the importance of revenge in post-conflict societies:

Revenge is commonly regarded as a low and unworthy emotion, and because it is regarded as such, its deep moral hold on people is rarely understood. But revenge – morally considered – is a desire to keep faith with the dead, to honour their memory by taking up their cause where they left off. Revenge keeps faith between generations; the violence it engenders is a ritual form of respect for the community’s dead – therein lies its legitimacy. Reconciliation is difficult precisely because it must compete with the powerful alternative morality of violence. Political terror is tenacious because it is an ethical practice. It is a cult of the dead, a dire and absolute expression of respect (Ignatieff 1999: 188).

The real point Ignatieff raises above, which is that revenge honours the past and therefore presents a viable moral alternative to reconciliation is a theme explored in detail by fictional writers. As such it clearly holds a politically destabilising function and will reappear in Chapters Three and Five of this thesis, most specifically in relation to Coetzee’s novels Disgrace and Boyhood.

The respect attached to revenge in South Africa is illustrated by several reactions from within the amnesty hearings. While some witnesses were able to forgive their relatives’ murderers, others were not. Quentin Cornelius, a university student who was drinking in the Heidelberg Tavern at the time his friend Lyndi Fourie was killed in an attack, stated after the incident:

I am not prepared and cannot find it in my heart to forgive them at this point in time. I do not believe that any murderers should be granted amnesty and set free to roam the streets that we are supposed to live in. I am just interested in one thing – I want to see justice served’ (Cornelius cited in SAPA 1997: 9).

Similarly Churchill Mxenge, the brother of murdered civil rights lawyer Griffiths

Mxenge, refused to forgive killer Dirk Coetzee for the death of his brother, declaring:

“President Mandela wishes that people will forgive and forget and that life goes on.

But unless justice is done, it is difficult for any person to think of forgiving”

(Mxenge cited in Graybill 2002: 49). His response highlights the need for (and absence of) material reconciliation before psychological healing can take place.

Coetzee's response to Mxenge, made after he had testified in some detail regarding the time taken to roast human flesh on a barbecue,<sup>17</sup> positioned Mxenge's reaction in relation to the dominant national rhetoric of reconciliation and criticised him for not "fitting in" with the new national profile:

"I've never seen them smiling and the like," he told state television. "Their faces show revenge and hatred." Coetzee said he felt sympathy for the children of the victim. "But for the brothers, *I'm getting really fed up with their nagging and not falling in with the new South Africa.*" (Coetzee cited in Graybill 2002: 498, my italics)

This statement by the widow of Bheki Mlangeni, a lawyer who was killed by a letter bomb, also links nationhood with a policy of not seeking revenge and refers to a similar kind of alienated subjectivity:

"The murderers of my husband must be found and prosecuted! I understand that Eugene de Kock is asking for amnesty from you. I oppose that! He knew that people would die when he sent those explosives. Today I am a widow. *I feel like an outcast because of a person who is asking for pardon*" (cited in Graybill 2002: 49, my italics).

These are not isolated examples. The legal representative of Charity Kondile, the mother of Sizwe Kondile, another of Coetzee's victims, refused forgiveness on her behalf: "You said that you would like to meet Mrs Kondile and look her in the eye. She asked me to tell you that she feels it is an honour... you do not deserve. If you are really sorry, you would stand trial for the deeds you did" (cited in Graybill 2002: 49).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For details see Tutu 1999: 97.

<sup>18</sup> Dirk Coetzee applied for amnesty for the killing of Sizwe Kondile, who was shot prior to his body being burned on a barbeque whilst Coetzee and police colleagues ate and drank alongside.

Why is this kind of vengeance important to victims? Is its sole function, as Ignatieff claims, to stand as the 'alternative morality' to reconciliation, or can it occupy a valid place in any conciliatory process? Hamber and Wilson argue that revenge *can* function as part of a healing process. In material terms, however, a vengeful South African society would be unstable and detract from economic investment, most specifically white capital. The alternative to vengeance in South Africa is participation in the TRC and provisional acceptance of symbolic reparations, and this is problematic. The passive acceptance of reparations can trigger guilt, or feelings that a victim has not been properly honoured through revenge, which can itself function as a form of reparation. The acceptance of reparations following the death of, for example, a family member, can function as closure, symbolising acceptance of the death itself. In some cases, this is not desirable as it can be seen as a political statement in itself. Otherwise, it may occur before a victim is psychologically prepared to accept the death of a loved one, or in a context where adequate or ongoing emotional support is unavailable. If the TRC, as the ritual designed to prompt reconciliation, does not create additional spaces in which individuals can process what has happened then the reconciliation process cannot be completed properly (Hamber and Wilson 1999: 15).<sup>19</sup>

A call for punishment, as a form of revenge, can also function as a ritual of closure, and may be undertaken in the victim's own time: it may also bring meaningful compensation and in this sense become part of a reconciliatory process. Vengeance can be functional to healing in that it can assist transformation of identity: a victim may no longer feel like a victim if a judicial process has been enacted and meaningful

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<sup>19</sup> Hamber and Wilson distinguish between private spaces for the reconciliatory process, such as counselling, and public spaces such as theatre and exhibitions (1999: 15).

compensation has been paid; likewise, a guilty person can be unburdened of self-destructive guilt through accepting a punishment regarded as just.

In South Africa the huge level of public support and consultation in the formative stages of the TRC is indicative of significant backing for a methodology that does not disrupt the structures of the new society with ongoing judicial retribution.<sup>20</sup> “Truth” in this sense then is presented as having a cohesive function, and potentially being a less divisive force than justice in a transitional society like South Africa. It is therefore likely to reinforce the political and moral consensus that frames the Commissions’ work and its nationalist goal.

However, given that the range of “truths” experienced by South Africans under apartheid is hugely diverse, it is problematic to then rely on a notion of a shared truth when it is posited as a means to political reconciliation. All South Africans shared the general societal truth of apartheid, but experienced a range of truths and narratives within that.<sup>21</sup> Michael Ignatieff claims that truth is largely defined by identity, for ‘what you believe to be true depends, in some measure, on who you believe yourself to be. And who you believe yourself to be is mostly defined in terms of who you are not’ (1999: 174). In apartheid South Africa subjective identity was largely defined, certainly initially by the state, in racial terms against a dominant white centre. In this kind of power relation it would seem difficult to locate any substantial degree of

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<sup>20</sup> All of the TRC’s processes were transparent apart from the selection of the commissioners themselves. Mandela overrode the agreed process in order to arrive at a more balanced racial distribution on the commission (Graybill 2002: 4).

<sup>21</sup> It is also important to remember that race was not the only site of oppression within apartheid South Africa, and that a range of narratives regarding oppression at the level of gender, sexuality and ethnicity were also experienced and given voice to in the general climate of “truth” afforded by the TRC.

shared truth, at least until political and ultimately economic power cease to be allocated racially. Until proper reparations are effected in South Africa, this will not happen. Ignatieff gives an example of this situation based on the former Yugoslavia, observing that ‘these communities cannot conceive of sharing a common truth - and a common responsibility - ...until fear of the other ceases to be a constitutive part of who they take themselves to be’ (1999: 174-75). He goes on to refute the possibility of a shared moral truth between communities that have such an oppositional relationship:

The problem of a shared truth is that it also does not lie “in between”. It is not a compromise between two competing versions. Either the siege of Sarajevo was a deliberate attempt to terrorise and subvert a legitimately elected, internationally recognised state, or it was a legitimate pre-emptive defence by the Serbs of their homeland against Muslim attack. It cannot be both. Outside attempts to write a version of the truth that does “justice” to the truth held by both sides are unlikely to be credible to either (Ignatieff 1999: 175-76).

In South Africa, once material reconciliation is in place, then an element of social reconstruction will lead to a greater commonality of truth in terms of experience of the present, which is more likely to lead to future reconciliation.

## **2.10 Testimonies and Memory**

It is problematic to invest in history as a means of achieving a peaceful transition to democracy, given that the ways in which individuals and community groups within South Africa vary perceive the past, and that identity is in part fixed by the experience of history. It is in this context that the debate around vengeance and reparations becomes important, for if vengeance can also transform and consolidate identity, this too becomes a valid course of action.

However its success may be judged, the TRC has created a space that has enabled the beginning of a process of national and subjective identity formation through the telling of the past. The ritualised structure of the hearings combined with a political agenda to locate these stories in relation to a new historicity. The mass mediation of the stories told before the TRC brought them to a wide audience and meant that they could be witnessed on a scale that far exceeded that usual in a psychoanalytic relation, and that secrecy was dispelled as good practice. Whether, ultimately, the TRC's processes are judged as an exemplary healing initiative, or as the imposition of a new and politically motivated moral hegemony, the space has been opened for the construction of a new nation through exploration of the past.

Victims and perpetrators alike sought a means of moving on from the past through the asking and granting of forgiveness,<sup>22</sup> and the attitude of testifiers can generally be seen as conciliatory. One simple request that the perpetrators 'be brought forward so that they can ask for forgiveness' stands as symbolic of the new rhetoric. In one hearing a commissioner highlighted in a simple sentence the fundamental shift in the rhetorical framework of the nation, stating that 'the country has changed' (GO/0133). The "country" is one which is based on truth, and agency within this new nation can be attained through disclosure of facts relating to the past, 'if you call yourself a man, please come forwards with the facts' (GO/0121). Within this context, requests for reparations are simple, human and moving: very often families requested information regarding the whereabouts of the body of a loved one, or the return of a dead relative's bones for proper burial, supporting at a personal level the national desire for closure. Busiswe Kewana (CT/00506) testified to the burning to death of her

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<sup>22</sup> In the case of Griffiths Mxenge, this was achieved through the refusal of forgiveness.

pregnant mother in 1985. In line with the national goal of seeking understanding of the past to move into the future, she stated, ‘...the reason why I am here, I want the Commission to help me - to help me try and find out why they killed my mother’ (CT/00506: 4). Later in the testimony, Kewana asked the TRC to help her lay her mother to rest, ‘... my wish from the Commission is that my mother be buried where she was born’ (CT/00506: 17).

The role of individual testimonies in the construction of a nationalist discourse is clearly powerful. Their representative function is visibly exploited in the context of retelling, as they are used to support the public face of the democratic “rainbow nation”. One testimony, that of a white policeman, is identified by Alex Boraine as an example of the diversity of national history, in a possible pre-emptive strike on public perception that whites could not be victims of apartheid. In his introduction to the speaker Boraine links the individual narrative specifically to that of the nation, stating the Commission to be ‘very grateful that you have come to tell your story, because all these stories are part of the whole fabric of South Africa which we are trying to unravel’ (GO/0135). The story thus becomes framed by a nationalist agenda, and the contemporary moral coding of the present (unravelling) is imposed on the policeman’s narrative to imply that the past is making way for the new nation. The ensuing testimony, which recalls vividly events that took place in 1988, expresses the perceived shift in nationalist rhetoric, the witness stating that ‘as we are now within the transparent and new South Africa more of these incidents are now revealed...Justice is an element of it as well. But forgiveness is ultimately to say you give people the chance to change’ (GO/0135). This testimony separates the concepts

of forgiveness and justice, suggesting initially that they are not the same thing, but also implying in line with TRC rhetoric that forgiveness is the way forwards.

## 2.11 Testifying to Trauma

Testifying to trauma in this manner connects past, present and future, and demonstrates the ongoing impact of the past in the present, offering an interpretation of it as that have not yet been laid to rest. The testimony rarely attempts to lay the past to rest, rather relives it in the present. Many survivors place the trauma of the past on a temporal continuum with the present and future, again testifying (like much post-apartheid literature) that the past has not been laid to rest. It is the structuring of the written Report that frames the text with the tools and lexis of resolution, for an entirely different political purpose. Survivors testify to the effect on their lives of post-traumatic stress disorder, and here are many references to ongoing physiological and psychiatric illness as a result, or ongoing effect of trauma: ‘my mother is still very sick from that day onwards. The trauma that she is going through is nobody’s business. Because she is suffering a lot when she heard – even we talk about Anton then she passes out’ (CT/ 00302)<sup>23</sup>. Another testifier describes the post-traumatic symptoms suffered by family members, ‘Sometimes when I try to sleep, it feels like something is evaporating from my head until I take these pills, and then I get better... My son Bonsile who was smeared with his father’s blood on him was never well again after that, he was psychologically disturbed... luckily he is still around even though he is psychologically very affected’ (CT/00624)<sup>24</sup>. Another survivor states,

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<sup>23</sup> This testimony was made by Mark Fransch, whose brother was shot at home. Fransch discovered his brother’s death via a newspaper report, and later visited the scene of the murder, testifying that ‘... we went to the house, that same day and I also saw parts of his flesh against the wall, his hair was c-part [*sic*] of his hair was also against the wall’ (CT/00302: 5).

<sup>24</sup> This testimony was made by Elsie Gishi, who told the story of the death of her husband. Jackson Gishi was murdered by the police during riots in the Zwelitsha township in 1976.

this time with regard to her daughter, ‘any sudden kind of loud noise would – would make her stop and shiver and tremble. Even the loud banging of a door that’s unexpectedly heard. The boys went through a similar phase I think, but just the – just probably the memory of – and the awareness at that time that – that people did not have access to or real access to complaining about things’ (CT/00302). In this testimony Snayer bears witness, through his reference to the generic ‘people’, to the wider disabling of communities under apartheid, inviting identification and continuing to evoke the notion of the collective and the individual: ‘I suppose for the older children I don’t know what kind of effect that had on them except that I think I am grateful that in some way it shaped their consciousness about – about where they were living, in what kind of country they were living and how – how the country should change’ (CT/00302).<sup>25</sup>

The “live” nature of oral testimony is also illustrated by the language structures contained in it: these also bear witness to the ongoing nature of the trauma that is spoken and demonstrate an unwillingness (whether conscious or otherwise) to use the kind of language that would suggest the trauma has been laid to rest. I will go on to argue that the structuring, or framework, used by the Report as a means of shock absorption, irons out the impact of this language by altering the audience’s expectations and perceptions of what is being read. While some of the grammatical inconsistencies in the transcripts of oral testimonies may be attributable to inaccurate transcription or translation issues<sup>26</sup>, the sheer number of cases where tenses are

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<sup>25</sup> Basil Snayer testified to the murder of his neighbour, Anton Fransch. His testimony is framed by the recollection of returning home late at night from a band rehearsal to find his wife baking cookies for his daughter’s birthday.

<sup>26</sup> As stated earlier, witnesses were able to testify in their chosen language, and testimony was simultaneously translated into all South African languages. All testimonies were transcribed and are

confused in a particular way indicates something more deeply unsettling to the cohesion of national “forgetting”. Many of the witnesses interject present tenses into their recollections of past events, implying that the event is re-experienced as it is narrated, and is recalled as if it were an event in the present rather than the past. This mode of recollection would not be consistent with an event that was assimilated into consciousness and catalogued into chronological memory, and implies an unwillingness to relegate the event to the past. Koto, from Mmbatho testified that:

While I was still in the van they drove around up to a shop, where another gentleman came around by the name of Makobe who put a gun on my forehead and said *I still can breath I am not yet dead...* I heard people screaming, one of them, *they call him Zero....* They said we were stone throwers, we burnt people’s houses, *we are stealing people’s cars* and that wasn’t the truth’ (Mmbatho, my emphasis, spelling and punctuation as original)

Mabalane, also from Mmbatho, similarly veers between present and past tenses when giving testimony. He testifies in the style of a news reporter who is commenting on a scene at which he is present:

After the service while the crowd was making its way home a Community Councillor, Stephen Mathloko, *allegedly drives his bakkie into this crowd*, badly injuring a girl. *Late that night Mathloko’s shop is stoned* (Mabalane, Mmbatho, my emphasis).

Mabalane continues with his testimony, telling the Commission how the girl is later killed, ‘They have poured her with paraffin or petrol gallon and she was burnt all over’. As the girl later died of her wounds, the use of the present perfect tense (‘they have poured’), the accepted usage of which is to indicate a situation or action in the past that is “incomplete” and has a bearing on consciousness in the present, is used to describe a past action. The use of this tense by the witness in this situation, can be read as a sign of the impact of trauma on the present, and illustrates that the murder is not regarded as a completed action in the past, as continues to have consequences in

the present. Another Cape Town survivor testifies regarding his experiences in 1976: the unpunctuated flow of his testimony bears witness to the way that past trauma intrudes on the present, as he testifies to the way that traumatic repetition can impose upon the established framework of language and have quite a specific impact on the audience:

I was coming home from work, it was during October/November of 1976, when I got into the township there was chaos there was children all over the streets. They were running away, it looks like they were running away from the police. This went on until November. That is now these riots. There are soldiers as well. When it was December we hoped that things were now subside – this particular Saturday, we didn't sleep that night.

In many cases, testifiers are unable to give the exact dates and times of traumatic events. Rather they locate them, like the woman from Auschwitz who testified to the collapse of the chimneys, within a broader frame of temporal reference or in relation to other events that happened at around the same time, proffering testimony within a revised chronology that is itself the product of trauma.

## **2.12 The Register of Reconciliation**

The Register of Reconciliation is another historical document that stands as a rich source of testimony to the traumatic impact of apartheid, and exists as a kind of “half way house” between the spontaneity of oral testimony and the entirely constructed nature of the Report. It is an online document and can be found on the TRC website. The first entry was made on 15 December 1997, after the closing date for submissions to the TRC, and the last on 29 December 2000. There are approximately two hundred and fifty entries on the Register that, in the words of Mary Burton the Commissioner who instituted it, was created as a symbolic commitment to the new nation:

The register has been established in response to a deep wish for reconciliation in the hearts of many South Africans – people who did not perhaps commit gross violations of human rights but nevertheless wish to indicate their regret for failures in the past to do all they could have done to prevent such violations; people who want to demonstrate in some symbolic way their commitment to a new kind of future in which human rights abuses will not take place.

We know that many South Africans are ready and eager to turn away from a past history of division and discrimination. Guilt for wrongdoing needs to be translated into positive commitment to building a better society – the healthiest and most productive form of atonement’ (Register: Introduction).

The Register is only available online, which shapes its potential audience in two ways. On the one hand its usability is limited to those who are computer-literate and have access to a computer and the Internet. On the other, the choice of media internationalises the Register, avails its contents to an international audience and turns it into a global statement about attitudes to the past. There are entries to the Register from people either from or resident in Argentina, Australia, Britain, Canada, France, Holland, Israel, Nigeria, Norway, South Africa, the United States and Zimbabwe, which opens up the South African past to the rest of the world in a manner that invites comparison with Glasnost.

The process of contributions to the Register varies from that relating to testimony to the TRC in several ways. Testimony is written, rather than oral, so there are opportunities for it to be edited before it is submitted to a public audience. Unlike submissions to the TRC hearings, entries to the Register are not restricted to those who have been seriously violated in the past, or even to those with no direct experience of apartheid. While approximately 70% of the entries are from South Africans, some of these are exiles and expatriates, who have in many cases been living outside the country for a number of years. The remaining 30% are from the range of national backgrounds identified in the previous paragraph. Their entries

range in purpose from articulation of personal experience of either South Africa<sup>27</sup> or apartheid, to apologies for direct or indirect complicity with the apartheid state<sup>28</sup> and simple expressions of solidarity with the TRC. While most of the contributors either have direct experience of apartheid or are members of the South African diaspora, the majority of the forty-five entries from the United States are from American students who have taken a high school course in South African history. Other international responses broadly support the South African model for democratic transition. The testimonies vary greatly in terms of length and style: some are highly literate, polished, articulate and even poetic, whereas others bear the signs of profound discomfort with written communication, are sometimes terse and abrupt, expressed awkwardly and sometimes even painfully.

Yet many of these narratives share common features of style, language and content. Many of the entries take their cues from Mary Burton's introduction, responding to her assertion that 'guilt for wrongdoing needs to be translated into positive commitment for building a better society' (Register: Introduction), by offering confessional-style pleas for forgiveness. Others follow the structure offered by the hearings themselves, which enables them to place past actions within a political context and present their deeds as concomitant with the moral vacuity of the past, before seemingly seeking amnesty for their actions. Doris Gardner prefaces her statement with 'having been born in 1940', highlighting the impact the apartheid state had on individual consciousness (Register: 11). Marthali Brand's entry is framed by

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<sup>27</sup> Some contributors have been sufficiently moved by short visits or periods of work in South Africa to contribute to the register, and have not necessarily lived there or experienced the apartheid regime directly.

<sup>28</sup> Some of these stories are from South Africans who served with the SADF or the SAP, while others apologise for not resisting the policies of the apartheid state.

her explanation ‘as I was born in the seventies’ (Register: 11). The vast majority of entries testify to the lack of active opposition to apartheid by the individuals concerned. Peter S. Rosmarin’s testimony, which appears on the opening page of the register, is typical in the way that it expresses ‘regret [for] my inactivity in not objecting to the human rights abuses of my fellow South Africans’ (Register: 1). The more poetic prose of Dr Merle Friedman similarly acknowledges the damage done ‘not only by “perpetrators”, but also by us, the “bystanders”’ (Register: 1). Blame, then, can be identified as part of the procedures of both reconciliation and justice. Some witnesses, like Colin Glen, place the responsibility for their actions with contemporary political rhetoric. In stating that he ‘was influenced by the propaganda of the government of the time’ (Register: 2), his testimony like that of many others illustrates the reciprocity between the subject and the nation in the past. The pledges made by people to do more, and to change their relationship with the nation demonstrate rupture with the past and place new emphasis on the autonomy of the individual within the post-apartheid nation.

Andries William de Villiers’ testimony reaches further back in time. In it he reclaims and rewrites his South African identity by placing his life within a litany of generations of immigrants, ‘I descend from Krotoa whose people watched van Riebeeck come ashore in Table Bay in 1652. I descend from Swiss, Dutch and German mercenaries... I descend from Huguenot refugees... I descend from slave women like Angela Bengale... I descend from an Englishman’ (Register: 11). De Villiers’ testimony constitutes reclamation of his subjectivity and agency as a South African whose identity, or personhood, and place in chronological history have been occluded by the broader racial identifications engendered and privileged by apartheid.

As Anne McClintock suggests, 'all stories of genesis are stories of political power': in stating the lineage of his own genesis in litany form de Villiers enters the political authority of his own self-representation (McClintock 1995: 300). Through repetition, his identity intensifies, continually asserting and reasserting his identification as different from the perpetrators of apartheid. The Deleuzian concept of 'intensity' outlined in Difference and Repetition is useful here for, through the presentation of a series of 'pure' differences between himself and the nation of the perpetrators, de Villiers creates both an artistic and human sensation of himself as other to the Afrikaner nation.

The Register gave him the opportunity to state in public for the first time, through the construction and rhetorically intensified presentation of his genealogical narrative, who he is and from where he comes, and for this to be witnessed and logged in national historiography. The need for a chronology that precedes apartheid is apparent (and is also a feature of postapartheid novels such as The Rights of Desire that will be discussed in Chapter Three), as is the need to locate the postapartheid self within a multiracial history, and one that reflects the social structures of the new moral order. The terms of de Villiers' self-identification are indicative of a profound need for historical affirmation and belonging, and are couched in the terminology of racial and national categorisation, the terms by which the new nation is renegotiated. The nature and mode of his testimony appears to support McClintock's argument that testimony is a means by which individuals can make sense of themselves and their stories through establishing their identity in relation to fixed points in the past: these then function as anchorage points for the reconstruction of identity (McClintock 1991: 218). De Villiers' need to construct his own point of origin mirrors the national desire

to rewrite the originary point of the present: notable he rewrites his perception of his social identity at the same time that he rewrites his relationship with the national past.

The Register also offers an unedited space where it is possible for experiences of apartheid other than those that fit into the dominant racial dynamic to be shared in a public domain. David Valentine's entry, for example, testifies to the fact that race was not the only site of discrimination and as such injects the possibility of multiplicity and difference into the problem and solution proposed by the TRC, thus having a destabilising effect. His testimony describes the exilic consciousness that was engendered by past oppression, cataloguing his perception of the sense of a national imaginary and characterising his position as being further distanced from the imagined centre. In this way his testimony to the range and consequences of the oppressive discourses that operated in South Africa provides critical historical documentation. As a homosexual who sought exile in New York, Valentine's testimony explicitly links the history of racial discrimination in South Africa with the prejudice and exclusion that he faced as a result of his sexuality:

As a deeply closeted gay man, too, I was frightened as much by homophobia as I was by the agony I witnessed around me. These things are connected in my mind...the deepest crime of a system of oppression, I think, is that it oppresses each single soul; it squashes love, passion and commitment, and thrives on the particular fears it manages to instil in each creature it has damaged. It is the sum of these fears and this pain that was the horror of apartheid, the addition and multiplication of agonies that made it seem unbearable (Register: 6)

Valentine's testimony highlights the complexity of relationships to apartheid. In identifying himself as a gay man 'frightened by homophobia', and openly connecting the nature of this oppression with the broader 'agony' endured by South Africa's non-white population under apartheid, he identifies with its victims. However, by

clarifying his identity as a white male, the structures of the apartheid and postapartheid societies align him, superficially at least, with the subject position of the oppressor. His position within the national power matrix is made more complex by his decision not to serve in the South African army on the grounds of conscientious objection. Valentine goes on to testify to his insecurity regarding national belonging, describing his choices as 'limited' and exile to be his 'easiest option'. Like the testimonies discussed earlier in this chapter given to the TRC by individuals like Mxenge, that reflect dissent to its processes as a profound alienation from the national imaginary (that can be likened to a kind of ideological exile), Valentine's narrative draws attention to the sense of national belonging that is presented as desirable by the TRC. Physical exile detached him emotionally from his national identity, and effected a profound feeling that battles 'remained unfought and therefore still painful'. This sense of non-resolution runs counter to the TRC's purpose, and is reflected in the fictional and autobiographical works that are the focus of Chapters Three, Four and Five. Valentine's disclosure of his sexuality enables him to embrace one aspect of his identity within the context of the new nation, although this displaces him from a wider national belonging. He states, in words that echo those of Charity Kondile and Victoria Mxenge, that he has 'the pain of not being part of the New South Africa, of being in another place that has become home'. He testifies to the difficulties inherent in reconciliation as a social process, claiming that, paradoxically, a form of violence lies at its heart 'reconciliation is a hard word because it means giving up something old and familiar, and accepting something new and strange... Reconciliation is a battle too, a fight to accept the dark bits of ourselves while avoiding guilt, self-hatred and smallness' (Register: 6).

The Register enables David Valentine's story to be witnessed and to claim a place along with others in a revised version of documented national history. His testimony allows him to publicly state his desire to identify with the consciousness of the new nation, and to align with other witnesses whose stories similarly refute the dominant narrative of the past. David Ravenscroft served in the SADF, stating: 'I was in the defence force conscripted in 1983. Obviously I did patrols in the locations in the unrest periods and I want to say I hated every moment of it' (Register: 3). This writes individual voices into the centre of the national script, with the dual effect of positioning the individual within the collective and demonstrating that the collective is made up of individuals (and therefore offering possibilities for disharmony and heterogeneity as means of resisting the unified perspective of the TRC), and deconstructs apartheid as an all-pervasive force. George Meyer Place offers partial deconstruction of the role of the church in apartheid, 'being a minister now, I am ashamed to have been part of a group... which proclaimed an unjustifiable gospel to the civilian population of South Africa at the time' (Register: 2). Reinette van Rooyen acknowledges the part the use of derogatory interpellations played in the emasculation of the black subject under apartheid, 'I deeply regret being part of a culture where mature men and women were referred to as "the girl" or "the garden boy"'. I also regret being part of a culture where Black men and women were forced to address whites as "master" and "madam" – even having to address young children as "master" or "miss"' (Register: 7).<sup>29</sup> Her testimony draws attention very poignantly to regret as a theme of the confessional narratives that characterise the Register, whose focus is on attitudes and emotions regarding the past rather than the recovery of empirical facts and information.

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<sup>29</sup> For further discussion of apartheid and emasculation see Chapter Four.

Continuing the theme of regret, some testimonies use the space of the Register to make very specific apologies and personal acknowledgements. Although these are unlikely to ever be seen by the person to whom they refer, in the sense that they are stated in public for the first and probably only time, they are witnessed and contribute to the process of healing in the perpetrator. Daniel du Plessis, for example, writes that ‘On behalf of my family I want to apologise to our servants for ill-treating them, especially to the family of the woman known by me as “Liesbet”’ (Register: 2). Andre van Deventer remembers a friend who was shot, ‘I could have been there for Pro and should have been more involved’ (Register: 9). The expression of personal and political regrets gives way in many cases to promises of commitment to a future that is perceived as different. Pledges range from the spiritual and the emotional to the practical. Many of the testifiers adopt a quasi-biblical model of confession leading to atonement; others offer a more pragmatic physical or material commitment to the New South Africa. Sonja Laden, a South African living in exile in Israel, highlights the symbolic function of the register and draws attention to the link between externally recognised symbolism and the validation of a new nation, ‘I believe that symbolic demonstrations of authority such as this register will be imprinted in history, and should be held in the highest esteem by the rest of the world’ (Register: 1).

### **2.13 The Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

The texts of oral testimonies form the basis of the published Report of the TRC, and illustrate the paradox of truth and reconciliation that lies at the centre of its activities. As a published, selective document it can be seen to pass jurisdiction on which memories of the past should survive: and as memories are being used as the basis for the construction of a new national imaginary, in so doing it also impacts on the shape

of the future. The Report is a testimonial document that has been presented as an authoritative addition to national historiography, its responsibility being ‘to explore a part of that landscape [of the past] and to represent the truths that emerged in the process’ (Report 1: 4). It supports the section of the TRC’s mandate that required the recovery of personal memory as a means of contributing to a unified national historical memory: yet, as already discussed, personal memory cannot necessarily be equated to empirically accurate memory. Laurence Kirmayer asserts that the reconstruction of past events within the therapeutic dynamic is not based solely on factual memory that might ideally (although never can) record or repeat the past and is conventionally associated with its documentation, but also relies heavily on the contribution of semantic memory. Semantic memory, usefully considered as the reflection of the unstable unconscious, adds “missing” details to a reconstruction, imparting ‘new meanings and connotations to a past event’ (Kirmayer 1996: 177). The form that these take may be dependent on the context of reconstruction, and upon the moral parameters constructed by the TRC as the institution of reconstruction. Traumatic events are by definition not readily lent to empirical verification or interpretation, being more subjective and ongoing than other past events or versions of history, so to a great extent, the content of testimony has to be accepted rather than proven as truth. So, testimony as a performance, then produces a form of truth with a higher value than empirical truth. The TRC can then be seen to adapt the popularly accepted notion of truth to suit its own purposes.

Given, then, that the measure of the TRC’s success (the acceptance of the “truth” of testimony as a means of moving on, cited in the Report as ‘there can be no healing without truth’) it is paradoxical that the delivery of this is contingent on the

performance mode which is not necessarily truthful in the empirical sense. However, only the empirically verifiable part of the truth that can be recovered of a traumatic past is included in the Report and used as the basis of a new national identification. National identification is only based on partial or incomplete truth. It results in part from the large-scale mediation employed by the TRC, and brings large sectors of the population who had been previously marginalised to centre-stage in terms of national belonging. This effectively means that the people who are either offering or verifying the kind of truth accepted by the TRC as a contribution to national identity are doing so from the perspective of what Ato Quayson terms an 'ex-centric' position (Quayson 2001: 191). His neologism characterises the position of the subject who, paradoxically, assists in the construction of national identity from the position of having been excluded from it. Those who had previously been isolated from the narrative of South African national history were forced to observe the production (and reproduction) of history from the national margins. In apartheid South Africa, the relationship of an individual subject to the national "centre" was constituted primarily in terms of a racialised relation with the state's dominant social narrative, one which instigated and incorporated various degrees of trauma depending on the racial classification of an individual. The state's official historical discourse was determined by the architects and enforcers of apartheid, with those excluded from power also being excluded from historical representation. The TRC aimed to restore the previously excluded, or ex-centric, voices to the centre of the national historical narrative.

Yet, the contributions that these voices make have come from the perspective of experience that is characterised by trauma. This means that the new nation is partially

defined, and identified, by trauma itself and by the relationship between the present and a traumatic history. The particularity of South Africa's traumatic past is a product of the relationship between individuals and the state, and it is this dynamic that is written into the new national narrative. Paradoxically, though, the TRC has to centralise trauma through its narration in order to expel it from the centre.

Benedict Anderson's theory of the imagined community usefully emphasises the way that the modern nation is founded on shared historical tradition, and Ernest Renan similarly states that a nation is 'the outcome of the profound complications of history' (Renan 1990: 19). Yet, as it is established that the national past in South Africa is based on trauma, then any contemporary perception or documentation of this past is based on unsettled memories and marginalisation. This is evident in several of the testimonies that have been given to the TRC from groups marginalised in various ways from the national centre. The testimonies of women that focus on the material, domestic, conditions of life under apartheid and the stories of individuals such as Mark Valentine, highlight the multiple forms of marginalisation that operated during apartheid and continue to do so under the liberating regime.<sup>30</sup> Because the new political and national imaginary that the TRC has contributed to is based on trauma and is as such a product of what Quayson terms 'the restless disorder of memory' (Quayson 2001: 194). Thus the new imaginary can be seen to have limited empirical foundation.

The answers to some of the questions that contributors to the TRC asked in order to establish factual, or forensic, truth about the past, such as 'where is the body of my

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<sup>30</sup> Discussion of women's roles within the ANC is developed in Chapter Four.

father?’ can be found in the testimonies of perpetrators who applied for amnesty. As a product of apartheid, these are also traumatic narratives. Many of these testimonies can be linked to specific victim testimony, as the TRC attempted to cross-reference stories in order to provide as much verifiable “truth” as possible. The majority of testimony to the TRC, however, took the form of non-falsifiable narratives from victims of apartheid (non-falsifiable in the sense that they could not be corroborated and cross-referenced against the stories of other witnesses). Often these people were telling their stories for the first time in a public space. The narratives are characterised by deep personal loss and trauma, and often recall events from up to thirty years previously. This makes them difficult to verify, both because of the effect of time on memory and because the stories are produced from the unconscious rather than the psyche in the present.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report adds another dimension to the process of documenting South African history. It was presented to President Nelson Mandela on 29 October 1998 and represents the “official” state-sanctioned record of the processes and findings of the TRC. It is a written, summative text, and uses written language as a means of verifying and creating the national community that it represents, and attempts to clarify and restructure the past through the imposition of order and chronology (McClintock 1991: 218). The Report comprises five volumes, each focusing on a different aspect of the TRC’s work. Volume One provides the background to the TRC and offers an overview of its aims and processes. Volume Two catalogues repression and resistance to apartheid, focusing on specific cases such as Samora Machel’s assassination and the activities of the Mandela United Football Club, as well as broader investigations into the role of

secret and biological warfare and secret state funding. Volume Three offers regional, statistical profiles of human rights violations within South Africa, and will be the main focus of this section of analysis, along with the summative fifth volume of the report, that states the final findings and recommendations of the Commission. Volume Four presents the findings of the special and institutional hearings that uncovered the roles played by the Church and legal, military and health institutions in the construction and maintenance of past discourses. It categorises and aggregates the past experience of individuals, organising it into chapters, sections and subsections. In so doing it exploits the editorial process to guide the reader's journey through and responses to the text as a collective entity.

The historical narrative that is presented in the Report differs most crucially from raw testimony and entries to the Register in that it is the version of the past that is sanctioned by the government. As a selective and summative document it presents a very different version of the past from those records that stand as the predominantly unedited (or self-edited) testimonies of individuals. Volume Three of the Report categorises the human rights violations of apartheid by region, type of violation and year of occurrence, with each section of the volume placing a particular violation with a broader historical context of political violence in that geographical area. While the Report employs submissions from individuals as primary sources, it also places statements from political parties alongside transcripts from court hearings and inquest findings in its attempts to position testimony to violence against individuals within a broader contemporary context. The 21,296 statements submitted to the Human Rights Violations Committee were categorised in such a way that they could be analysed by data processes in order to produce a table of statistics (Report Vol. 3: 3). The

statistics, for example, broadly demonstrate that most human rights violations occurred in the Durban area, and between the periods 1990 to 1994. Most victims who died were aged between 13 and 36 and tended to be male: women were more often ill treated or tortured. These aggregates provide useful statistical breakdowns of crimes committed during apartheid, and by contextualising the crimes within a broader political context, support the TRC's mandate.

Each regional profile follows the same format, so for the purposes of this analysis I will look only at the first section that focuses on the Eastern Cape, which is also the geographical setting of the novels Disgrace and The Rights of Desire that are analysed in Chapter Three. The Eastern Cape was the heartland of ANC resistance to apartheid, and as such was the symbolic cornerstone of the TRC. The section outlines shifts in state policies regarding detentions and sentencing, and intersperses these more objective accounts with extracts from relevant testimonies. The extracts selected tend not to offer emotional responses to past trauma, rather providing evidence, in the form of personal accounts, to back up alleged trends and methods. Short extracts are taken from testimonies in support of specific points, but the emotional effects neither of the events nor of their telling is taken further.

The extracts of testimony provide “snapshots” of selected aspects of specific events that are interwoven to comprise the national narrative. The reader is not offered information regarding the outcomes of specific cases; rather testimony is employed to characterise historical periods and to humanise the relevant statistics. Personal stories are interwoven with fragments and overviews of official history, the purpose of the

extracts is exposed as a means of illustrating and exemplifying national trends and forces that have contributed to a national history, rather than the publication of individual historical narratives. Testimony is included if it supports a broader assertion, or if it supports other testimonies that have been made.

While this seems to use testimony to construct the basis of a verifiable and substantial national history, it is also important to look at what has been left out when the impact of the past upon the nation is considered. The slippages and omissions that occur between personal testimony and the documentation of official history are as crucial to the reconstruction of the past as what is included. The gaps in oral testimony speak to the imagination of the listener in terms of the individual stories and lives that may not fit into the national construction. The Report, as the aggregated anthology of written testimony erases these gaps in the process of editing: the “gaps” in the written report are conscious omissions rather than the pauses and ellipses of unconscious interruption. Their traces are not evident in the text in a manner that might provoke a response from the imagination of the audience: rather the editing process has created the impression of a smooth and closed text. The burden the texts carry is that of representation and aggregation which is demonstrated through the silences rather than the words stated.

The most glaring omissions are those relating to the testimonies of women, whose experiences receive dedicated space of just seven pages in the five volumes of the Report. The Report lacks a detailed focus on issues like gender and sexuality, still sites of oppression under the apartheid regime, yet not privileged in the same way that racialised domination was. Unlike the Register of Reconciliation the Report does not

offer spaces to testimony such as that of David Valentine, which proffer additional perspectives on the multiplicity of oppression meted out by the state. It would seem, then, that the TRC is unable to process or accord official space to issues other than those that relate directly to race, and that any kind of dedication to other issues would somehow detract from race as the primary focus. Race “works” as a source of past inequality that can be demonstrated as resolved by the TRC’s procedures, and thus signifies a clear ending to the past. Issues pertaining to factors such as gender and sexuality, conversely, carry over into the new national imaginary that is theoretically free of racialised power structures.

Omissions also manifest themselves in more subtle ways. Accounts of torture focus almost without exception on the physical forms and consequences of violation, which are verifiable via their physiological traces, police records or witness corroboration. This supports the summative motivation of the TRC, which seeks to redress the past, close it, and move into the future. It is not socially or politically expedient to leave the questions of the past open, or to produce a document that implies conclusions are other than definite.

In terms of its physical format and layout on the printed page, the Report’s methodology serves to link and structure seemingly disparate events into a continuous historical narrative, in contrast to the more erratic nature of oral testimony. Smaller, or less widely publicised, cases are linked into bigger events, which may have been prominent in the national media and function as a referential locus for the national, or regional, population. The accounts of these selected cases become pivotal points in the text, positioned as markers for subjective identification. For example, several

smaller cases are linked both chronologically and thematically to the assassination of Victoria Mxenge, a prominent anti-apartheid lawyer (Report Vol.3: 229). In this way the TRC can be seen to edit testimonial versions of the past to create a continuous story, using a collective hindsight and overall editorial purpose that was not available to the individuals concerned at the time of testifying. As history is aggregated and cross-referenced, the margins that have been centralised by the act of giving testimony are themselves marginalised by the body of the text that they have helped to construct. Oral testimony, conversely, stands as a more democratic tribute to the past, its performer taking centre stage and the witnesses being drawn in from the margins as interaction and identification progress in a situation where individual voices are heard as individual contributions.

The Report reproduces for a wider public audience those stories that can be established and verified as fact and retains, or rather reconstructs, a narrative order as it recounts past events. At the point at which the text is read, it is already complete, has literary form and is sequenced. As a written text it utilises the conventions of literary form to reduce the space, or gap, between the account of a traumatic event and the capacity of witnesses to absorb that knowledge (Langer 1991: 19). In other words, it transforms the fluid and subjective reality of trauma into a reality that is fixed and assimilable. It is written for the reader, its structure symbolising closure rather than presenting the traumatic narrative of writerly catharsis that is evident in a number of post-apartheid novels and autobiographies.<sup>31</sup> The text of the Report is not a spontaneous repetition of a traumatic event, and does not represent or relive the past

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<sup>31</sup> These fictional and autobiographical texts will be the subject of the following three chapters, and contrast with the narrative style of the TRC Report will be made more explicit at this point. I am thinking specifically of the disjointed autobiographical narratives of Antjie Krog and Rian Malan, and the overtly postmodern prose of Zoë Wicomb exhibited in David's Story.

in the vivid and sustained detail that characterises oral testimony. It does not characterise the individual voices as its oral counterpart might, neither does it attend to the silences and the spaces in what has been spoken. Rather than flowing from the consciousness of the survivor, the text of the Report stands as the polished prose of a distanced narrator. The purpose of the Report is to disseminate information to the reader from a perspective of knowledge and moral certainty regarding the past. As such, writerly perspective and intention inform the structure and content of the text.

The Report contains references to other countries and comparisons with situations outside South Africa that validate and further contextualise the stories of the apartheid past. In doing this it constructs an external point of reference for the events that are cited, referencing them (like Coetzee's Disgrace that is discussed in Chapter Three), within a much wider history and topography of human rights violations. The Report contains precise details of places, times and dates, in this sense differing from the photographic precision that characterises the recall of oral testimony, which may be able to recall an event in vivid detail but be unable to place it into a narrative relationship with other events. It reconstructs the past systematically and methodically, exorcising past injustices through the imposition of order and methodology. The events that the report acknowledges, and textualises, are placed into chronological order as they are self-consciously assimilated into the written history that constitutes the memory of the nation.

However, what lie behind this ordered discourse are the events that have not been acknowledged by the national consciousness, whose diversity and lack of resolution could fragment the integrity of the “healed” nation. The focus of the new nation is

predominantly upon the racialised nature of past oppression, because this is the source of the most tangible and most evident trauma of the past, which has been visibly “cured” through the democratic election of an ANC government and the publication of the stories of past oppression. If the Report can present to the nation stories of the past that are now “closed”, in that their facts have been verified by both victim and perpetrator, and forgiveness has been sought in the mode of national reconciliation, then this symbolises closure of the national past and facilitates national transition. On the other hand, if fragments of stories and marginalised narratives, like that of David Valentine, are left open and unassimilated, then the wounds of the past are left open and public, and stand as obstacles to national transition. The success of the TRC’s intervention is measured in terms of civil peace initially and most publicly, this being signified in part by the inclusion of testimonies that directly refer to individuals having experienced closure and resolution to their own trauma.

While the identity of modern nations may be founded on the past, the new South Africa is founded on what is forgotten, or omitted, from its documented history as well as what is remembered. The TRC aimed to construct a common memory for the nation, which foregrounded selected or “approved” knowledge of past events in such a way that they became a focus for national identification. The Register of Reconciliation, the Report of the TRC and oral testimony delivered to public hearings held by the TRC present truth and knowledge about the past in different ways. The Report aimed primarily to create stability for a nation that has evolved from trauma. In linking truth and knowledge to the printed word, it attempts to close the gaps present in oral testimony, and in so doing to close the questions that remain unanswered. Testimony, conversely, thrives on gaps and silences, which in many

cases speak louder than words. The texts of oral testimony, entries to the Register of Reconciliation and the Report all represent stories told about the past, that are based on fact, and that contribute through different means and interactions to the reconstruction of national history. Bearing this in mind, subsequent chapters of this thesis will examine a range of autobiographical and fictional texts published since the end of apartheid in order to analyse their contributions to rewriting history.

## Chapter Three

### Representing the Past in Post-Apartheid Fiction: Disgrace and The Rights of Desire

*Though historical narrative may approach the truth it is not, of course, the truth. The reality of the past can only be partially represented and one of the ways to do so – perhaps the quintessentially human way – is to organise it into narrative structures (Nigel Penn).<sup>1</sup>*

*The truth, so history tells us, has never harmed any state, but concealing it certainly has. It has not been the honesty of writers, but rather the persecution of them that has threatened to undermine governments since time began (Johann Jacoby).<sup>2</sup>*

#### 3.0 Introduction

Historical narratives, or stories about the past, are the medium sought by the TRC in order to help the nation and its constituents move into the future. Testimony is seen by many as the dominant mode of historical narrative in the South Africa characterised by the TRC, but it is not the only mode of telling that disseminates the past into the public domain. The individual testimonies given to the TRC both in public hearings and in writing may appear, alongside the final published report of the TRC, to be the most “obvious” and culturally pervasive form of historical representation, and can also be seen to have influenced fiction writers.<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, this section of the thesis will build on my earlier focus on the testimonies and Report of the TRC as national, or “official” healing methodology, to focus on works of post-apartheid fiction and autobiography. These textual representations of the past are potential loci of reconciliation that circulate in the domain of popular culture, rather than a purely

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<sup>1</sup> This quotation is from ‘The Fatal Passion of Brewer Menssink’ by Nigel Penn.

<sup>2</sup> This quotation was obtained from the main permanent exhibition at the Jewish Museum in Berlin.

<sup>3</sup> I refer to the ‘culturally pervasive’ nature of testimony here in the sense that the media coverage accorded to the TRC was huge, with testimonies broadcast on SABC radio as well as a range of television channels, with saturation of the public’s consciousness a specific aim.

institutional sphere. In this chapter I will examine the historical function of two of these novels, Disgrace by J M Coetzee and The Rights of Desire by André Brink to suggest that these novels perform a role that remains related to that of earlier testimonial texts, whilst also having a very different function. I will use Hayden White's theory of metahistory to argue that these texts "trouble" the metanarratives of South African literature: in using a range of literary devices to recast the expected order of things and make social points, they muddle the expectations and responses of the audience, whilst also drawing attention to the power of literature. In the Hegelian sense, the novels function as 'ruses of history': the individual characters in the texts are emblematic of history, rather than being the actors of past events, and as such play out different aspects of the past.

### **3.1 Fiction as a Response to Trauma**

White argues that there are a certain number of narrative types and that all historical writing fits into one of these modes. According to White, historical writing combines historical data itself, the theory with which the data is explained and a narrative structure for its presentation. This structure defines the distinct nature of a "historical" explanation of the past, and comprises the metahistorical dimension of historical works (White 1974: ix). In discussing the connection between history and fiction, White contradicts the popular perception that the fictional writer invents facts that are merely "found" by the historian to emphasise the extent to which historians also invent stories about the past. He argues that, by arranging accounts of events into a formal narrative, the historian affords an event coherence by making it part of a narrative sequence. The way in which he suggests historical events are converted into a story that is accessible to its readers and become what he terms 'a *completed* story'

distinguishes it from what would otherwise be merely ‘a *followable* story’ (White 1974: 6, my emphasis). The completed story, which offers the possibility of synoptic judgement, uses a range of narrative devices in its construction. White identifies these as: explanation by emplotment, explanation by argument and explanation by ideological implication (White 1974: 6). Each of these strategies is split into a number of sub-categories. For example, explanation by emplotment is divided into four modes (Romance, Tragedy, Comedy and Satire) each of which carries certain generic characteristics, or codes. In terms, say, of the endings of texts, Comedy would be expected to end with reconciliation and a healthy, harmonised society: Tragedy, conversely, would end with a sense of negativity and resignation with characters working within imposed limits (White 1974: 7). So, in a similar manner to Benjamin’s shock absorption theory, the forms of texts can be seen to prepare their readers to have certain expectations of content and meaning. In a specific post-apartheid South African context, a reader may have an expectation, for example, of a literary text to portray a harmonious multicultural society, with a past that is characterised by white perpetrators and black victims. The novels that are the focus of this chapter, I argue, disrupt the expected metanarrative of the post-apartheid literary text to disturb any socially conciliatory possibilities that these texts might otherwise possess.

Coetzee and Brink withhold any notion of a comfortable metanarrative structure in Disgrace and The Rights of Desire. The multifaceted refusal of these authors to represent the materiality of the apartheid past in a recognisable and coherent narrative form denies the element of closure to the traumatic events of the past that would otherwise permit moving on. In withholding a conventional narrative structure they

take the reader outside a preconceived comfort zone, and withhold the “shock absorption” facility (in the sense of Walter Benjamin’s analysis discussed in Section 2.4) that is offered by texts such as the Report that adhere to established structural conventions. In their repudiation of what Sam Durrant terms the ‘teleology of redemption’ (Durrant 2004: 49), the linear process via which narration can lead to reconciliation, they to some extent honour Adorno’s behest that the writer/artist should remain silent in the face of a traumatic history. Their partial silence, pertaining to certain elements of the lived reality of apartheid, is an effect of the writers’ inability/refusal to represent that past in established textual forms. These are not able to contain certain events from the past, such as the trauma of the materiality of apartheid. This crisis of representation, which manifests itself differently in the two novels compared in this section, effectively denies the restoration of wholeness to the past that was sought by the TRC as a means of reconciliation. It is in this act of historical relation that the texts take on a far greater function as works of remembrance. Like Walter Benjamin’s angel of history, which refuses to turn the past into a coherent historical discourse yet would like to make its dissembled elements whole again, these texts look simultaneously to the past and the future. Their composition represents the trauma of the past, yet in their refusal to placate and lay it to rest they also configure resistance to the vision of reconciliation promoted by the TRC, which founds the future nation in terms of a quite specific, reconciled relation to the past.

I argue that the primary means by which each novel withholds representation, or “translation”, of the materiality of apartheid is by insisting that apartheid is “read” or understood within the wider historical contexts of colonialism, as its discursive

antecedent, and textual depiction of the lived realities of the post-apartheid nation. This has the effect of creating a silence around the daily realities of apartheid itself, which represents a breakdown in the cohesion of historical narrative and thus indicates the trauma of that particular historical period. Disgrace by JM Coetzee, whilst clearly functioning on many levels as a national allegory in Fredric Jameson's sense (and there are several "signposts" in the text that point the reader in the direction of this interpretation) makes recourse (primarily via references to the Holocaust) to an international history of racialised oppression, whilst maintaining its narrative present firmly in the post-apartheid era. André Brink's The Rights of Desire offers a fictional interpretation of an existing historical text ('The Fatal Passion of Brewer Menssink' by Nigel Penn, which discusses eighteenth-century slave life in the Eastern Cape).

It uses the literary device of the spectre (the ghost of a young slave, Antje of Bengal) to explore South Africa's history of slavery and colonialism from a post-apartheid perspective, representing the material circumstances and construction of apartheid only through fictional flashback rather than a more direct mode. Brink uses Antje's ghost as a means of representing the past (specifically the origins and horrors of racism in the Eastern Cape of the eighteenth century). He manages, however, to include a supernatural dimension without rendering the novel a ghost story or magical-realist text, and without it taking on the qualities of a postmodern metafictional narrative like Zoë Wicomb's David's Story which is the focus of Chapter Four. Disgrace also incorporates a spectral dimension in terms of characters who impact on the protagonists whilst remaining peripheral and slightly other-worldly: the three rapists (only one of whom has a single name, Pollux, which has a

mythological rather than genealogical connotation) and the unnamed prostitutes who flit into Lurie's life, symbolising the economic exploitation of the apartheid years without presenting it directly. These characters, like the German uncle in Coetzee's Boyhood, discussed in Chapter Five, write other material worlds into a contemporary fictional text, giving the reader supplementary information and possibly making the texts accessible to a wider range of audience responses. If this strategy is considered in the light of Edward Said's mode of contrapuntal reading that is outlined in Culture and Imperialism, which affords the reader an understanding of more than one aspect of a text's social world, then the spectral characters can be read as the counterpoint to the main narrative. The juxtapositioning of main narrative and its counterpoint enables the text to take on a revisionist function and to do greater cultural work than if just one material position were represented (Said 1994: 79).

The novel form offers the writers additional opportunities to confront the past, representing it in a way that offers the possibilities of memory to the reader. For example, the fragmented or discontinuous narrative that is broken by the appearances of the spectre in Brink's text represses continuity, or memory, meaning that the reader is constantly reminded of the unhealed past. "History" is also written into the novels in the form, for example, of Lucy Lurie's rape in Disgrace, which is written as a historical product, the flashbacks to episodes of Magrieta Daniels' biography in The Rights of Desire, and the restructuring of both male protagonists' employment circumstances. A fictional representation of trauma such as The Rights of Desire enacts both personal and wider historical trauma. It links the experience of the individual subject with that of the collective or, in this case, national identification. The representation of trauma through fictional writing, by making the focus of trauma

less direct, restores the dimension of fantasy to a past that might otherwise be too “real” or too painful to bear scrutiny. It does not constitute “fact” or official discourse so, perhaps in a similar way to oral testimony, invites a response on a more imaginative and subjective level.

The TRC aimed to construct a collective memory and shared response to the past through narrative. Fictional texts also have the ability to do this. Jill Matus argues that the relationship between history and memory can provide a mechanism for the construction of collective memory (Matus 1998: 17). The collective memory that is invoked through shared response to a fictional text can, she states, become in its own right ‘a powerful cultural authority’ or, to invoke Benedict Anderson, a means of creating an imagined community (Matus 1998: 17). History, she goes on to state, is ‘never in the past’, its repercussions and consequences continuing to ‘generate the effects of the present and ... to shape it’ (Matus 1998: 17). Coetzee and Brink bring historical events into the present in different ways through the form of the novel. The relationship between text and reader bears clear similarities to the invocation of collective, imaginative responses to oral testimony delivered to the TRC.

By representing a fairly distant past in the novel, going back almost three hundred years in history, and drawing parallels between this past and the present time, Brink writes the origin of the present trauma in South Africa at this point. By rewriting a past that is this distant he is able to reinvent that basis of tradition within the context of the moral frameworks of the present. The story of the trauma of the slave Trijntjie of Madagascar, on whose biography The Rights of Desire is based, and her compatriots, is resurrected as the story of Antje and Magrieta in the context of the

prevailing morality of the TRC. In the present the values of confession and reconciliation prevail over the secrecy and revenge that dominated the past, although the novel affords some interplay between the two. Antje represents the polarity of reactions to political change in South Africa, on one hand seeking vengeance, on the other peaceful settlement. The interplay between past and present that frames the characters of Antje and Magrieta enables Brink to expose some of the flaws of the modern nation. Looked at in this way, the present and past can be seen as mutually interdependent, containing aspects of one another, and invading the other in terms of both physical and psychic presence. Coetzee introduces history into the text of Disgrace through Lucy's rape and surrounding events, and through social reconstruction, manifested largely through employment issues. Like the characters and time periods in The Rights of Desire, Coetzee constructs characters as responses to the past. His portrayal of Lucy and her father represents conflicting attitudes to political and economic change, as do the novel's two settings in Cape Town and the rural Cape hinterland.

One function of novelists such as Brink and Coetzee is to give voice, to bear witness to that past and to lay it to rest in a place 'where it can no longer haunt future generations' (Matus 1998: 2). Matus goes on to make the case that the fictional writer (as distinct from the historian who reports what might be considered as "facts") can play a useful part in abreacting the past, for 'in revisiting and reactivating traumatic experiences, they may provoke readers to the vicarious experience of trauma and act as a means of transmission' (Matus 1998: 3). The character of Antje of Bengal is based on the life of Trijntjie of Madagascar, whose life is explored in some detail in 'The Fatal Passion of Brewer Menssink'. Brink makes his reference to Penn clear in

the postscript of the novel. What he does not clarify, however, is the extent to which Penn's essay centralises the narrative of Brewer Willem Menssink, Trijntjie only playing a marginalised role in the text. When the two texts are read together they offer a contrapuntal approach to that historical period.

The basic facts about the life of Trijntjie of Madagascar can be gleaned from Penn's essay. She was originally sold in Madagascar in 1696, when she was eight years old. She was bought by Elizabeth Lingelbach, the wife of Willem Menssink, in the Cape in 1709. Trijntjie of Madagascar died in 1713, aged 25. On March 2, 1713 she was sentenced following trial 'to be bound to a pole and strangled with a cord until dead. Her body was then to be fastened to a forked post and exposed to the air and the birds of the heavens until it disintegrated' (Penn 1999: 58). She had been accused of a lengthy affair with Menssink and of attempting, on more than one occasion, to murder Elizabeth Lingelbach in collaboration with Menssink and other slaves. It is not known whether Menssink attended her trial or execution, but Penn states that he went on to become an object of scandal in Cape society and ended his days on a farm subsidised by his sister (Penn 1999: 67).

In drawing so closely on Penn's essay as a source, Brink's writing is true to historical specificity. His characters, like Coetzee's, are a response to South Africa's past and present. This fidelity, Matus argues, 'urges readers to see how identities are constructed temporally, relationally and socially' (Matus 1998: 3). Fictional narratives offer a means of not only imagining a particular historical period, but also a means of "reading" the subject into a specific past context. In so doing, they challenge received

versions of the past, replace specific memories that may have been overlooked and integrate the reader into that past. The author who sees history as traumatic history bears witness, as storyteller, to that past, and can therefore play a role in the revision of perceptions of the past. Matus argues that the writer who assumes this role can construct a 'counter-memory of the past that... [can] revise the foundations on which the narratives of history were built' (Matus 1998: 1).

The "raising of the past" in an imaginative way such as through fiction clearly has implications. Coetzee and Brink both use characterisation to construct a counter-memory that runs counter to existing South African metanarratives. Coetzee does so by offering insight into the psyche of the historically determined "perpetrator".

Through his use of prostitutes Lurie reawakens the exploitative nature of the labour relations prevalent under apartheid, yet is also presented as a victim. Lucy, a victim of interracial rape, is seen to be living in rural poverty, and the material conditions of life for her rapists and their family and associates are presented as being correspondingly ambivalent. Brink, similarly, represents Olivier as racist and victim of racial violence, and also offers insight into the lived materialities of Magrieta and Antje. His construction of the apocryphal Tessa which will be detailed in Section 3.7 additionally undermines the transparency and integrity of the TRC if Tessa is read as representative of the "new" white South Africa, for she is seen to construct a range of different stories to suit her circumstances.

The main spectre haunting Brink's text, Antje of Bengal, is a composite character which operates on different levels of signification. The events that Brink attributes to her are not an exact replication of documented past, but rather are based on the

biographies of Trijntjie of Madagascar and the other eighteenth-century slaves, taken from the pages of Penn's historical narrative. Penn's history is a mixture of documented source-material and imaginative construction, so it seems reasonable to assume that Brink's novel departs still further from what can be established as empirical truth. Coetzee blurs the boundaries between victim and perpetrator, using sex as a metaphor for social relationships in general to present Lurie as both victim and perpetrator. Through this device, he destabilises the reader's clear perception of social status, and offers insight into the mind of the perpetrator that denies the audience a clear-cut response. Both texts focus on the inner machinations of the traumatised subjects, who have been imagined by the authors from a basis of available evidence. In support of this practice, Matus states that the historical novel is able to access areas of history that would otherwise be off limits, asserting that 'the imagination can penetrate areas that seem erased from history' (Matus 1998: 17). In the sense that the imagination may sometimes be the only way of accessing the interior memory of the subject, narrative fiction can be seen to supplement existing historical knowledge. It is also a means of ordering history through the imposition of narrative structure and of providing an organising framework for the events of the past.

### **3.2 Fiction and the Nation**

Fiction writing in South Africa has long been linked explicitly to the nation. The ANC recognised the importance of the role of texts and their authors in the construction and dissemination of national consciousness, and co-opted writers and artists into the liberation struggle following the Soweto uprisings in 1976. In a post-apartheid context, the publication in 1994 of the Draft National Cultural Policy clarified what

were deemed to be the moral responsibilities of writers and artists regarding the construction of the “new” nation (see Section 5.1). However, the connection made between writers and nation possesses an underbelly which is made especially obvious when the nature of the critical attention that met the publication of Disgrace in 1999 is noted. The ANC levelled particularly fervent negative critiques at the author through an oral submission to the South African Human Rights Commission’s Inquiry into Racism in the Media, making a direct link between the novel and the South African nation-building project as personified by the TRC. Jeff Radebe (at the time political head of the ANC’s Policy Department) delivered the party’s criticisms to the Inquiry. The allegations were widely considered at the time to be the thinly veiled views of Thabo Mbeki himself (Bridgland 2003: 1). Radebe contended that Coetzee had represented the post-apartheid nation as racist, violent and corrupt, and that he had implied the best solution for white South Africans wishing to protect their personal safety and resources would be to leave the country (as did Coetzee himself, who emigrated to Australia following the critical reception of his novel, amidst rumours that his distress following a burglary comprised part of the reason for his move). Most specifically, Coetzee was criticised for his fictional portrayal of the rape of a white woman by three black men, which the ANC read as a direct and racialised attack on national unity, the goal of the TRC.

In the “new” South Africa, multiculturalism, as the political manifestation of the moral impetus of the TRC, took rhetorical precedence over the old practices of differentiation that were essentially based on race. The ANC passed legislation (in the form of the Draft National Cultural Policy) which offered funding to writers and artists to promote this vision of national unity (see Section 5.1). Radebe went on to

state in support of this view that ‘what was astonishing was that white writers did not go further and portray Mbeki as a criminal and an HIV-positive rapist of white women’ (Radebe, cited in Bridgland 2003: 1). It is notable that, encompassed in this comment, is one of the main issues that at the time detracted from the public “success” of the new nation: rape as a particularly emotive example of rising crime levels in South Africa. I will go on in Section 3.8 to discuss sexual relationships as a metaphor for social relationships in general: when this is applied to the incident of the rape in Disgrace, the reach of Coetzee as social critic becomes more apparent.

The nature of the criticism of Coetzee emphasises the link between the body of the individual and the concept of the modern nation as a corporeal entity. This can be seen through Radebe’s reference to Mbeki, and in the sense that a literary portrayal of violation of the female body was read as a metaphor for an infringement of the founding principles of the modern nation (in that rape violates the healthy social relationships that are symbolised in literature by a functional sexual relationship). However, it is through this analogy as well as more general aspects of structure, characterisation and subject material that Disgrace engages most directly, and controversially, with much of the procedure and philosophy held dear to the TRC. The outcome sought by the TRC represents a stage in the linear teleology of nationhood, whereby the “new” South Africa constitutes a clean break with the past. Two questions are raised by the ANC’s assertion that Disgrace bears a potentially corrosive relation to national unity. The first issue is whether or not the text presents the nation in a manner that could disrupt this notion of continuity. The second, probably answered when it is remembered that Coetzee’s work carries great prestige and that Disgrace rose to great international prominence (and attracted most criticism)

when its author won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2003, relates to why the text could be considered to influence the public image of the nation to such a great extent.

### **3.3 Literature and Witnessing: Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello**

Two realms of experience and expectation are joined when trauma is represented in a form generally associated with aesthetics, or even possibly the provision of pleasure. The fictional representation of trauma exists at the point where the aesthetic and the political merge, enabling political work to be carried out through an art form. In his review of The Castle in the Forest, Norman Mailer's biography of Hitler and Stalin, Coetzee states that an aesthetic writer is able to offer a different kind of truth about people's lives from a historian, and states: 'if we want to know what went on in those two child souls, we will have to turn to the poet and the kind of truth the poet offers, which is not the same as the historian' (Coetzee 2007: 2). Coetzee goes on to state his belief that fictional inquiry enables us to 'gain access to the truth of our times', implying that the role of fiction in the construction of truth exceeds the supplementary (Coetzee 2007: 2). In Elizabeth Costello Coetzee explores the relationship between fiction and a traumatic past more visibly and theoretically. In the essay entitled 'The Problem of Evil', the protagonist Elizabeth Costello has arrived to speak at a conference in Amsterdam, where she has planned to give a talk addressing the problem of evil in the world. Coetzee juxtaposes the material and fictional worlds through her decision to base her presentation on the living author Paul West whose book, The Very Rich Hours of Count von Stauffenberg, tells the story of an attempted assassination of Hitler and offers graphic imagery of the Holocaust, a theme which notably recurs in Disgrace.

Coetzee uses the character of Costello, who bears a strong biographical resemblance to himself, to explore the historical role of fictional texts. Through her lectures, he raises questions regarding the literary representation of evil, criticising the storyteller who deals with this subject matter and in so doing 'releases evil into the world' (Coetzee 2003: 167). He uses this scenario to illustrate that it is West as author who is responsible for the release of the stories (which are not of his own experiences) into the public domain. This is what invites the challenge from Costello regarding whether the author has the right to make this kind of decision, it having social implication. Costello functions as a device through which Coetzee is able to question whether individuals can own stories, or whether they become public property on entering the public domain. In interrogating whether West, or indeed any other fictional writer, has the authority to bring the horrors of the past back to life through fictional representation, Costello queries:

What was it inside her that rose in revolt against West and his book when she first read it? As an initial approximation, that he had brought Hitler and his thugs back to life, given them a new purchase on the world. Very well. But what is wrong with that? West is a novelist, as is she; both of them live by telling or retelling stories; and in their stories, if their stories are any good, characters, even hangmen, take on a life of their own...

The answer as far as she can see, is that she no longer believes that storytelling is good in itself, whereas for West, or at least for West as he was when he wrote the question does not seem to arise... (Coetzee 2003: 166-7).

Costello's view on the issue is clearly expressed: that in certain circumstances silence has greater value than storytelling. And it is through the construction of her character as an assertive creator of literature that Coetzee compares storytelling to a genie in a bottle:

When the storyteller opens the bottle, the genie is released into the world, and it costs all hell to get him back in it again. Her position: better, on the whole, that the genie stay in the bottle...

The wisdom of the similitude, the wisdom of centuries (that is why she prefers to think in similitudes rather than reason things out), is that it is silent on the life the genie leads shut up in the bottle. It merely says that the world would be better off if the genie remained imprisoned (Coetzee 2003: 167).

The central thesis of Costello's presentation is that 'certain things are not good to read *or to write*' (Coetzee 2003: 173, original emphasis). Coetzee acknowledges the potential impact of a text upon its audience, conceding through antithesis that in some circumstances, perhaps, the content of a text can be beneficial to its reader. By extension then, it is implied that certain texts therefore have beneficial social properties. Costello condemns West for laying 'claim to the suffering and death of those pitiful men', stating that 'their last hour belongs to them alone, they are not ours to enter and possess' before concluding that 'death is a private matter; the artist should not invade the deaths of others' (Coetzee 2003: 174). This latter comment implies that the fictional text, because it can access the imagination of the reader, is able to transgress the boundaries between private and public in much the same manner as the trauma it represents.

The post-apartheid novel, then, can function as an act of memory: but this memory is perhaps limited by human capacity and the psychological and political desire to repair the damage of the past. In Elizabeth Costello, the protagonist comments on the role that the novel can play in remembering, stating its limitations as well as uses in her acceptance speech for a literary award, possibly pre-emptive of the Nobel Prize for Literature that Coetzee would go on to receive in 2003:

Despite this splendid award, for which I am deeply grateful, despite the promise it makes that, gathered into the illustrious company of those who have won it before me, I am beyond time's envious grasp, we all know, if we are being realistic, that it is only a matter of time before the books which you honor, and with whose genesis I have had something to do, will cease to be

read and eventually cease to be remembered. And properly so. There must be some limit to the burden of remembering that we impose on our children and grandchildren (Coetzee 2003: 20).<sup>4</sup>

The TRC also limited the 'burden of memory' it imposed on the nation, by restricting its public procedures to a duration of two years.

In a subsequent period of reflection, after her talk has been badly received, Costello privately concludes that:

Paul West was only doing his writerly duty. In the person of his hangman he was opening her eyes to human depravity in another of its manifold forms. In the persons of the hangman's victims he was reminding her of what poor, forked, quivering creatures we all are. What is wrong with that?' (Coetzee 2003: 178).

In acknowledging the responsibility, or duty, of the writer to disseminate trauma as a learning experience for others, Costello subscribes to the view that fiction, and in a wider sense art in general, can forge a link between the personal and the public, and acknowledges the impact that the creative individual can have on the wider community. If memory is indeed a burden, in the sense that it can cause individual or collective pain in the present, then the capacity of the fictional text to alleviate this can be regarded as a moral role. Additionally, the suggestion is put forward that writers have a kind of moral authority in society.

This perhaps goes some way towards explaining the necessity, or compulsion, to represent trauma in literature. As something potentially disruptive, painful and destabilising, the representation of trauma may in some ways seem contradictory to

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<sup>4</sup> Coetzee was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for *Disgrace* on October 2 2003: *Elizabeth Costello* was published on October 16 2003, so was clearly written before Coetzee was confirmed as prize-winner. There have been many suggestions that the character of Costello is semi-autobiographical, as many aspects of her life overlap with Coetzee's own. Her focus on animal rights also echoes the subject of Coetzee's own latter publications such as *The Rights of Animals* and, of course, the animal imagery in *Disgrace*. Coetzee, however, gave only a minimal speech which referred very simply to his mother when he received his award: perhaps Costello's stands in its place.

the artistic role of fiction, although literature has long been adopted as a political tool in South Africa. The writer, however, requires an audience. Costello's presentation highlights the novel as a reciprocal, or participatory act, in which the reader and writer play a joint role in responding to events. The writer leads, but is dependent on the audience to fulfil the act. She laments that 'she did not want to read but she read: violence was done to her but she conspired in the violation. *He made me do it*, she says, yet she makes others do it' Coetzee 2003: 181, original emphasis). Here, in language that echoes Derrida in 'The Violence of the Letter', Costello supports the philosopher's argument that all writing is a form of violence (in that, as a form of spectacle, it violates the original event that has inspired it). By implication, then, so too is reading (Derrida 1997a: 113-127). Costello goes on to highlight the power wielded by the author over the reading subject: when the social implications of this are considered, it becomes clear that the writer is presented as being able to participate in the resolution of social trauma. Costello's statement is especially pertinent in that, like many of the characters in post-apartheid fictional texts (such as the Luries in Disgrace and Olivier and MacFarlane in The Rights of Desire), she constructs herself simultaneously as a victim and perpetrator of violence. This deliberate construction of ambiguity blurs the distinction between victims and perpetrators made by the TRC, and presents resolution to past events as being harder to achieve. She identifies herself as the object of violence (in relation to the trauma that West presents through fiction): but, in the way that she acknowledges the dialogic relationship between reader and writer and between speaker and audience, she accepts responsibility for participating in the textual representation and dissemination of trauma and violence.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Again, this echoes the scenario of oral testimony. See Chapter Two.

Although violence may be contingent in the process of creating literature, it is precisely because it turns an event into a spectacle that fiction enables a form of witnessing: the reader is able to gain an understanding of something that s/he could not witness personally. The reader witnesses trauma through the imagination rather than having to be physically present at the site of its occurrence. This carries implications with regard to agency. For example Brink, as a contemporary white South African male, tells the stories of four women. One is much younger than him, two are from a different racial background (and therefore have entirely different experiences of South Africa's social history), and the other dead. These stories are told alongside the story of a white male of approximately his own age.<sup>6</sup> He also emphasises the connection between the situation faced by women and by blacks, perhaps using gender as a metaphor for race in the novel in much the same way that Coetzee uses the experiences of women and animals. In an interview given to Libby Brooks in 2002, Brink states that he 'became more and more interested in the parallels between the situation of blacks and the situation of women in the country... One can't make comparisons glibly, but they were two groups against which all the big guns were aimed' (Brink, cited in Brooks 2002: 1). He goes on to explain that 'since the beginning of the 90s it became evident that racial oppression wasn't the only form of oppression and that South Africa is, like most ex-colonial societies, very much a patriarchal set up. Once one becomes a writer involved in – terrible word – social conscience, you inevitably go for the underdog' (Brink, cited in Brooks 2002: 1). The historical representation of the underdog, or the outsider, is one of many major similarities between the texts.

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<sup>6</sup> This is not the first novel in which Brink has featured a female protagonist. He assumed a female narrative voice for the first time in Imaginings of Sand. The Other Side of Silence also features a female narrator. While Brink has taken some criticism for assuming a female voice, he has cited this as a technique with which to draw parallels between the situation of blacks and women, and to highlight the multifaceted nature of oppression in South Africa (Brink, interviewed by Libby Brooks 2002:1).

### 3.4 Superficial Similarities: Disgrace and The Rights of Desire

The two texts analysed in this chapter have several features in common, as do their authors. Andre Brink and J.M. Coetzee are both white South Africans, of a similar age. Brink was born in 1935, and Coetzee in 1940. Both are academics as well as writers of fiction, and both have held professorial posts in literature-related fields at the University of Cape Town, Brink as Professor of English and Coetzee as Professor of General Literature (until his departure for Australia after the publication of Disgrace). Both writers use fiction to address matters pertaining to the contemporary nation as well as its past. Under the strictures of apartheid, they wrote allegorically and indirectly about the injustices of South Africa's racialised history and both have used their post-apartheid writing to address the shortcomings of the South Africa that is characterised by the TRC. This is done through a mixture of allegorical and realist writing styles, both of which feature in Disgrace and The Rights of Desire.

Disgrace tells the story of David Lurie, an old-style professor of literature at the University of Cape Town, whose professional role is diminished as a result of the implementation of post-apartheid positive discrimination policies. Following the failure of his two marriages and a series of unfulfilling relationships with prostitutes, he embarks on a predatory relationship with Melanie Isaacs, one of his students. When their relationship is discovered, Lurie is dismissed from the university after he refuses to participate in a TRC-style committee of inquiry. He goes to live with his daughter Lucy, a homesteader in the rural Eastern Cape. During an attack on her farm, Lucy is multiply raped and Lurie injured. The novel's central drama features Lucy's discovery that she is pregnant as a result of the rape. She decides to keep the baby,

and Lurie divides his time between city and countryside, eventually seeking reconciliation with aspects of his past in a massive personal transition.

The Rights of Desire is the story of Ruben Olivier, a librarian whose position, like that of Coetzee's Lurie, has been "restructured" during the national transition to democracy. His wife is dead, his sons have emigrated, and he lives with an elderly housekeeper in a house haunted by the ghost of a young eighteenth-century slave woman, Antje of Bengal. He goes on to have a passionate relationship with his young lodger, Tessa Butler. The story of his turbulent interaction with Tessa is recounted alongside the biography of his housekeeper, Magrieta, and the narrative of a series of visitations from Antje of Bengal. The final scenes of the novel depict Tessa narrowly escaping being raped and Olivier injured whilst the two are out on a walk, and their final attempts at resolution.

Brink's novel, written in 2001, follows Coetzee's. I argue that some of the unanswered questions and part of the crisis of representation posed by Disgrace are addressed by The Rights of Desire, although the latter text goes on to pose its own questions, or crisis, regarding representation of the apartheid years. Immediate parallels between the settings of the two novels are obvious. They are both set largely in the Eastern Cape and the narrative present of both texts is within the first decade of the post-apartheid years. Like the earlier text, The Rights of Desire takes on the post-apartheid nation that is marked by international criticism for corruption, its HIV crisis, poor leadership and immense poverty. While Coetzee focuses on the relationships between individual characters and their experiences in relation to negotiating a future in a climate whose past has been reframed by the TRC, Brink revisits and interrogates

versions of history through his characterisation of the ghost of Antje of Bengal, a composite character based on information from historical sources. The primary factual source and allegorical frame of Brink's novel is 'The Fatal Passion of Brewer Menssink' by Nigel Penn, an account labelled by its writer as the 'historically revealing story' of Brewer Willem Menssink and his relationship with the slave Trijntjie of Madagascar.

The Rights of Desire is haunted by the restless ghosts of other texts as well as events from the past, leading to a multiple fictionality that lends significance to the stories being told. One of the more significant intertextual sources is Disgrace by J M Coetzee, itself a traumatic novel that deals with fragmentation, inequality, rape and violence within a post-apartheid setting. Several parallels can be drawn between the two texts: both feature older men who have lost their jobs following policy changes after the end of apartheid and who desire younger women. The men are at a point in life that could be termed a crisis, or a time of self-reckoning. The female objects of desire are themselves similar, being overtly sexual, dark-haired, creative and involved with other men. Both novels feature a violent attack on the protagonists, although with different outcomes. And, both novels are framed by the rhetoric and discourse of post-apartheid truth and reconciliation.

While the texts are clearly very different, in addition to these basic observations, they are similar in that they both feature:

- a. the Eastern Cape as a setting

- b. a central white male character of a similar age to the author (in the case of Ruben Olivier, exactly the same age) whose employment circumstances are altered following post-apartheid economic restructuring
- c. a central male character who uses prostitutes and has an additional predatory relationship with a younger woman
- d. the situation of another social group as a means of writing allegorically about blacks in post-apartheid South Africa (for Coetzee, dogs and women, for Brink, women)
- e. a structure that revolves around sexual violation, in which sexual relationships (and, by extension, rape) can be read as a metaphor for wider social relationships
- f. personal incidents as a means of commenting allegorically on TRC procedures
- g. a version of reconciliation at the end of the text
- h. integration of past and present through plot, characterisation and structural devices.

### 3.5 The Eastern Cape as Setting

The Rights of Desire is set entirely in the Eastern Cape, as is the second part of Disgrace. The Eastern Cape bears its own specific history in relation to colonialism and racial domination. This, as discussed in earlier chapters, has been acknowledged by the TRC, and carries significance in the organisation of TRC hearings. It is the site of the first European colonisation in South Africa, and also the location of the opening of the official reconciliation process. The Sunday Express reviewer of The Rights of Desire states that, as a text set in the Cape that refers to events that have occurred there in past and present, it is 'a book rooted in a place and a time where collective

reality is taking a battering and where people are having to rely on themselves to make sense of what is coming into shape' (Brink 2001: back cover). This endorsement draws on the dominant moral consciousness and apparently popular need, institutionalised by the TRC, to 'make sense' of time and events. It makes a clear reference to the "collective reality" (in itself a highly problematic term and concept) of post-apartheid South Africa that is characterised by trauma and a perceived need to come to terms with it. Yet the statement would equally fit the early eighteenth century, the novel's other setting. The Eastern Cape was the area that witnessed the first racialised political struggle as colonial domination was fiercely contested.

It is in this way that the novel links two historical periods characterised by trauma. Although Europeans first settled the Cape in 1652, with the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck, it was the early 1700s that saw the establishment of the frontier. Political tensions developed as what had been a small East Indian settlement expanded into the huge Cape colony. The economy of the colony relied on slavery and this quickly established a society based on racialised power relations, with the predominantly Indian slave classes occupying a position socially subordinate to their Dutch colonisers. Penn, Brink's "historical" source, demonstrates that the manner in which these slaves worked and lived their daily lives, often in extremely close proximity to their owners, linked the private and public domains and facilitated the very rapid establishment of negative differentiation of race, gender, sexuality and labour. Power hierarchies, once established, gained momentum through their easy traffic between the domestic and social spheres, and helped blur the boundaries between individual and collective representation.

In contrast, all the events of Disgrace take place in post-apartheid South Africa, in the years between 1994 and 1999, and are divided between the urban setting of Cape Town and the rural surroundings of the Eastern Cape. The dual setting of the text engages directly with the shifting values of the nation in transition: the metropolitan opening section very clearly functions as an allegory of the TRC, whereas the narrative shift to Cape Town's rural hinterland explores the shortcomings of the new regime. On one level everything has changed; on another, daily life remains the same although the new society largely exists without the rule of law. The lawlessness of the post-apartheid society is symbolised by the breakdown in boundaries regarding sexual relationships that leads to Lucy's rape and her father's involvement with Bev Shaw, not a match he would previously have contemplated. The parallel in The Rights of Desire appears in Olivier's attempts to seduce Tessa, her relationship with Zach and her attempted rape towards the end of the text, as well as the sexual relationships that Antje of Bengal was forced to participate in. If read as a sequel to Disgrace, Brink's novel perhaps offers the historical explanation for Lucy's rape, adding another layer of certainty to Coetzee's suggestion, through Lucy, that it is a justifiable act of revenge. It is in this way that Disgrace portrays a sequence of events that makes recourse to scripts of reconciliation alternative to those presented by the TRC. In an allegorical sense Coetzee's characters and settings arguably represent developmental stages in a nascent national consciousness. Cape Town and Lurie stand for the old nation, reluctantly dispossessed to make way for the new, the society of the university and the Isaacs family for the values of the TRC, and the Eastern Cape for the lived materiality of the post-apartheid nation, which eschews the codes of reconciliation in favour of solutions that function more pragmatically within given historical and socio-economic circumstances.

The Rights of Desire is set in Papenboom, in the rural Cape around two hours' road journey from Cape Town. The majority of the novel's events take place in Olivier's house, which is the locus of much of his personal and familial history, as well as that of the main characters. His unhappy marriage was lived out in the house, he conducted his extra-marital affairs there, his daughter was conceived and miscarried there, and it is where, despite pleas from his children, he has decided to live out his days. It is also where his housekeeper, Magrieta Daniels, has lived for almost forty years, regarded by Olivier as a 'fixture', along with the ghost of Antje of Bengal (Brink 2001: 3). Given that sexual relationships in both texts can be read as a metaphor for social interaction, and that the setting of the Cape functions as a historical microcosm for the extremes of social relationships in South Africa, it is fitting that both novels focus on sexual relationships within this setting. The house in Papenboom is the focal point of Olivier's relationships with women, through which the text's experiences of trauma and resolution are articulated. As in Disgrace, the setting of the house is where issues relating to sexual misunderstandings and violations are worked through (although in The Rights of Desire the near-rape of Tessa occurs outside the house, its aftermath is worked through within its walls), including Olivier's infidelities and the various stages of his relationship with Tessa.

### **3.6 "Reconstructed" White Males**

The central characters of both texts experience exclusion from their employment as a result of post-apartheid positive discrimination and economic reconstruction policies. In both cases a change in material circumstances functions as a catalyst for a dramatic series of events as well as leading to psychological and emotional introspection. The

texts “identify” the main characters in the opening paragraphs, rooting them very clearly in time and place. Both main characters bear considerable biographical resemblance to their creators. Brink was born in 1935 and the first page of The Rights of Desire states Olivier’s age as being 65. Olivier, a librarian with a strong interest in classical music, shares with Brink a strong and defining interest in literature and the arts. Lurie is slightly younger than Coetzee, cited as being 52 when the text was first published in 1999 (Coetzee was born in 1940), yet other biographical details are comparable. Additionally Lurie, like Coetzee, is Professor of Literature at a Cape Town university.

For both protagonists, the restructuring of their posts is something accepted reluctantly. Following the closure of the Classics and Modern Languages Department in which he was professor prior to what Coetzee terms ‘the great rationalisation’, Lurie has (in a an ironic take on the limited nature of communications in the rest of the novel) been made adjunct professor of communications (Coetzee 2000: 3). When describing the communications courses that Lurie is expected to teach under the new arrangements, Coetzee sets up tension between the pragmatic solution to national historical issues as symbolised by the TRC, and the psychic resolution sought by many individuals. This is represented by Lurie’s hostility to the coldly rational university-stated aims of the communications module, and his true opinion (which, ironically, remains uncommunicated) ‘that the origins of speech lie in song, and the origins of song in the need to fill out with sound the overlarge and rather empty human soul’ (Coetzee 2000: 4).

Ruben Olivier's post at the library is terminated, in language redolent of Coetzee's reference to rationalism, 'about a year after the last elections – that famous moment when we were supposed to become a democracy' (Brink 2001: 8-9). He is asked to train a young black recruit, and then forced to take early retirement at the end of the induction period as part of a new system in which 'dead wood had to make way for the previously disadvantaged' (Brink 2001: 9). His relationship with the social groups marginalised under apartheid, such as those of races other than his own, remains unnatural after this point, perhaps illustrating his lack of acceptance of the new national structures. He refuses to let a room in his house to a coloured couple, feeling that their presence might 'upset the balance' although they 'seemed quite decent people' (Brink 2001: 6). His relationships with women are commodified, and reduced to assignations with prostitutes, which he compares to 'ordering takeaway pizza or pasta' (Brink 2001: 22). He makes judgements about the homeless and alcoholics, failing to stop and help an injured man lying in the road near his house, not knowing it is his neighbour Johnny MacFarlane, and justifying his actions by rationalising: 'A drunken bergie, I thought... How could anyone in his right mind be expected to stop – after dark – to deal with a drunken and possibly abusive vagrant on the road?' (Brink 2001: 14). Lurie expresses similar resistance to the "New" South Africa in Disgrace, purchasing sexual relationships and expressing a range of negative judgements about his daughter's life in the Cape, as well as rejecting the structures of the post-apartheid nation that are manifest in the university's committee of inquiry.

### **3.7 The Spectre of the Past in The Rights of Desire**

In The Rights of Desire Brink elects to represent the past through the ghost of Antje of Bengal, the spectre acting as the narrative's contrapuntal beat, there in the

background of every event. The figure of Antje allows Brink to evaluate the present in relation to the past. The links between past and present in terms of racialised power dynamics in The Rights of Desire suggest that, while the two historical periods represented in the novel do not conflate, they do impact on one another. The prevalent moral climate of the present enables the identification of common features from the past, such as a focus on race, and a need to address violence. This creates a relationship between the moral consciousnesses of past and present that is based on shared experience, although this is not necessarily based on “truth”. In constructing what he terms a ‘historical narrative’ (Penn 1999: 1) Penn has attempted to impose a chronological narrative form onto this violent and disorderly past. For while Penn acknowledges that his historical narrative ‘may approach the truth’, he goes on to state clearly that ‘it is not, of course, the truth’ (Penn 1999: 5). Despite acknowledging that the imposition of linguistic and narrative structures alters the meaning of a past event as it is brought into contemporary awareness Penn does, in an attempt to recoup some legitimacy for his approach, caution against ‘the extreme post-modernist conclusion that history is simply another form of fiction’, claiming that ‘narrative history is a distinctive and legitimate form of discourse which bestows meaning on events but does not thereby lose touch with real events or the truth value of its factual statements’ (Penn 1999: 5). While historical narratives are not entirely arbitrary, as they draw on documentary sources, in this instance the criminal records of the Dutch authorities, they remain subject to intervention in the form of interpretation, here that of the creative historian. Brink is not a historian: he is a novelist who characteristically draws either upon historical events or events that seem as if they might be historical to construct the plots of his fictional works.

Brink's rewriting of the story of Trijntjie of Madagascar has a revisionist function that is not enabled simply by the fact that the work is based upon events from the past and in part has a historical setting. The means by which the past is represented in the present is crucial to its perception. In The Rights of Desire the reader is made aware of the past through the characterisation of Antje and the events surrounding her story. By constructing Antje, the means by which the past is represented, as a spectre Brink is able to portray South African historical memory as itself being haunted. Time is disturbed in the narrative because the past visits the present in a material form, demonstrating that time itself can be a vehicle capable of being haunted. The text can be identified in several ways as a narrative of historical trauma, and it makes a clear distinction between trauma and guilt. If trauma is the possession of the subject by the past to the point where active remembering is inhibited because of unassimilated traumatic flashbacks, then all of the characters in the novel are traumatised.

Trijntjie of Madagascar inspired Brink's Antje of Bengal. However, Brink's characterisation also contains elements of Penn's descriptions of other slaves. Details, for example, of the punishment of Titus of Bengal, a slave who was executed in 1714 for conspiring to murder his master, are identifiable in Antje's fate although are not attributable to the story of Trijntjie.<sup>7</sup> The severing of the right hand of executed criminals was common practice in the Cape at the time, so the details of Antje's end in this sense represent broader historical detail rather than one specific model. Brink's account of what happened to Antje's body following her execution differs greatly from Penn's. According to Penn, there was no evidence as to whether Brewer Menssink attended the execution of his lover, whereas Brink perhaps uses poetic

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<sup>7</sup> Titus of Bengal was impaled alive and his head and right hand severed before his remains were placed on a pole outside his master's house.

licence to place Willem Mostert firmly amongst the crowd that witnessed the hanging of Antje of Bengal. Similarly, Brink records the dismembering of Antje's body, while Penn makes no mention of this further violation. According to Brink, 'two days after Antje's execution, under cover of darkness, Willem managed to retrieve the dismembered parts of the broken, once beloved body, and returned to his home in Papenboom' (Brink 2001: 48) before hanging himself. Brink makes no further reference to what happened to the remains after this point: they do not reappear in any concrete form until the end of the novel, where their discovery and reunification symbolise both closure and resolution and a new beginning for Tessa and Olivier.

By focussing on a specific character from the past rather than a broader racial identification, Brink avoids essentialising the communities of the past. Moreover, by telling the story of an individual who could not and will not be able to speak for herself Brink documents a period that forms part of the national history, but crucially does not fall within the time period specified by the TRC. This has the effect, like that of individuals who cite their genealogy as originating from a point preceding apartheid, of broadening the history of trauma in South Africa out from apartheid. It demonstrates the human rights violations that fall within the historical period specified by the TRC to be a sequitur, or even consequence of earlier power dynamics, suggesting a function of history to be that "we reap what we sow". His revised version of the past includes events that have been forgotten or suppressed. The literary device of the spectre enables their reappearance and re-enactment. Through constructing what is effectively a counter-memory, Brink supports the assembly of a new and inclusive national consciousness that is based on a revised understanding of the past. As the history represented in the novel is based on unequal power relations,

the alternative memory suggested by the author of fiction makes it possible to subvert hegemonic narratives from that past, allowing the novel to stand as an overtly political act. Apartheid restricted what could be written, so even the act of restoring a voice to those aspects of the past that were not permitted as subject material for fiction is a political act. As a device, the spectre enables a text that counteracts the idea that history is the propaganda of the victors.

As shared tradition and cultural memory form a major part of perceived identity in the present, this revision becomes an important factor in the construction of contemporary consciousness. Jill Matus argues that a legitimised cultural memory is a prerequisite of self-possession (Matus 1998: 11). This is effectively denied during the processes of colonisation or enslavement. If Brink can restore memory through fictional representation, and in so doing “bear witness” to the events of the past, then identity can be restored as these lost memories are brought into the contemporary cultural space, and the present can be clearly seen as a consequence of the past. The fictional restoration of slave narrative into the present carries the dual function of retrieving the selfhood of those slaves and of their contemporary counterparts (in the novel represented through Antje of Bengal and Magrieta). Through the textual juxtaposition of past and present, then, the author is able to challenge the contemporary cultural relations that allocate power in post-apartheid South Africa.

It is through fictional narrative that Brink directly calls into question the verisimilitude of available historical documentation: in so doing he emphasises the fictionality of all histories including that approved by the TRC. In referring to the work of a fictional historian, Geoffrey Dugmore through footnotes and endnotes,

Brink uses the structures of fiction to emphasise its nature, especially through acknowledging in the footnote that most quotations attributed to Dugmore are in fact from Penn (Brink 2001: 307). Through a strategy similar to that employed by Coetzee in Elizabeth Costello he states that ‘even in the fullest and most recent published account of Antje’s life in Geoffrey Dugmore’s *A Sparrow for Two Farthings: Slavery at the Cape, 1657 – 1795* (Juta, Cape Town) there is little more than conjecture about her life; but it would seem that...’ (Brink 2001: 40). Brink’s narrative demonstrates historical “truth” to be questionable and unverifiable, thus questioning the truth value of all narratives. The Rights of Desire is peppered with allusions to the indefinite nature of his assertions, such as ‘one gets the impression that...’, ‘which leaves one free to imagine that’, ‘he must have..’, ‘there was something fishy about this, but it is difficult to get to the truth’ (Brink 2001: 40-41). Importantly, Brink establishes that, once Antje and Willem have embarked upon a sexual relationship that ‘we have no way of knowing... whether the passion was mutual or whether Antje merely submitted to the master’s exercise of what he clearly regarded as “his rights”’ (Brink 2001: 41). By highlighting the nature of what is not known about the past, Brink emphasises the fictionality of the novel, and at the same time demonstrates the uncertain nature of its source, as well as doubt regarding the power imbalance within Antje and Willem’s relationship. It is the moral consciousness of the present, defined by multiculturalism and the Christian-based conciliatory rhetoric of the TRC, that allows the reader to pass judgment on the events that are recorded from the past: the layers of textuality interact with one another to provide a new reading of the past.

Brink draws Antje into his story in a more central role than Penn, recentring women within the narrative of the past. This revisionist function is not immediately evident

though; Tessa questions the nature of historical knowledge and representation through her conjecture 'I guess all those historians were men', and subsequent observation that 'it's supposed to be Antje's story, but she hardly features in it' (Brink 2001: 51). It is at this point that the reader is encouraged to draw parallels between Tessa and Antje in terms of the catalytic effect they have had on Olivier's life. Tessa emulates the appearance patterns of the ghost, having fleeting but powerful periods of presence and absence in Olivier's life. When Tessa takes the room in his house, she disappears the next morning as suddenly as she has arrived, with Olivier left thinking that her presence 'may or may not have been my imagination' (Brink 2001: 50). Tessa is, though, aligned to Antje once she has seen her, and it is the link to the spectre that creates a bond between Tessa and Magrieta, an example of female solidarity that parallels the relationship between Lucy and Bev Shaw in Disgrace, following Lucy's rape.

The function of Antje, the spectre of the past, is clear in the novel. She represents the unassimilated trauma of South Africa's racialised past, standing both as a traumatised character in her own right, and for a broader unassimilated past. Tessa, then, stands for the secondary revision that whites have put into place in order to disguise the primary trauma. Antje is characterised as the victim of abuse meted out on the basis of her gender, her race and her social class, which caused her to be triply marginalized within the nascent Cape Colony. As a kind of "everywoman" figure, Antje of Bengal represents the trans-generational trauma suffered by women in South Africa, the non-white population, and the economically disadvantaged. The recurrent spectre of Antje is the most visible and readily accessible representation of past trauma in the novel. It is through her that Brink, as novelist, engages most directly with South Africa's

racialised and gendered past, and through her interventions that he attempts to reconstruct a point of origin for the more recent trauma of apartheid. He explores the contemporary implications of this through the story of Magrieta, the text's present-day slave character, who is responsible for telling many of Antje's experiences, taking on a ventriloquist function and becoming her mouthpiece in the present. The fact that Antje's story is told through Magrieta gives voice to the otherwise unrepresentable (in official discourse) voice of the contemporary slave: the necessity of voicing this through the literary figure of the spectre passes judgement on the limitations of fiction as a representative discourse.

Brink's characterisation of Antje, a multiply symbolic representation of woman, slave and racial other, testifies to a traumatic history. The spectre of Antje frames the novel with the issues of race, class and gender. Like the ghostly presence that haunts the novel's pages, these critical national issues from the past are presented as highly relevant to the present. Their trauma is inscribed on the restless body of Antje as they repeatedly disrupt chronology. Indeed Olivier's present only begins with their acknowledgement. As this process develops, a whole range of mutually interdependent identities is created in relation to Antje in terms of gender, sexuality, race and class. Olivier is a white male who desires women, and employs a servant. Tessa is aligned with Antje in terms of gender identity, but - unlike her predecessor - she has a more ambiguous relationship with her main predator. She is able to reject the sexual advances of an older man, and is able to resist some other sexual predators. In further contrast to Antje, Tessa is able to terminate an unwanted pregnancy, and thereafter to continue with a myriad of sexual relationships. In contrast to Antje and to

Brink's (and Coetzee's) model of the present as a consequence of history, she is seen to continue with actions that neither have consequences nor regard for the future.

Magrieta shares a gender and class identity with Antje, yet she enjoys economic privileges not available to her archetype. It is in this way that Antje can most clearly be seen to represent the interrelationship between categories of identity: it is not, for example, possible to understand issues relating to her gender without acknowledgement of racial issues or the economic basis of society. Matus' assertion that an identity that may initially be perceived solely in terms of gender or race is in fact a conglomeration of circumstances can usefully be applied to Antje (Matus 1998: 21). It is neither useful nor indeed really possible to regard categories of identity as discrete (while categories may be discrete, their distribution is not necessarily so): they are interrelated and applicable only within a specific set of historical and geo-economic circumstances.

Antje, as the spectre who is unable to be laid to rest until her past has been told and exorcised, is the embodiment of trauma. Her supernatural status enables her to represent the unassimilated trauma of present generations as well as her own, in a similar manner to Wicomb's characterisation of Dulcie that is discussed in Chapter Four. As established in Chapter Two, present trauma is a symptom of a past that maintains a hold on the affected subject in the present. As a ghost, Antje represents the power of the past in the present, whose final "laying to rest" has a catalytic effect on other characters. In The Rights of Desire, chronology is restored when Antje's bones are reassembled, and once this has occurred the literal as well as metaphysical intervention of the past into the present can be halted.

The timing of Antje's appearances in the text is pertinent, affording the reader opportunities to interpret the trauma of the past through the moral lens of the present. Antje's visit to Tessa immediately following her termination is one of her most meaningful hauntings. Most superficially, it could be regarded as a display of female solidarity. More meaningfully, it is a means of linking female experience across generations. It provides the opportunity for Antje to revisit the experience of her own miscarriage, and the memory of the baby created and lost at the hands of her master. Through the conscious repetition of the incident in the present, Antje, like Olivier, is able to lay to rest her own lost baby, in a kind of working-through. Interestingly, it is at this point that the character of Antje of Bengal most significantly differs from her model, Trijntjie of Madagascar. In a story that bears shades of the myth of Medea, the Trijntjie of Penn's narrative gives birth to an unwanted baby boy, who she tortures by various means before finally killing him (Penn 1999: 46). The fate of Trijntjie's son parallels that of the slave woman in Toni Morrison's Beloved, who kills her own child. While it would appear that slave infanticide was relatively rare, Morrison's story is based on the real-life story of Margaret Garner, a slave woman who murdered her child rather than see it become a slave, and in so doing resisted dominant power structures.<sup>8</sup>

Both Trijntjie and Tessa, however, elect not to bring up an unwanted child, or one whose continued existence would in some way symbolise their violation: Tessa of the twenty-first century opts for a termination, Trijntjie for the method most easily and safely available to her. On a material level, Tessa's act of resistance is against the

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<sup>8</sup> Margaret Garner killed her two-year-old daughter Mary in January 1856, following pursuit by Federal Marshalls. For further discussion of her case and the situation of slave women in general see Steven Weisenburger's essay 'A Historical Margaret Garner'.

power that Zach, the probable father of the child, wields over her decisions and actions: terminating the pregnancy without telling him is a means of her regaining some of that power. By textualising, and therefore repeating, Trijntjie's actions in a modern novel, Brink in some way exorcises her act. In another layer, Antje is able to revisit the loss of a child, and to acknowledge this episode from her own life. And, by specifically repeating Trijntjie's act in the character of Tessa, Brink validates it within the modern historical context, demonstrating that violence against the rights of women is transhistorical, even though the material circumstances of its occurrence may vary.

By locating the spectre of Antje within the contemporary prevailing discourse of the TRC, Brink highlights issues that are unresolved within the present political climate. As well as informing the reader about the conditions of life suffered by women like Antje, the spectre disrupts the continuity of the text in the present and, in acting as a catalyst for flashbacks by other characters, provides the link between the present and the as yet unresolved aspects of the past. In this sense the intervention from one time period into another can be seen as conciliatory: unresolved trauma from the past is brought into the present so that it may be healed and made whole again. However, a kind of oppositional reciprocity is evident in the way that Antje's intrusions into the present occur at moments of trauma in the contemporary world: when Magrieta's husband is having an affair; when Olivier is about to have sex with another woman; when Tessa is in bed with her lover. The visitations all occur at flashpoints in sexual relationships, a metaphor in the text for relationships in general. It is in this sense that Antje's role changes, becoming more associated with justice and retribution, illustrative of the strands at play in the rhetoric of post-apartheid South Africa. The

spectre of the woman who was wronged in the past and was not given a voice of her own affords, through the characterisation of Magrieta at least, a voice to those wronged in the present.

Boundaries, like those between the individual and collective consciousnesses, as well as those that separate the identities and social worlds comprising modern South Africa, are reinforced throughout the text. Olivier observes, after Magrieta reports a series of disturbances and violations in her township, that she inhabits 'a different world' (Brink 2001: 134). He cannot enter this space physically, due to Magrieta's concerns for his safety. Neither can he experience it as she does. Yet Olivier can cross the boundary into Tessa's room and enter her personal space, searching it for clues after she fails to contact him at work. Immediately after this incident, Olivier pointedly meditates upon 'The Rites of Desire' [*sic*], using this reference to the novel's title to minimise the distinction between ritual and rights, two discourses that are conflated in the TRC.<sup>9</sup> It is at this point that Tessa reappears to Olivier, strangely accompanied by Antje of Bengal. The cats greet her in ritualistic succession, and she and Olivier sit and drink wine in their own well-practiced ritual that marks both courtship and reconciliation.

The layers of historical consciousness that inform present experience become clearer as, assisted by ritual, Olivier goes on to tell Tessa the story of infidelity during his relationship with Riana. It is framed by trauma in the form of grief, in response to her miscarriage and death, and shame. He is finally able to publicly express the guilt he feels after her death, describing the circumstances in which he was having sex with

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<sup>9</sup> See Chapter One.

another woman at a conference at the exact moment at when Riana was killed. In sharing his shame, Olivier is able to rebalance the past. We also learn that his grief and guilt were misplaced as his wife had hated him and was also having affairs. Tessa goes on to facilitate the practical application of his atonement by telling him that she is pregnant with a child that she does not want. Although the very existence of the baby confirms his unrequited desire, he assumes the role of Tessa's father in the way that he accompanies her to the hospital when she decides to terminate the pregnancy. This questioning of the role that he should play with regard to future generations, and to Tessa as allegory of the national future, in a way reflects the central question posed by the TRC itself: what role should whites (represented in the text by Olivier) play in the new South Africa? It is in the aftermath of the termination that Olivier and Tessa sustain an honest dialogue for the first time in the novel. In a further example of imagery used by Brink to link portrayals of personal reconciliation with the processes undergone by the contemporary nation, and which is also resonant of Coetzee's language in Disgrace, Olivier also echoes prevalent nationalist rhetoric. He suggests, in words very similar to those of Tutu in the TRC Report, that the past represents a different country. As he reflects on the true nature of his relationship with Riana, in the same manner that the TRC brought the realities of South Africa's history to the foreground, Olivier is also able to acknowledge that Riana too was affected by her relationship with her past, being haunted by memories of her father. In coming to terms with his past, Olivier is able to admit that he had not previously confronted it, rather that he 'clung to the memory of a happy marriage' (Brink 2001: 180). The final pregnancy symbolised the last hope for their marriage, and it is only through acknowledging this that Olivier is able to accept the loss.

He carries this awareness into the present, accepting that Tessa may be carrying 'hidden hurts' (Brink 2001: 185), and acknowledging the existence of 'a kind of post-traumatic stress' (Brink 2001: 85). This overt acceptance that unassimilated events from the past can return to haunt the subject in the present leads to the observation that the scene in the hospital with Tessa 'will continue to haunt us for the rest of our days' (Brink 2001: 187). The flashback that he experiences with Tessa in the hospital is so intense that the experiences he has had with Riana and Tessa blur, an indication of the power of unresolved trauma to elide the distinction between past and present: once it is resolved then past and present can return to their chronological places. Tessa answers the questions that Lucy Lurie fails to, seeking a different kind of resolution.

While experiences of pregnancy and loss might link Tessa with Antje, it is Magrieta who is Antje's successor in many other ways. Magrieta is a coloured woman, in Olivier's service. While many of the material conditions of her service are different from those of Antje, in that Olivier respects her advice and provides her with good working conditions and other forms of support, Magrieta is still a coloured servant of a white man, a position determined by her race and social class, which function within the nationally endorsed power matrix to restrict her economic opportunities. A citizen of the new South Africa, Magrieta is technically "free", but is too old to educate or retrain herself for alternative employment. Magrieta gives voice to Antje's experiences, both literally and metaphorically, as well as telling her own stories. It is in this way that Brink accords to her the authority to "speak" for the oppressed women in South Africa, adding the narrative weight of the past to the articulation of the present, validating it within its own history and tradition.

It is through Magrieta that Brink is able to tell of the trauma inflicted for generations upon non-white South African women. Magrieta is in her sixties, of a similar age to Olivier, and it is through her articulation of these traumas that the reader learns the most about the daily conditions of life for most South Africans, which have to this point remained undiscussed. In one incident, gangs burn down Magrieta's house in the township because a member of her family is suspected to be an informer. This is not the case, and Magrieta decries the fact that the stories she tells of her traumatic past (and present) are not listened to by the government, because they are not framed within the procedures of the TRC. Her situation draws attention to the fact that if storytelling is to be therapeutic, then it must possess a reciprocal function, and be actively listened to: Magrieta and her compatriots willingly share their experiences through storytelling, yet because nobody in power chooses to listen to the stories, there are no discernible material results. Magrieta states, in language redolent of Disgrace 'We are too common for them to hear us' (Brink 2001: 203), illustrating the selectiveness at work in storytelling as healing in South Africa and making explicit the link between access to national reconciliation and power.

Olivier and Tessa assume the role of Magrieta's patrons in the absence of the state. The collective responsibility they feel towards her is defined by the legacy of their race, and it is in the face of this that the greatest turn towards a collective national identity comes from Magrieta. She refuses to racialise their responses to the new nation, asserting that:

It's no use thinking of "this country" as if it was some great abstraction, Ruben. It's all of us. If *we* don't make it work... We must believe there's something more to [this country], something larger than all of us, a kind of hope, a kind of potential. It's something like Antje of Bengal: even if one doesn't see her, we must be prepared to believe in her (Brink 2001: 206).

It is in terms of her invisibility that Antje assumes the place of the faith required to

take the country into the future, representing its fleeting and impermanent nature.

The fact that it is not visible to everyone all of the time reflects that the basis of the future lies in the past, also partly invisible in the present.

### **3.8 Exploitative Relationships with Women**

Both Ruben Olivier and David Lurie have marriages behind them and in the narrative present of the novels participate in commodified and unorthodox sexual relationships with women. Their sexual relationships go on to structure the texts and, I argue, can be read as a metaphor for wider social relationships in post-apartheid South Africa. Sex is used as a literary device both to represent the racialised social relations of the past and the inequalities and prejudices that remain in the present. Both novels present sex as a problem that needs to be solved: I argue that this situation is deliberately constructed in both texts as an allegory of the “problem” of social relationships that needed to be “solved” in South Africa following the dismantling of apartheid. If the unhappy marriages inhabited by both protagonists for many years prior to the narrative present of the texts are read as an allegorical representation of the strictures of apartheid, then the sexual relationships that follow can be seen as symbolic of the social reconnaissance, experimentation and pragmatic restructuring that was required in the TRC years. The very first pages of both novels support this theory. In the opening line of *Disgrace* Lurie states that, ‘For a man of his age, fifty-two, divorced, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well’ (Coetzee 2000: 1). He then goes on to recount his pragmatic solution, which is the use of prostitutes. Not dissimilarly, Olivier outlines his own relationships with prostitutes in his response to Tessa’s forthright question, ‘What do you do for sex?’, which again posits it as a problem requiring a solution (Brink 2001: 22).

If, to apply Hegel's analytical framework, the novels can be read as a ruse of history with their characters emblematic of different aspects of South Africa's history, I suggest that the white characters in the texts, like the urban and rural settings in Disgrace, represent different stages in national consciousness. Lurie and Olivier represent the structures of the old, apartheid nation that is reluctantly ceding to TRC-engendered multiculturalism. Tessa is the apocryphal symbol of a younger generation of white South Africans who invent their own narratives about the past in order to resist perceived TRC/authoritative sanctions, and Lucy stands for the new generation of white South Africans who (willingly or otherwise) embrace the pragmatism of the TRC's approach. This is represented especially poignantly by Lucy's decision to keep the baby she conceived when multiply raped by three black men and to accept the patronage of her black neighbour (and relative of one of the rapists) by becoming his third wife. Bev Shaw, guardian of the sick and unwanted dogs and briefly Lurie's lover during the second part of Disgrace, signifies a generation of white liberals prepared to sacrifice their own lives to help the liberation cause (in the novel, the treatment of dogs symbolises that of black South Africans). Lurie's sexual relationship with her, I argue, functions as a temporary interlude of moral consciousness in the period surrounding Lucy's rape and his expulsion from the university community. In terms of the novels' non-white characters, in Disgrace the coloured prostitutes employed by Lurie represent the racialised exploitation of labour that marked the apartheid past. They are partially paralleled in Brink's text by Tessa's black lovers, whom she tokenises in attempts to assert her sexuality in front of Olivier. The racially mixed members of the university's committee of inquiry in Disgrace represent the TRC itself and the Isaacs family (whom I interpret as being

coloured) the Christian rhetoric of the TRC. Lucy's rapists and the other black characters in the rural Cape community represent the black communities who were disenfranchised before apartheid, remain economically disadvantaged and who subscribe to a doctrine of revenge rather than reconciliation.

In Lurie's case his sexual behaviour bears a direct relation to the loss of his job, and is also a means by which Coetzee is able to represent the ongoing social structures and material consequences of apartheid. Apartheid, as the racialised system of oppression that characterised the old nation, assumes a spectral presence in the text of Disgrace: its racial classification systems and those of the preceding colonial system structure the sexual relationships. Lurie uses an escort agency that classifies prostitutes according to their racial/ethnic backgrounds: the women also work in the informal economy, as many blacks were forced to do under apartheid. After the failure of his second marriage, Lurie's sexual relationships become commodified and businesslike (like social relationships in the post-apartheid nation) as he becomes reliant on female company purchased from the agency. His relationship with Soraya, his favourite escort, plays out a historical power relation that is enshrined in racist and gendered discourse: it introduces in the first few pages of the text the notion of the female body as a site for the enactment of violence, the context of the violation placing Soraya's subject position as a product of history. Society has been violated through history as have the female bodies that inhabit it. Soraya is a coloured prostitute who, in her professional circumstances at least, is described in the language of racial stereotyping, 'on their books under 'Exotic' (Coetzee 2000: 7). Within the economic parameters of the post-apartheid nation, Soraya's body and also her colour are commodified. Lurie's relationship with her is initially conducted on a transactional basis. Under the terms of

the new nation, his relationship with Soraya is presented in economic terms as an exploitation of labour, and emotionally as purely functional. The opportunity to participate in it is afforded him by a racialised past. He abuses this by using the economic power bestowed upon him by the apartheid era yet he goes on to transgress the professional or private/public boundaries imposed by their economic relationship by hiring a detective to spy on her private life, in an allegory of the processes enacted by the TRC.

The objectification of Soraya is an ideological precedent to Lurie's relationship with Melanie Isaacs, which abuses his historically accorded subject position to a greater extent. Melanie would appear to be coloured under the racial classification systems of apartheid South Africa: her racial identity is not itself named in the text, but is heavily signified by her name, the etymological roots of which lie in the Greek "black". Like Soraya, Melanie's physical appearance is described in language that resonates with the racial stereotypes of the past, 'close-cropped dark hair, wide, almost Chinese cheekbones, large, dark eyes' (Coetzee 2000: 11). Their racial and historical inequality is highlighted by their age difference: Lurie by his own admission is old enough to be her father, a reality that sinks in for him once he realises that in having sex with her he has transgressed a boundary and, by allegorical implication, disturbed the social structures invested by the TRC. "There, there," he whispers, trying to comfort her. "Tell me what is wrong." Almost he says "Tell Daddy what is wrong" (Coetzee 2000: 26). The last occasion on which he has sex with Melanie is preceded by a poetry class which she attends, on Wordsworth's The Prelude. In highly symbolic imagery, David reads of the way that the vision of Mont Blanc, a literary (and perhaps literal) parallel of his own role as a large, white imposition on the

landscape of Melanie's life, has 'usurped upon a living thought that never more could be' (Wordsworth, cited in Coetzee 2000: 21). This "allegory within an allegory" functions as a signpost to the wider allegorical nature of the text, suggesting to the reader that this is the way in which it should be read. This is closely followed by their last intimate encounter, termed 'not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core' (Coetzee 2000: 25). His physical abuse of Melanie is accompanied by further misuse of his power within the university. Following her failure to attend any more of his classes, he fabricates attendance details and exam results in order that she can pass the course.

Lurie's relationship with Melanie, while "not quite rape", is abusive and pre-empted the attack on Lucy in the second part of the novel. Rape symbolises the violation of "normal" sexual and social relationships, and it is notable that in Disgrace it occurs in the lawless community of the rural Cape. Lucy's rape at the hands of three black intruders on her farm is the main event of the second part of the novel, and as an event that is portrayed as being well-practised, taking on almost ritualistic qualities, bears some similarities to the attempted rape of Tessa in The Rights of Desire. Apart from one who is accorded a first name, Pollux, her rapists remain nameless. This means that it is impossible to "write" them into the structures of reconciliation advocated by the TRC. Pollux remains a presence around Lucy after the attack. However, because he is a member of the extended family of Petrus, her tenant/farm manager, the Luries are unable to pursue justice against him. Lucy's rape is presented in tandem with her father's sexual relationships with Soraya and Melanie, where he pursues and takes advantage of women who do not desire him. Indeed it can be argued as a kind of nemesis for his actions, a vengeful, racially inverted expiation of his treatment of the

women in Cape Town, suggesting perhaps the nonviable nature of a “tit for tat” concept of justice. Lucy finds it difficult to see her rape as anything other than personal, stating after a long period of recalcitrance (that parallels her father’s response to the questions posed by the university committee of inquiry) that ‘It was so personal...It was done with such personal hatred. That was what stunned me more than anything. The rest was... expected. But why did they hate me so? I had never set eyes on them’ (Coetzee 2000: 156). Lurie’s response is to define his daughter’s rape as a historical event, therefore detracting from the personal elements of what happened, and relating it to a national rather than individual story. He rationalises the attack, understanding that because they had never met her it was racial rather than personal, stating: ““it was history speaking through them,” he offers at last. “A history of wrong. Think of it that way, if it helps. It may have seemed personal, but it wasn’t. It came down from the ancestors.”” (Coetzee 2000: 156).

Lurie seems here to speak of the inevitability of the attack, and absolves the rapists of direct responsibility for their actions: notably in this position where, through the father-daughter relationship, he might be perceived as victim. This implies that Lucy’s rape, as an act of revenge within a social context of lawlessness, is a logical consequence of apartheid, whereas perhaps the measured approach of the TRC is not. Lurie is anxious to remove the attack on his daughter from a personal sphere by claiming that the rapists are acting out a historically determined role, even partly exorcising trauma accorded to them by their subject positions under apartheid. In according the crime a social dimension he also presents its solution or consequence as social. Notably, when Lurie himself is placed in the culturally constructed role of perpetrator his attitude towards nationalist initiatives is that of an outsider, balanced

against the situation involving his daughter, where he tries to integrate her violation into national processes and history. In any case, a fictional text is used to highlight the relative positions of perceived victims and perpetrators in relation to nationalist rhetoric. Their modes of reconciliation to sexual incidents conflict: Lucy reads a deeply personal motivation into the violence enacted against her, yet seeks a form of atonement that privileges a superficial version of interracial reconciliation and a seeming multicultural democracy. Her father seeks a personal solution, in his avoidance of the university committee convened to investigate his relationship with Melanie Isaacs, to a sexual act that has disrupted social unity.

Disgrace, like The Rights of Desire, raises the possibility of exile as a solution to social problems. Ruben Olivier refuses his children's suggestions that he should leave the country, but Lurie begs his daughter to leave South Africa and live near friends and family in Holland, which 'may not be the most exciting of places to live, but at least it doesn't breed nightmares' (Coetzee 2000: 161-2). In alluding here to the trauma inherent in the post-apartheid nation, Coetzee offers damning condemnation of the materiality of the democratic South Africa, where crime rates have continued to soar since the end of apartheid, and rape statistics are some of the highest in the world (in 2001 standing at almost one out of every hundred women likely to have experienced rape).<sup>10</sup> Lucy ignores her father's pleas and decides to remain on the farm and accept Petrus' patronage, which will ultimately lead to a reversal of their socio-economic positions. This in some way mirrors the social restructuring Lurie has experienced at the university, and represents a pragmatic compromise that facilitates a

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<sup>10</sup> In South Africa women's rights activists claim that a woman is raped every 26 seconds (Phillips 2001: 2). This can be compared to Britain, where the National Crime Survey of 2001 suggested that 47,000 women between the ages of 16 and 59 had experienced either rape or attempted rape out of a total national population of approximately 59,000,000 ([www.truthaboutrape.co.uk](http://www.truthaboutrape.co.uk)).

version of multiculturalism. Lucy goes further, though, in accepting Petrus' proposal of marriage, a symbolic colonisation of her body that is the only way to guarantee her survival in the "new" South Africa, realising that 'I contribute the land, in return for which I am allowed to creep in under his wing. Otherwise, he wants to remind me, I am fair game (Coetzee: 2000: 203). Lucy accepts her fate, agreeing to her own version of reconciliation and perhaps signalling that the acceptance of certain aspects of sexual behaviour can stand for the acceptance of a different kind of society:

"Yes, I agree, it is humiliating. But perhaps that is a good point to start from again. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start again at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity" (Coetzee 2000: 205).

While Lucy's rape effects a form of social reconciliation, the consequences of the attempted rape of Tessa Butler are more personal. In a violent incident that mirrors the attack on Lucy and her father in several ways, Tessa and Olivier (who has been posing as her father during her recent hospital stay) are ambushed whilst out walking. Olivier, like Lurie, is injured, although not badly. Tessa, unlike Lucy, manages to defend herself, and the two are also helped by passers by, suggesting a more responsive and cohesive social network than Coetzee implies in Disgrace. Paramount in Olivier's mind following the attack is the fact that Tessa asked for help and it arrived, 'She screamed for help, I thought. She screamed for help, and people heard, and came, and saved us. I haven't even asked their names. But they were there. They helped' (Brink 2001: 299). This prompts Olivier to contemplate the number of other people who have asked him for help during his life, and who he has not heard. His reflection perhaps constitutes his testimonial to the wrongs committed in his past. In content and structure it echoes many of the entries by white South

How many other voices have there been shouting for help throughout my life, shouting for me to help? Riana, more than anyone else, ever. Shouting and shouting, in so many ways. But also my sons. Alison. Perhaps Tania. My mother from beyond the grave, my father from his carpentry shed in Booyens. Magrieta and her three husbands, her children, little Mabel. Antjie of Bengal. Johnnie MacFarlane, so urgently. My dear friend who lay there in the road, unable to shout but weakly raising an arm at me as I drove by. Perhaps he's recognized my car. But he never spoke about it. And I drove past. One doesn't stop for bergies. One doesn't stop. All those cries for help from a clamouring world. While I chose not to listen. I couldn't bear to get involved. Unlike those strangers, this afternoon. I complain, often, like everyone I know, except Tessa perhaps, of how this place is going down the drain. Misery, violence, terror, the lot. All the voices, voices. Yet I prefer not to listen, not to respond. And by turning a deaf ear I help create the very space in which the world can sink into the morass. The mindset that makes atrocity possible (Brink 2000: 300).

Olivier reaches a point of self-realisation at the end of the novel. Once Antje's bones have been laid to rest and some of his other traumas are overcome, he experiences a situation where his capacity for "normal" narrative memory is restored and he becomes aware that 'I have memories, I can survive' (Brink 2001: 306).

The women in the text also experience trauma. Magrieta is affected by the successive deaths of her husbands, the loss of her daughter, repeated dispossession, displacement and encounters with violence, gaining material release at least when she retires from Olivier's service and moves into the house that he has bought for her. Tessa is possessed by the spectres of a traumatic past. However in her case the crucial issue is that, for the majority of the novel, the events that she highlights from her past are not necessarily empirically true. Yet, traumatic memory is not necessarily comprised of veridical truth. It is what represents truth to the subject at the time of recall, which in itself comprises a form of semantic truth. This may be because the reality of her past is too far removed from her psyche for her to be able to discuss it. It is not until

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<sup>11</sup> See Section 2.12 for illustration and further discussion of these.

relatively near to the end of the novel, when Tessa has survived the attack on the mountain, that she is able to have honest dialogue with Olivier. It is at this point that they come closest to having sex but at the moment when Olivier could fulfil his long-term fantasy, he experiences a moment of clarity and decides he cannot go ahead.

Tessa's response is to announce her plans to move away, and so both are able to move on as integral human beings. Antje, conversely, is haunted by the wrongs done to her throughout her life and fragmented as she is even in death, assumes an additional role as the embodiment of collective trauma. This is symbolised by the references to other slaves as well as Trijntje of Madagascar.

This is the only point in the novel where Olivier, prompted by the sexual encounter with Tessa, moves beyond simple reflection on the past, and is able to accept responsibility for his actions, perhaps in a similar manner to Lurie. Importantly, it is sexual desire at a time in life when his body is becoming less outwardly desirable that triggers Olivier's acceptance of the role that he has played during his life.<sup>12</sup> This is possibly indicative of the capacity of desire to overwhelm other perceptions, or a marker of the extent to which self-appraisal on a physiological level or as an object of desire can follow acceptance of the acts committed by the subject. In both of these novels, it appears that the subject accords himself object status, in the sense that he realistically assesses his physical appeal from the perspective of the beholder, only when the true status of his actions has been acknowledged in a wider social context. This could be regarded as a form of intrasubjective reconciliation, where the subject, through acknowledgement of participation in past trauma and expression of a desire

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<sup>12</sup> At this point, the narrator remarks on 'my old man's nakedness, not an alluring sight. The cadaverous legs with bony knees lean hairy shanks, knobbly feet, the shrivelled penis with its dumb blue head, the belly folds'. This can be cross-referenced to the description of David Lurie in *Disgrace* when, following his assignation with Bev Shaw, he reflects on his body, 'his bowed shoulders and skinny shanks' (Coetzee 2000: 150).

to reconcile, accepts a social role over and above one that is simple and self-oriented. To achieve reconciliation, the traumatised subject has to acknowledge the reciprocity between the individual and collective domains. As Olivier states on the final page of the novel, he has now to 'face what has to be faced, what all my life I've tried to turn away from. There is the world outside... - which requires me and strangely concerns me' (Brink 2001: 306). It is this act of reconciliation in the novel's closing stages that provides recognition of the link between the private world of the cultural subject and the wider, public, social world that the subject inhabits. As Olivier's sexual potency diminishes, he attaches greater importance to his social role. As in the stories offered to the Register of Reconciliation and to the TRC itself, in Brink's work of fiction, the "I" of the individual subject gives way, through acknowledgement of the role played in past trauma, as victim or perpetrator, to the "we" of the collective subject that is both the object and goal of conciliatory initiatives.

### **3.9 Personal Incidents as Allegory of the TRC**

Other than sexual incidents and behaviour, both novels contain features that function as social allegory. In Disgrace the most obvious is the university committee that is convened following Melanie Isaacs' withdrawal from the university. After she files a complaint against Lurie, the university assembles a committee whose approach is clearly modelled on the restorative justice paradigm privileged by the TRC. After Melanie has made her statement, Lurie refuses to speak before the committee bar a straightforward admission of his guilt. Withholding details and any kind of apology, he states that 'repentance belongs to another world, to another universe of discourse' (Coetzee 2000: 58). As such he refutes participation in a social world that has

established truth and repentance as criteria for acceptance, in which he should be 'prepared to acknowledge [his] fault in a public manner and take steps to remedy it' (Coetzee 2000: 58). In so doing he fails to meet the criteria by which the TRC granted amnesty to perpetrators, as he will not fully disclose his participation and will not express remorse.

The committee of inquiry parodies the TRC in many ways. It is set up as a means of investigating Melanie's accusations and, like the TRC identifies itself as 'not a trial but an inquiry' (Coetzee 2000: 48). The committee requires Lurie to tell the story of his involvement with Melanie which he refuses to do. He admits guilt, although this is not enough for the commission which, in the spirit of the TRC requires a statement that 'reflect[s] [his] sincere feelings' (Coetzee 2000: 54). While in the case of the TRC an apology was a desired rather than prerequisite component of the granting of amnesty, Lurie's refusal to provide this equates to a rejection of the ethos of the committee. Its objectives, in line with those of the nascent nation, are to exorcise the latent trauma inherent in Lurie's action, restore order to the university community which functions as a microcosm of the nation, and return Lurie to his post.<sup>13</sup> The university's approach aimed to maintain order within the whole, prioritising the integrity of the collective organism over individual desire. One committee member asks: "'Don't you think... that by its nature academic life must call for certain sacrifices? That for the good of the whole we have to deny ourselves certain gratifications?'" (Coetzee 2000: 52). Lurie's masochistic response is due to his refusal

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<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting here that the intention of the university was to restore Lurie to his academic post. This is in line with the government's decision not to practice lustration following the establishment of the identity of perpetrators. This differed from practice in other countries where truth commissions had been held prior to that in South Africa such as, for example, Hungary. Here those deemed to have been perpetrators of human rights violations were removed from positions of public office in the post-conflict society.

to accept the imposition of a moral regime that he does not subscribe to. His refusal to participate, then, carries a wider social resonance: in rejecting the demands of the committee he denies the highly public spectacle of confession, which rejects the specific version of reconciliation that was designed to restore social harmony. His alienation from the Christianised atonement-through-confession model expressed through his refusal to make a confession that 'comes from his heart' (Coetzee 2000: 54) results in his being asked to leave the university, an act representative of formal exclusion from the community.

The boundaries between private and public experience are an important component of TRC procedures. Antje's frequent intrusions into the most intimate moments of the other characters, which render their usually private sexual incursions public, illustrate the tension between the private and public domains symbolised in TRC. Similarly, Olivier intrudes into the space that Tessa, like him, has been protecting with a wall of stories. His paranoia leads him to search her room whilst she is out. He attempts to track her down at work when he finds her explanations inadequate, and questions where she has been when she returns late at night. He waits up for her at night, and quizzes her about her lovers. When he discovers that she shaves her pubic hair, he takes delight in the fact that he has discovered her 'secret' (Brink 2001: 113), in this instance her more intimate sexual parts, that she says make her feel more feminine. Secrets are not acceptable in the new South African rhetoric. He is also transfixed by her navel ring, another often-hidden body ornament that he later becomes fixated upon. Olivier's desire effectively colonises Tessa's body, offering a contemporary bodily metaphor for the violence inflicted on Antje's body as well as that of women throughout the generations. Olivier crosses spatial and moral borders

in his treatment of Tessa. In one way this can be read as gratuitous violation of Tessa's privacy, yet in another it parallels the way that, through the transgression of boundaries and publicising of previously concealed information, reconciliation is sought on a national scale. It is significant that the music Brink uses as the background to this revealing scene between Olivier and Tessa is by Daniel Barenboim.<sup>14</sup> In a scene framed by Barenboim's score, Olivier and Tessa's dialogue reflects the structures of the TRC as they negotiate a deal and come to a pragmatic agreement as to how they can manage to live together.

### **3.10 Exclusion and Reconciliation**

Both novels feature characters excluded from mainstream society, and whose sexual crises are seen to carry social consequences. In *Disgrace*, Lucy has already taken herself to the Cape and Lurie is forced to join her after his relationship with Melanie is discovered. His exclusion from the university community and Cape Town, and subsequent departure to the countryside is another signpost to the allegorical function of the text. His self-imposed exile parallels the biblical story of the scapegoat, signified very explicitly in the novel by the old goat that Lurie encounters at an animal treatment centre. In the Old Testament Book of Leviticus, the scapegoat is one of two goats subject to a lottery on the Day of Atonement. One goat, which can be read as a representation of Melanie withdrawing from studies, is sacrificed immediately whereas the other, the scapegoat, is consigned to the wilderness to bear the sins of the nation in Christ-like fashion. The theory is that the scapegoat bears the

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<sup>14</sup> Daniel Barenboim is a Jewish composer and conductor, an Israeli national who has become renowned in recent years for his conciliatory work in the Middle East. His friendship with the Palestinian American academic Edward Said led to a concert in the West Bank, a recital at the Palestinian Birzeit University in 1999, and a series of workshops (the West-Eastern Divan Workshop) that took place in Berlin.

burden of responsibility for the nation, acting as a ritualised carrier of social evil. The parable illustrates the means by which individuals subject to the TRC were expected to sacrifice their own needs and ideals in a manner that would redeem the community. The more socially pervasive aspect of the parable is that any members of the community who refused to take part in fasting, and other rituals, that accompanied the ceremony of scapegoating were completely ostracised from the community. Lurie, in rejecting the processes of the committee, effectively martyrs himself, perhaps in a veiled suggestion from the author (who himself left South Africa after the TRC) that whites should leave the country voluntarily.

Thus, Disgrace demarcates the state-endorsed rituals of reconciliation as practices that exclude as well as include, and that align conciliatory initiatives with political dogma. When Lurie goes on to seek what is effectively exile in the rural Eastern Cape, the pseudo-nationalist structures of the university and its committee are marked as having failed. The majority of the remaining action of the text takes place in a highly specific regional setting, one that is associated with its own tradition of resistance to colonial/nationalist domination. Peter MacDonald argues that Coetzee's decision to shift the narrative focus to the Eastern Cape detracts attention from the preceding events that are highly nationally encoded (2002: 302). Yet, Coetzee's earlier fiction also uses a regional focus with allegorical intent. He has in the past reportedly referred to himself as a regional writer, who regards South Africa outside the Eastern Cape as a foreign country: this affords him the opportunity to represent events in the Eastern Cape as allegories of national events. So, while the novel's setting appears to be reduced, it is actually representative of the national parameters that Coetzee inhabits. It is in the section of the novel that is set in the countryside that the most

pertinent allusions to the national body are made, as the shift in setting creates the geographical and political distance required in order to create allegory.

### **3.11 Truth and Reconciliation: the Novels' Conclusions**

It is against the backdrop of his daughter's pragmatic compromise, emblematic of the "third way" of the TRC which is aimed at meeting the basic survival needs of the nation rather than the long-term material or psychological requirements of every individual within it, that Lurie is able to pursue atonement. He visits the Isaacs' household unannounced and, in the face of Melanie's father's Christian rhetoric, is finally able to offer an apology after sharing a meal with the family: "I am sorry for what I took your daughter through. You have a wonderful family. I apologise for the grief I have caused you and Mrs Isaacs. I ask for your pardon" (Coetzee 2000: 171). However his apology is indirect and limited, made to the parents rather than to the victim herself. It addresses history, the past, which is notably what he regards as the source of the crime against his daughter (in that racialised power relations have necessitated the need for revenge). Through making peace with Isaacs, the representative of history, Lurie is offered the possibility of restorative justice, and the chance to restore wholeness to the affected community through their meeting. However, complete closure is withheld. Lurie is not able to apologise directly to Melanie, and Isaacs makes it clear that he has no intention of helping Lurie recover his job at the university. The failure of what might be regarded as a pragmatic solution to a psychic problem perhaps implies that this approach in general is not appropriate and is unlikely to be successful. Moreover, the allegorical inference is that practical solutions, such as those espoused by the TRC, may not be able to heal the psychic trauma of the nation.

The reconciliation that Lucy achieves is, like that effected by the TRC, based on stories. Like her father and like Tessa Butler, Lucy tells the stories that she wants to, withholding “truth” that is spoken “from the heart”. There is no way that the audience can discern the empirical truth from what is told. The stories that Lucy tells are those of her choice, and she forbids Lurie to speak on her behalf. While this can be read in terms of the types of “truth” presented to the TRC about the past, it can be seen as an intergenerational split: Lucy will not allow her parent, representative of hers and the nation’s past, to speak for her. The schism between her and her father symbolises the divide between past and present in South Africa and the desire for those living in the present to break away from the guilt and trauma associated with the past. In a statement that mirrors her father’s rejection of the opportunity to speak to the committee, Lucy states, ‘what happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place, it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone’ (Coetzee 2000: 112).

The closing pages of the novel that, if the structure and moral consciousness of the TRC are extended to Lurie, might be expected to offer the logical sequitur of resolution/conclusion for the protagonist following his apology to the Isaacs, are bleak. So are the wider social prospects. In a strangely Christ-like way, Lurie suffers a series of self-inflicted consequences. He is cut off from his daughter and ex-wife; he is assaulted by Melanie’s lover whilst watching her perform in a play; his home in Cape Town is wrecked during a burglary and, with the installation of a new lecturer in his office, he remains, like the martyred biblical scapegoat, firmly and finally excluded from the university community. The reconciliation that he is able to achieve is in relation to stray dogs at a clinic he has been working at. He begins to work with

the dogs, the allegorical representation of generations of non-white South Africans, when he first moves in with Lucy after being expelled from the university. Lurie initially resists the work, associating it with his daughter's friends who he has little respect for. He is reluctant to work with Bev Shaw, the woman who runs the clinic because she fails to fit into his existing, highly sexualised, categorisations of women. From the outset he sees the work at the clinic as enforced reparation and resists this on the grounds that 'it sounds suspiciously like community service. It sounds like someone trying to make reparation for past misdeeds' (Coetzee 2000: 77). This is precisely what he seeks to avoid in his interaction with the university committee of inquiry. The committee emphasises the need for regret, stating there to be 'a difference between pleading guilty to a charge and admitting you were wrong... we will see what attitude you express. We will see whether you express contrition' (Coetzee 2000: 54). He has to overcome sexual prejudice in order to go and work with Bev, 'a prejudice that has settled in his mind' of which he is aware that he ought to 'sweep the premises clean' (Coetzee 2000: 72).

If a return is made to the sexual/social allegorical frame, then the situation also requires him to conquer or lay aside social prejudice, which he does both by sleeping with Bev and working with the dogs. The role that he plays in the dogs' lives is in some ways similar to that played by the Capos (who acted like friends to the concentration camp inmates whilst assisting their deaths) described in Primo Levi's If This Is a Man. He accompanies them whilst are put down, playing a part in the "solution" to the problem that their lives have become, in a nation in which they are able to breed without control and their owners do not have the economic resources to care for them. The metaphor is obvious: dogs symbolise the non-whites in South

Africa, for whom in this rural setting in the late 1990s, the end of apartheid has not provided a universal solution. For Petrus, Lucy's farmhand, the solution is partial, his increased status of the farm eliciting his observation that he is no longer 'the dog man', and that Lucy's new lack of status as she is forced to sign her land over to him leaves her 'like a dog' (Coetzee 2000: 205).

While his work with the dogs affords Lurie some degree of intrasubjective reconciliation, Coetzee's lexical choice when describing the episode has wider historical and cultural connotation and resists any attempt at closure. He uses the concept 'Lösung' (Coetzee 2000: 142) to describe the solution that Lurie and Bev help effect for the dogs, whose main crime is that they are 'too menny', an expression borrowed from Thomas Hardy's Jude the Obscure. The TRC seeks a solution for the national problem, as the university committee of inquiry seeks a solution for the "problem" of Lurie. He and Bev are then left to provide a solution for the surplus canine population. In common German usage "Lösung" refers to a solution to a practical, everyday problem, and would have a generally pragmatic meaning. Yet "Lösung" also connotes the Holocaust, the "final solution" employed by the Nazis, in imagery that is vividly supported by descriptions of Lurie transporting the bodies of the dogs in bulk to the incinerator in order that they can be disposed of. The linguistic play throughout the text links the fate of animals, in this case the dogs, to the nation's human other, and through the term "Lösung" to the fate of the Jewish population in Nazi Germany. It also links to those forced to participate in those abuses, such as Levi's Capos who became like animals themselves. Lurie conspires in the dogs' deaths: in powerful imagery that is evocative of the Capos, he accompanies them on their "final journey". On one hand this can be read as Coetzee's attempt to comment

on a wider human condition and expression of racial oppression that is not specific to a South African historical context. But on another it could be seen both as an affirmation of the stereotypes of racial difference and the continuation of this difference. This goes on to reinforce the reader's vision of the barbaric conditions of the post-apartheid nation, accompanying the prognosis with the ideology that solutions to socio-economic conditions are likely to be negative and self-administered.

The ending of the novel, while presenting possibilities of reconciliation on some levels, is not complete in this respect. While the seeds of reconciliation are sown between Lurie and his daughter, and the two are left with the possibility of 'a new start', the physical and emotional gap between them remains huge (Coetzee 2000: 218). The reader is left uncertain as to whether Lucy accepts Petrus' offer of protection and continues to live safely on the farm, or whether her future is fully dispossessed. No answers regarding the future and paternity of her unborn child are given. Melanie's future is not discussed, nor is any catharsis (should it even be possible) offered to the trauma experienced by Lurie and Lucy. Rather, the text's final words relate to a favourite dog that Lurie has decided to put down. Lurie is stripped of a job any of any status in Cape Town, and leaves to take up seemingly permanent residence in a bed-sit near to the animal clinic. This represents a fall of biblical proportions that ought, if the figure of Lurie is read as the scapegoat, to stand as his atonement. It does not, in any way that could be read as either safe or materially successful, point to a reconciled future for the individual or nation. The text remains unable to represent Lucy's rape, for she withholds her narrative from the public domain and refuses to allow her father to speak for her. The experiences of Soraya

and Melanie remain similarly unrepresented. It is in this sense that the novel, while in many ways a conventional chronological narrative, reflects the materiality of apartheid in its refusal to give a voice to any character than the adult white male.

In The Rights of Desire Olivier and Tessa's cohabitation remains uneasy, termed by Olivier as a 'mock domesticity', a semblance of harmony in the domestic sphere that functions as microcosm for the national unity symbolised by the TRC. Their superficial reconciliation is patchy and subject to disturbances, as Olivier sporadically seeks revenge upon Zach, one of Tessa's lovers whom he especially dislikes. In a section of the text that is framed by references to Macbeth, the great revenge tragedy, Olivier slashes the tyres on Zach's tyre. The intertextual references to Macbeth that occur repeatedly through the text may represent the constant intrusion of human desire. This is also perhaps symbolised by Tessa's navel ring, an icon of femininity and sexual desire that is lost and found during the text and becomes the object of Olivier's quest.

Additionally, the act of stabbing the tyre with the knife takes on sexual connotation: Olivier is not able to penetrate Tessa, initially because she will not let him, but then because of his own self-imposed restriction. When he returns to the house after slashing the tyre he, in the manner of one trying to remove blood, wipes the knife on his dressing gown and reflects that 'one more stain would only add glory to the rest' (Brink 2001: 131). His act of violent revenge, provoked by his sexual desire for Tessa, diametrically opposes the prevalent, stated discourse of his attempted reconciliation with her. It exemplifies the contrast between social goals (reconciliation) and individual needs, personalised in this case in the form of sexual

desire and its attendant emotions: the position of the individual can in this instance be seen in direct conflict to that of the collective. Notably, Olivier fails to experience any regret for his actions, and rejects the TRC model. He does, however, feel shame. In subsequent reinforcement of TRC spin, Olivier laments the lack of resolution to the problems in Magrieta and Tessa's relationship, commenting that it 'remains unresolved' (Brink 2001: 133), and adding that for her part in what has gone wrong in the past, Tessa should be 'helped not condemned' (Brink 2001: 134). However, what fuels Olivier's need for reconciliation is what he sees as a second chance to atone for the wrongs of his own past, although this takes second place to his sexual desire for Tessa. This can possibly be seen as a more short-term solution to the problems of the present, an intermediary goal that benefits the individual rather than the collective. What stands out is that the fact that the desire fuelling Olivier's conciliatory rhetoric is sexual and therefore individually-motivated, whereas that which prompts the nationalist initiative is pragmatic and collective. Olivier links his violent actions to history, stating as he stabs the tyre 'one, two, three more furious stabs. That will change the course of history... no one is going to shit on an Olivier again' (Brink 2001: 134). Violence in this instance is seen as bringing an inner peace to the protagonist that more measured responses to Zach cannot. Olivier claims afterwards that 'I felt extraordinarily calm. I slept more soundly than I had in months' (Brink 2001: 134). Thus the text presents revenge, the antithesis of TRC philosophy, as a viable alternative to reconciliation.

Antje of Bengal is a crucial component of the novel's ending. She is presented through the novel as a tragic figure that is sexually, racially and economically abused, although she also has a talismanic function. Her story is adapted by a white male from

another, more privileged time, sourced from another white male narrative. While it can be argued that this removes the last vestiges of Antje's agency, her integrity is restored, on a symbolic level at least, at the end of the novel. This suggests it is possible to restore subjectivity through the act of storytelling. When Olivier is able to acknowledge the limitations of his relationship with Tessa and face up to the shortcomings in his relationships with other characters in his past, he is able to locate Antje's bones in the cellar. She is literally restored, made whole again by Olivier, in a partial act of atonement for a past based on racial abuse. Once he has buried the bones, he discovers Tessa's lost navel ring, and desire and the possibility of new social relationships is restored.

Like Antje, Magrieta is also made whole by the end of the novel. Part of this restoration has come from her decision to leave Olivier's service. Additionally, Olivier, who goes to great lengths to provide Magrieta with a safe home for her retirement, pays a large part of Magrieta's material reparation. Olivier goes some way to trying to see himself and Magrieta as equals, levelled by age if not past experience, by the close of the novel. Magrieta, though, is able to move on from Olivier only after she has shared with him that he had not fathered the baby miscarried by Riana, and Olivier realises that in fact Riana did not love him. Once Antje's narrative has been told and Olivier has, literally as well as figuratively, pieced the trauma of his own and others' pasts together, some sense of order is restored to the household through revelations about a sexual relationship.

The last major event of The Rights of Desire, the attack on Olivier and Tessa and the attempted rape of Tessa, provides an illustration of vengeance within a post-colonial

context, not unlike the situation depicted by Coetzee in Disgrace. However, unlike the attack in the earlier novel, where the already-disgraced Lurie, is locked, powerless, in the toilet whilst his daughter is brutally raped, Olivier is permitted, albeit rather impotently, the opportunity to defend the object of his desire against the desire of others. While Lucy Lurie accepts her fate at the end of Disgrace, and it is written into the political and moral history of the nation, it represents passive and pragmatic acceptance of social circumstances rather than genuine reconciliation. The reconciliation that Lucy does achieve is shown not to be based on truth, as the story of what happened between her and her attackers is never fully voiced. Lurie and other characters are not reconciled to the past, neither do they demonstrate any sense of domestic resolution. This is perhaps in part achieved in the closing pages of The Rights of Desire, where Tessa thwarts the intentions of her attackers, where there is some social redemption in the form of rescue from their assailants, and where Tessa is able to appear after the attack and go on to live her life according to her desire. Her subsequent appearance dressed in white in a reconstruction of virginal innocence partly stands as a form of resistance and also carries spectral connotations, reminding the reader while in some ways times have changed since the days of Antje of Bengal, in others they have not. In this way The Rights of Desire, like Disgrace, continues to destabilize the status quo by presenting violent incidents with life-changing consequences.

## Chapter Four

### Gendering the New Nation: David's Story by Zoë Wicomb

*You have turned it into a story of women; it's full of old women for God's sake... Who would want to read a story like that? It's not a proper history at all (Zoë Wicomb).<sup>1</sup>*

#### 4.0 Introduction

As argued in Chapter Three, the role of the fiction writer is not necessarily to assist in the provision of psychic closure to traumatic past events, although clearly there are times when writers have been called upon to do just that. This chapter will argue that David's Story by Zoë Wicomb in fact emphasises the impossibility and undesirability of a symbolic “end” to certain kinds of historical event. The novel exemplifies a reluctance and inability to represent certain aspects of South Africa's history as a closed chapter, thus maintaining their discursive presence in the present and keeping the wound of the past open. The Rights of Desire and Disgrace, the focus of the previous chapter, address a range of historical and contemporary subjectivities through white, male eyes and do so in relatively conventional form. David's Story, on the other hand, uses an overtly postmodern structure to focus on a very specific historical perspective. In particular it testifies to the difficulty of representing the experience of the coloured, female active combatant, and to the silences that have surrounded its representation in nationalist historiography to date. This enables a contrapuntal reading of the past which supplements that afforded by the novels analysed in Chapter Three: it writes an additional perspective into post-apartheid textuality, exploring in depth historical experience that other texts, including the TRC Report, do not give space to.

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<sup>1</sup> This quotation is from David's Story by Zoë Wicomb.

As is the case with The Rights of Desire and Disgrace, David's Story functions as a 'mode of discourse' rather than a 'mode of knowledge', and as such creates a new relationship with the past (Felman 2000: 127). Shoshana Felman distinguishes between history as 'a discipline of inquiry and as a mode of knowledge' and narrative as 'a mode of discourse and as a literary genre' (2000: 127). This is a useful distinction for the purposes of this chapter as Wicomb does not present "truth" or empirical knowledge in David's Story, rather exploring creative means of addressing the past of an ANC activist. Like other post-apartheid novels that address the past, its fictionality defines it as neither exclusively nor straightforwardly testimonial. In a similar manner to The Rights of Desire, David's Story has, however, made use of historical documentation (pertaining to Griqua history and Saartjie Baartman, the Hottentot Venus) in order to set up dialogical relationships between historical periods. This process enables a new generation of witnesses to the past. The imagination of Wicomb as fiction writer, in conjunction with that of the reader, permits the text to enter the realm of historical possibilities that empirically verifiable historical documentation cannot. It is in this new "space" afforded by post-apartheid fiction that historical documents can be creatively mediated in order to afford new modes of access to the past. Testimonials are usually judged in terms of their relationship to verifiable history. The imagination of the fiction writer is able to reconstruct aspects of the past, such as those relating to the human psyche, that are either poorly documented or are accompanied by historical documentation that has provided either inadequate or premature closure to past events.

David's Story by Zoë Wicomb was published in 2000, after the close of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and during Nelson Mandela's second term of office as president of the "New" South Africa. The narrative present of David's Story is 1991, one year after

Mandela's release from prison and three years prior to the country's first democratic election. The text can thus be firmly identified as a product of South Africa's period of political transition, a time when the national past posed what I have termed a crisis of representation to South African writers and intellectuals, as well as to the nation's policymakers.

David's Story bears some similarities to The Rights of Desire and Disgrace. It uses the literary device of the spectre to represent the intrusion of unresolved historical trauma into the present, and employs rape (and the fear of rape) as a metaphor for the breakdown of wider social relations.<sup>2</sup> It is highly critical of apartheid South Africa and, like The Rights of Desire, it interweaves events from different time periods. In so doing it combines past and present in what Susan Willis would call 'metaphoric juxtaposition', using the representation of "real" events from the past as a means of passing salient comment on contemporary national conditions (Willis 2000: 50). However, it differs significantly from the two texts discussed in the previous chapter (and thus warrants its own section) in three main ways. Firstly, even though both Coetzee and Brink represent the experiences of women, and Brink tackles aspects of coloured woman's trauma through the characterisation of Magrieta, David's Story is written by a woman who would have been classified as coloured under the racialised systems of apartheid. Secondly, it criticises practices that took place within the ANC as a resistance movement, rather than simply condemning the apartheid state and its legacy. Thirdly, in its refusal to adhere to the traditional narrative structure that can be seen in the two novels analysed in Chapter Three, it stands as a disjointed, postmodern text that shifts between past and present and between "real" and metafictional.

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<sup>2</sup> See Joanna Bourke's Fear: A Cultural Study for detailed exploration of the impact of the fear of sexual assault on women.

#### 4.1 David's Story and Representation

While David's Story is able to depict aspects of the society of its narrative present, it struggles to represent the past experienced by the protagonist Dulcie in the ANC detention camps in Angola. The articulation of her torture in the camp, which is a combined consequence of her race and gender, forms the novel's main crisis of representation. However, as will be discussed later, David's own story also remains largely unrepresentable, possibly due to his complicity in Dulcie's fate. Dorothy Driver states in the novel's afterword that 'Dulcie's is the story that needs to be but cannot be told... She is the unrepresentable body in pain, "a disturbance at this very time of liberation"' (Driver 2001: 218). David's Story evidences the tension between the need to represent a version of the past that is verifiable and objective, as sought by the TRC, and the more subjective, psychological truth of that past presented by its survivors whose memories have been disrupted by the structures of historical trauma. It also represents an ongoing 'disturbance', to borrow Driver's terminology, to the national narrative of liberation. David's Story, like The Rights of Desire, represents both the colonial and apartheid pasts of South Africa. The text stands as a work of memory, representative of histories that are neither objective nor straightforwardly retrievable (like Lucy Lurie's rape in Disgrace, Antje of Bengal's experience in The Rights of Desire and Dulcie's internment in the detention camps), owing to their origins in the severe psychic trauma inflicted by Empire and apartheid. This historical trauma is evident in the form and content of the novel. Its key problematic is the representation of the struggle for representation itself: it is in this way that it functions as a narrative of both oppression and resistance, and supplements and counters previous narratives of national history.

By exploring a national past that predates apartheid, Wicomb writes social worlds into the text that are not represented in either the public hearings or the Report of the TRC. She uses David's Story as a means of exploring three specific historical spheres:

- i. the genealogy and power dynamics within South Africa's Griqua community<sup>3</sup>
- ii. events that took place at Quatro Camp, an ANC detention camp near Quibaxe in northern Angola in the 1980s
- iii. experiences of female ANC comrades.

The fictional representation of these particular histories and the power mechanisms that have informed them enables the integration of modes of domination other than the predominantly racialised approach taken by the TRC into recent national history.<sup>4</sup> With this in mind, this chapter will explore the mediation of historical trauma in the novel, analysing the way in which Wicomb confronts and represents aspects of the past so that they are brought into juxtaposition with the present in order to destabilise the hegemonic discourse of reconciliation.

The opening pages of the preface of David's Story locate the content of the novel firmly within the national narrative of South Africa and highlight its self-conscious fictionality. The text lacks a singular narrative authority: this is underscored by the inclusion of the opening lines of the South African national anthem as the closing couplet of the preface. 'Nkosi Sikilele iAfrika' was a pan-African symbol of anticolonial resistance during the apartheid years and, in its post-apartheid hybrid form, is emblematic of the unified nation.<sup>5</sup> Its inclusion

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<sup>3</sup> See Section 4.4 for discussion of Griqua history and identity.

<sup>4</sup> The TRC covered the historical period 1960 to 1994 inclusive.

<sup>5</sup> 'Nkosi Sikilele iAfrika' has been the anthem of the ANC since 1925, and became part of South Africa's national anthem in 1994 following the ANC's election victory. The new national anthem integrates 'Nkosi Sikilele iAfrika' with its predecessor, the Afrikaans 'Die Stem van Suid-Afrika'. The new anthem includes five of South Africa's eleven national languages, and is as such symbolic of the political integration of the post-apartheid nation. The couplet that appears in the preface of David's Story could be taken from either version. This (deliberate?) ambivalence emphasises the two time periods encompassed in the novel's setting and production.

in this part of the text overrides the wishes of David, the notional protagonist and “owner” of the story:

David wanted the following to be the last words of the text, but I have, for reasons which may/may not be clear in the course of the narrative, transferred them to this position, where I hope they will serve another function.

Nkosi Sikilele iAfrika – God Bless Africa  
Viva the Struggle, Viva! (Wicomb 2001: 3).

While this additional function is never made explicit, two clear purposes are served here.

Firstly, Wicomb reminds the reader through the imperative ‘Viva!’ that the struggle is not yet over. Given the possible ambivalence regarding which political period the cited anthem belongs to, this can either be read as a retrospective reference to the anti-apartheid struggle, or as testimony to the national struggle of the present, or even that which may still come.

Prefaced in this way, the text is established as a component of ongoing political and ideological resistance whilst still testifying to that which has passed. Wicomb opens up temporal possibilities for the text through pointing to both the uncertainty of the national future and the traumatic nature of its past. The novel can then be placed at an interim point on a time continuum, rather than forming the conclusion or resolution to a series of events, which would imply closure. Thus it represents an incomplete and ongoing process, and the role it plays in this is formative rather than summative. In this way it assumes a very different function from memorial texts like the TRC Report. The early and flagrant manipulation of David’s story by the female narrator in terms of what is included in the novel, and where, pre-empts the remainder of the text. It goes on to clarify that this predicted future national struggle relates predominantly to the fight for representation still faced in South Africa by women and by the coloured population (represented in the text as the Griqua descendants of

Krotoa/Eva).<sup>6</sup> The main purpose of this chapter is to analyse the way in which Wicomb represents the duality of this struggle.

Secondly, the repositioning of the couplet decentralises and displaces David's voice in favour of that of the narrator. This happens more than once in the novel, as the narrator goes on to ignore other instructions from David, most notably those pertaining to the inclusion of the narratives of Saartjie Baartman and Krotoa/Eva, as well as disregarding the confidentiality of his feelings for Dulcie. In that the voice of a male protagonist cedes to, and is framed by, that of a female narrator, the text resists imposed gender hierarchies that exist both within its own structures and in the external world. This focal shift denies the reader the security or "truth" of a singular, authoritative narrative voice by emphasising the text's function as an act of representation. It accentuates the lack of immediacy or narrative authority that would be present in a conventional realist text or first person narrative.

The nascent polyphony of the text, that may well be a product of the trauma associated with national history, is developed when additional stories enter the narrative. This demonstrates the impossibility of representing that particular version of the past as linear, unified narrative, as well as the undesirability of presenting it as trauma that has already been processed. The narrator's discourse frames the story of David and the other characters, indicating the possible inability of the narrator to represent her own past in the person and in so doing to lay claim to her story with the personal pronoun "I". This is also evident in Coetzee's Boyhood, the subject of Chapter Five. The fragmented and supplementary narrative angles increase a sense of ambivalence and uncertainty for the reader, creating further distance from the notion that the past might possess a singular "truth". Additionally, it implies that any truth that might

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<sup>6</sup> I am using the term 'coloured' here as it was used under the system of racial classification in apartheid South Africa.

come forth from the text is defiant, gendered and racialised, like the structures of South African national history. The narrator's struggle with the written version of the word is recorded as if to emphasise David's lack of control over the manner in which it enters a written text. It also indicates the more conceptual difficulty of truth existing as a singular entity as well as a more fundamental and literal resistance to it being told. The language in which this is articulated is clear, and presents the corporality of Dulcie as a barrier to representation:

Truth, I gather, is the word that cannot be written. He has changed it into the palindrome of Cape Flats speech – TRURT, TRURT, TRURT, TRURT – the words speed across the page, driven as a toy car is driven by a child, with lips pouted and spit flying, wheels squealing around the Dulcie obstacles. He has, hauling up a half-remembered Latin lesson, tried to decline it. Trurt, oh trurt, to the trurt, trurt, by, with, from the trurt (Wicomb 2001: 136).

The novel resists the kind of truth that is personified by the TRC in language that is reminiscent of Antjie Krog's reflection in Country of My Skull when she expresses her inability to type the word "truth" whilst working as a radio reporter on the TRC (Krog 1999: 53-4).

Although David's "truth" is never really articulated, the text remains ostensibly his story, with a framework provided by the fictional female narrator whose role oscillates between interrogator, amanuensis and collaborator/confidante. The indirect nature of the narrative echoes much of the testimony given to the TRC. While no direct comment is passed regarding David's literacy, testimony was often given by people who were illiterate and wrote through an amanuensis. Oral testimony was also simultaneously translated into national

languages other than that of the witness.<sup>7</sup> Both these acts of interpretation enable traumatic testimony to be framed by the dominant social conventions of language and discourse.

However, this offers rather a simplistic suggestion as to why David's truth is not fully represented in the novel. In her essay 'Shame and identity: the case of the coloured in South Africa', Wicomb has suggested that 'coloured' politics present a problem for representation, because the coloured identity is founded on shame. She cites the roots of the South Africa's coloured population as being located in miscegenation, 'the origins of which lie within a discourse of 'race', concupiscence, and degeneracy [and which] continues to be bound up with shame, a pervasive shame exploited in apartheid's strategy of the naming of a Coloured race' (Wicomb 1998: 92). This is reflected in the mode of representation of historic figures such as Saartjie Baartman, which will be developed in Section 4.4. David, then, represents a double silence in South Africa's history: the silence which surrounds the perceived shame of his race, and that which accompanies the coloured activist within the ANC. Dulcie, as a female comrade, provides the additional silences that pertain to gender.

## **4.2 The Literary Representation of Women**

The majority of narrative space in the novel is given over to the representation of the experiences of women in different periods of South Africa's history, to the extent that David finally complains that he has lost control and the narrator has turned his story 'into a story of women' (Wicomb 2001: 199). This leads to his continued interrogative complaint 'who would want to read a history like that? It's not a proper history at all' (Wicomb 2001: 199). Wicomb's text defies the national past and refutes his assertion that a 'proper' history is one which does not include female narrative, "writing back" to some of the silences of the past.

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<sup>7</sup> The national languages of South Africa are: Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Sotho, Swati, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu.

David's narrative is filtered through the assertive and gendered lens of the narrator and then has to vie for space with the narratives of women. The predominant female narratives are those of Dulcie (a former MK cadre leader who was once possibly David's lover), his wife Sally (also previously an active combatant) and Rachael Susanna Kok (a Griqua matriarch and ancestor of David, whose story he "discovers" as he researches his ancestry).<sup>8</sup> Behind these more prominent female characters the text is inhabited, in a similar manner to Brink's The Rights of Desire, by the more ghostly and less constant presence of other coloured women from South Africa's past, amongst them Krotoa/Eva (the first Griqua woman to be represented in Dutch literature and an employee of Jan van Riebeeck, the first Dutch governor of the Cape) and Saartjie Baartman ("the Hottentot Venus", exhibited in London and other European cities in the early nineteenth century). David's Story also stands as the narrative of the nameless female narrator who, like Dulcie, is both present and absent from the text. At times she is in control of her story and at others surrenders control, most notably to the ghostly figure of Dulcie who intervenes in the final stages. The character of Dulcie additionally recalls a historical figure: her experiences of torture and survival have a personal and "real" archetype in Dulcie September, a coloured ANC activist who was assassinated in Paris in 1988.

In a similar manner to Coetzee's Disgrace, not all of the characters are accorded complete names. Naming, according to Sam Durrant (2004: 32), is a prerequisite of mourning. Certainly each TRC hearing opened with a liturgical reading of the names of the dead, framing the ritual of remembering and mourning, the goal of which is to achieve psychological closure. A memorial function is achieved by naming the victims: they are used to bury the dead, literally and figuratively, and to mark the acquisition of empirical truth

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<sup>8</sup> MK is Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC.

about the past. As discussed in Chapter Two, many victims seek answers to simple questions relating to who has died, at the hands of whom, and where their bodies lie. Durrant asserts that withholding a complete name denies closure to past events, and that the specific denial of a patronym stands as ‘a refusal to historicise the suffering of the dispossessed’, from the perspective that what cannot be properly remembered is unable to be forgotten (Durrant 2004: 32). Dulcie, whose fate and past are not fully elucidated in the text, remains for the most part of the text nominally incomplete, as do Coetzee’s character Pollux and Brink’s Antje for the entirety of the novels. The female narrator of David’s Story remains completely nameless. Whilst keeping aspects of the past “open” this also enables, as will be discussed later, individual characters to take on a representative function, and to pass social comment across generations. Dulcie, for example, is able to represent the real-life female ANC activist Dulcie September, as well as female active combatants in general and a more universal female experience.

The parallel narratives of David and the female characters serve several functions. On the one hand they flag the self-conscious fictionality of the novel, reminding the reader that representation and meaning are constructed and are not necessarily what they proclaim themselves to be. This has the wider effect, in a national climate marked to such a large extent by storytelling, of implying that all narratives can be open to a multiplicity of interpretation: by extension, none of the stories told in the context of post-apartheid nation building necessarily possess a definitive truth or meaning. This destabilises the authenticity and authority of narratives cast as part of the revised nationalist historiography, such as testimonies to the TRC and their assemblage into its Report. If David’s story as told to the narrator is read as an allegory of testimony given to the TRC, then the very self-conscious mediation of his story by the narrator and the gaps that remain within it highlight the role

played by the TRC itself. As an institutional interlocutor, the TRC elicited stories through questioning before going on to select and edit fragments of responses into its official Report: this mirrors the role of the female narrator in David's Story, although passes control to a very different kind of authority.

### **4.3 The Manipulation of Chronology**

The self-conscious postmodern fictional representation of the characters is testimony to the impossibility of representing their experiences via a more traditional or realist mode. To this end, David's narrative is written unchronologically. This extends to the representation of his genealogy, which he has chosen to research and which Wicomb explores in some detail. It is also the racial heritage of the narrator and, indeed, of Wicomb herself. She manipulates the sequence and geographical location of past events pertaining to the Griqua community, with reaching political consequence. Wicomb herself has commented on the fragmented and seemingly muddled nature of the text, stating that 'people ask me, "Why did you choose this structure?" I didn't choose it. It was all I could do' (Wicomb, cited in Willemse 2002: 2). In keeping with the narrative disorder that precedes it, the end of the novel resists the closure that would be offered in a classical narrative structure such as the Bildungsroman. David dies before achieving redemption through completion and publication of his narrative: the withdrawal of the protagonist at this stage effectively passes its control to the narrator, who is in turn unable to finish telling the story because the words delete themselves from her computer. This prohibits a direct merger between David's story and the wider social world, and withholds reconciliation from the narrative subject.

The novel that masquerades as David's story, a male narrative that the nominal protagonist is unable to tell himself, recounts versions of the experiences of Dulcie, the other women and

the narrator. These cannot be told directly due to ongoing social limitations. In the way that women's stories especially are not represented via traditional or direct means in the novel, the marginalisation of many women's narratives within TRC processes is brought to centre stage. Separate TRC hearings were held for women to testify and a discrete, limited section of the Report is dedicated to logging the experiences of women under apartheid.<sup>9</sup> Very often, when women did testify it was to the experiences of their male relatives. This creates a public impression that women did not suffer directly as a result of apartheid, and that the function of these testimonies within the TRC is to affirm male endurance. Fiona Ross observes that, while women told many different kinds of stories to the TRC, their common feature is 'that for the most part, women tell stories about the human rights violations experienced by others' (Ross 1996: 1). Crucially, no female active combatants testified before the TRC.<sup>10</sup> Two silences can therefore be identified: the silence of women with regard to their own experiences, and the silence that relates to female active combat. Thus David's Story fills a gap in the historical experience that has been narrated within the context of the TRC and nation building. Wicomb's representation, then, of an ostensibly male narrative of the past, which goes on to focus predominantly on the historical suffering of women, inverts patterns established by and within the TRC and ventures to territory not covered (or offered by women, according to Ross) in the public hearings. Like Disgrace and The Rights of Desire, which focus respectively on rape and economic discrimination, what initially appears to be a male narrative contains an exploration of female trauma, suggesting perhaps that the trope of trauma is feminine. This can therefore be seen as a representation of the emasculation effected by apartheid developed in Section 4.7. This rewrites and resists popular perceptions of national history and opens new arenas for discursive contest. Yet, like Brink's and

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<sup>9</sup> Pages 282-316 of Volume Four of the Report are dedicated to the three Special Hearings for Women that the TRC held in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. Beyond this small proportion of the document, the testimonies and experiences of women are not accorded specific space.

<sup>10</sup> What I have been unable to verify is whether any female combatants made submissions to the TRC that were not accepted into the final stages of public testimony.

Coetzee's narratives, Wicomb is only able to represent the experiences of women indirectly, telling their stories from a perspective that is nominally male.

Like that relating to Antje of Bengal in The Rights of Desire, the indirect mode of representation of female experience in David's Story testifies to the transhistorical nature of male domination and female suffering. By including Dulcie's characterisation as a tribute to Dulcie September and by making extended intertextual references to Beloved, Wicomb lifts the text out of the racial binarism that is specific to apartheid South Africa. This strategy is also evident in Disgrace and The Rights of Desire through, for example, references to the Holocaust. Wicomb represents in some detail three female characters from different periods in national history and alludes to others, all of whom, like Wicomb herself, would have been determined coloured under apartheid's racial classifications. Krotoa/Eva is from the 17<sup>th</sup> century (the first period of Dutch colonisation, characterised by violence and slavery), Rachael Susanna Kok from the 19<sup>th</sup> century (the time of wider European colonisation), Saartjie Baartman from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (the era characterised by Victorian scientific racism, the early stages of racial segregation and the bloodshed of the Boer Wars), and Dulcie September from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (the time in which the brutality of apartheid and resistance to it were at a height). The use of these women as referents to different periods of South Africa's racialised history accords broader signification to female experience. And, by using coloured female experience as a means of representing several historical periods characterised by extreme violence, it signifies the ongoing gendered and racial hostility of post-apartheid South Africa

#### 4.4 Racial Stereotyping and the Hottentot Venus

The relationship between violence and the representation of the coloured South African woman lies at the heart of South African racial stereotyping. Wicomb employs several strategies to address the history of this. David's research into his Griqua forebears enables discussion of the community's experiences of colonialism and disenfranchisement. By drawing on Sarah Gertrude Millin's narrative of miscegenation, God's Stepchildren, Wicomb addresses the stereotyping that has surrounded the racialised history and identity of South Africa's coloured populations. The iconic figure of Saartjie Baartman, the Hottentot Venus, is additionally used to write the fetishist history of colonial racial stereotyping into the text, and to unite gendered, racial and nationalist discourses.

The Griqua are descended from the Khoi people who were, along with the San, South Africa's original inhabitants. The first colonisers referred to them as Hottentots and Bushmen (and accorded them the collective name of the Khoisan). A Griqua settlement was established in Klaarwater in 1804, and extended by an influx of runaway slaves from the Indian Ocean Basin. This was later renamed Griquastad. They have faced prejudice throughout South Africa's history: in 1874 the governor of the Cape Colony issued orders for the community to be 'entirely subdued and destroyed' (Driver 2000: 220). Perhaps oddly, as their differences are so obvious, the Griqua share several traditions with the Afrikaners in South Africa.<sup>11</sup> Their societies were based on founding myths, such as that of the Promised Land and they were both also Christian. Yet crucially, unlike the Afrikaners, the Griqua community included a range of ethnicities, this multiracialism being a formative part of its identity. In this way the reference to Griqua history frames the contemporary struggle for democracy with discussion of a non-racist precedent.

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<sup>11</sup> And, interestingly, the National Party has garnered huge support from South Africa's coloured population. At the time of the first democratic election the Western Cape (home to a massive coloured population) was the only region where the ANC did not gain parliamentary majority (Wicomb 1998: 93).

Wicomb refers in the novel to actual Griqua treks and tracks the genealogy of the le Fleur family through David's research into his family tree. The text explores the history of coloured communities in South Africa through a series of "historical" accounts based on the diaries of Andries le Fleur, a Griqua chief in the nineteenth century. Wicomb self-consciously blurs the boundaries between fictional and historical texts by interrupting the narrative of the le Fleur lineage to state that 'the rest of [the] story can be found in Mrs Sarah Gertrude Millin's narrative about miscegenation' (Wicomb 2001: 38). However, she casts aspersions on the reliability of Millin's narrative by issuing the caveat that she 'has taken several liberties with the tale, including casting the boy as an Englishman and adding some years to his age' (Wicomb 2001: 38). By raising this kind of doubt, albeit in the context of fiction, Wicomb is able to both subvert "official" discourse and the canon of racialised fiction from the past that was used to support and disseminate official policy. Her choice of a fictional intertext that predates apartheid (Millin wrote God's Stepchildren in 1924) enables her to write against the principles of Victorian scientific racism, which formed the basis of apartheid and justified the construction and propagation of the coloured female stereotype.

While Wicomb's general historical references remain largely accurate, she does not adhere to chronology when writing about characters' relationships to one another, a device that enables the experiences of the coloured population to be presented as transhistorical. There is no need to repeat an analysis of Griqua history as Dorothy Driver has done this so effectively in her afterword to the novel. However, it is useful to look at the specific areas Wicomb has chosen to manipulate in relation to race and nationhood.

Through changing the forename of Andries le Fleur to Andrew she conflates a historical Griqua figure and Andrew Flood, the character created by Millin in God's Stepchildren. This merger of two otherwise conflicting characters destabilises the racial stereotypes perpetuated in Millin's novel. In God's Stepchildren Millin, a white South African of Lithuanian origin, reinforces popular contemporary notions of the moral and physical degeneracy of the Hottentot. The novel draws on popular nineteenth-century European opinions that there is a direct relationship between blood type and an individual's degree of "civilisation" to reflect the contemporary views, like those popularised by Gobineau, of European civilisation as superior to that of Africa. God's Stepchildren follows the journey of the Reverend Andrew Flood to the Hottentot land of Canaan to replace a recently deceased missionary. Millin's writing draws on and propagates contemporary racial stereotypes, likening the Hottentot encountered by Flood to apes, describing them as 'little, yellow, monkey-like people with... triangular faces and peppercorned heads' (Millin 1924: 8). Using the language of evolutionary racism, she posits the Hottentot as an animal-like race who 'squat on their haunches' (Millin 1924: 12). She also draws attention to the 'characteristically protuberant behind' of the Hottentot female that dominated contemporary British and European views of the Hottentot and Bushmen (Millin 1924: 15). Her stereotyped representation of the Hottentot as lazy and perpetually sleeping is revisited in David's Story, as the similarly-named Andrew le Fleur catalogues in his diary sightings of 'a people of running sores, of filth and idleness and degradation' (Wicomb 2001: 41). Additionally, he criticises the mules who accompanied him on his trip (mules, as the hybrid offspring of a horse and a donkey allegorical in this instance of the Hottentot as a miscegenated race), stating that 'stupidity and laziness, that's what made them wander off; they deserved no better than to be used as beasts of burden' (Wicomb 2001: 43).

Wicomb's most significant fictional interpretation of history is the connection she makes between the le Fleur family and Georges Cuvier, the French scientist who was responsible for dissecting Baartman's body in Paris and, therefore, for perpetuating European stereotypes of the Hottentot female. Madame La Fleur left France to travel to the Cape almost a century before Cuvier lived (Cuvier was born in 1769, whereas La Fleur left in 1688). Because Wicomb casts La Fleur as Cuvier's servant, Driver suggests that we could then follow a course of intuition and inference to conclude that her son Eduard is Cuvier's illegitimate son. (Driver 2001: 227) This further plays on Millin's title God's Stepchildren, presenting the race of the Griqua in South Africa as originating from illegitimacy. By extension, Andrew le Fleur is then presented as a possible descendant of Cuvier, which muddles and complicates David's own racial and political heritage. Because David's lineage is troubled, contemporary racial categorisations are also challenged.

While, according to Driver (2001: 228) this male genealogy is relatively well-documented, Wicomb's stories of coloured women are essentially invented. Lady Kok and Rachael Susanna Kok are only briefly referred to in written histories, but are granted significant fictional space in David's Story (Driver 2001: 228). The mythologised historical figures of Saartjie Baartman and Krotoa/Eva, however, remain as the backdrop to the text although are never fully represented. Yet the stereotyped representation of their bodies frames the narrative. Wicomb states near to the beginning of the novel where David, as with the word 'truth', is unable to pronounce 'steatopygia', 'the word that has fired his imagination, that has set the story on its course so to speak' (Wicomb 2001: 17). David's contemporary environment is haunted by these women. While he resists the perceived feminisation of his narrative, he also seeks the restoration of their stories in his finished piece, and insists on the inclusion of the narrative of Baartman. Indeed, according to the narrator, he states that to miss

out the story of Baartman ‘would be like excluding history itself’ (Wicomb 2001: 1). The narrator decides not to follow his wishes, and also leaves out the story of Krotoa/Eva, who worked as an emissary between the Dutch and the Khoisan. Krotoa’s story originally formed the beginning of David’s narrative: her omission is significant. Not only does it withhold a specific point of origin from David’s genealogy, but in the more recent context of Krotoa’s status as a national “mother” it also renders David illegitimate.

David’s ambivalence towards women is clear. He complains of female domination of his story, yet wants certain female narratives to be included in the book. He never questions Le Fleur’s attitudes to women (yet he does challenge his racism). He chooses a female narrator, but also tries to silence her. Thus, like The Rights of Desire the text establishes a connection between attitudes to women in the past and present, which are represented through symbols relating to the female body. The scars on Dulcie’s back that echo those on the body of Morrison’s Sethe embody a history of slavery and abuse and reaffirm the connection between racialised and gendered attitudes in past and present. In the way that they are shaped like the branches of a tree they affirm the ongoing strength of the violated female body.

Stereotypical and fetishist attitudes to the coloured female body of Saartjie Baartman have their modern-day equivalent in the playground treatment of Dulcie, and in the rape of Sally in the training camp. This sexualised aspect of the Hottentot stereotype is represented historically in David’s Story through Wicomb’s references to the Hottentot Venus, although in contravention of David’s wishes her full story is not included. The historical figure of the Hottentot Venus has long been contested in South Africa. Saartjie Baartman, a young Hottentot woman, was taken from South Africa to Europe in 1810 to satisfy growing western interest in the Hottentots. She was exhibited in the major European cities for five years before

she died in Paris in 1815. Interest in Baartman focused on her genital organs and buttocks. Eighteenth-century travellers to Southern Africa had returned to Europe with tales of steatopygia and the “Hottentot Apron”, an enlargement of the labia majora and labia minora in the Hottentot female that was regarded locally as a sign of beauty (Gilman 1985: 85). Following her death Baartman’s body was dissected and, in keeping with the contemporary trend for autopsies of black females to focus on the sexual parts, her genital organs were displayed in the Musée de l’Homme in Paris. They remained there until 1974, when they were removed from public display and placed in storage at the museum. Her autopsy was carried out by Georges Cuvier, an eminent zoologist, and focused largely on noting ‘anomalies of her organ of generation’ (Gilman 1985: 85).

As a Hottentot national icon as well as a self-proclaimed icon for Wicomb herself (Wicomb 1998: 93) Baartman has long been the subject of political debate. Wicomb argues that ‘she exemplifies the body as a site of shame... the construction of woman as racialised and sexualised other’ (Wicomb 1998: 93). Her contested body has also transcended history to become emblematic of the struggle for national reconciliation. Indeed, Wicomb’s refusal to include her narrative in David’s Story may well be indicative of a reluctance to lay Baartman to rest before her body had been returned home. While there had been occasional demands for the repatriation of Baartman’s remains since the 1940s, the case did not become prominent until the 1980s. Mandela called for France to return her when he acceded to power in 1994, although the French government did not acquiesce until 2002, two years after the publication of David’s Story. On August 9, 2002, National Women’s Day, Saartjie Baartman was given a state funeral in her birthplace, the Gamtoos River Valley. In a gesture indicative of the memorial and symbolic aspect of Baartman’s identity, Thabo Mbeki gave her funeral speech. At the time Wicomb wrote David’s Story, the campaign for the return of Baartman’s

remains was topical, and had been the subject of several fictional works.<sup>12</sup> The symbolic laying to rest of her remains on National Women's Day clearly and publicly unites the two stereotypes that she embodies. As Rachel Holmes points out, even her name conjoins the racial stereotype of the Hottentot (the now unacceptable name for South Africa's Khoisan peoples) that symbolised much that Victorian Europe considered to be "other" and disturbing, and the Venus, powerful cultural marker of lust and love (Holmes 2007: 2).

Wicomb's academic writing reinforces the use of the stereotype in her fiction writing. Her essay 'Shame and Identity: the Case of the Coloured in South Africa' links the body of the coloured woman firmly with the feelings associated with its colonialist stereotype. The display of Baartman's genital organs in Paris firmly established the link between the black woman and sexualised behaviour. Yet, as Wicomb points out, Baartman's past is associated with pain and injury rather than shame (Wicomb 1998: 91). Wicomb questions whether the burial of Baartman would bury the notion of woman as associated with shame, her very name being indicative of her mixed ancestry and the "shame" of miscegenation. Wicomb, then, can be seen to be writing an icon of historical, fetishist stereotyping alongside discussion of the contemporary reality faced by coloured women in the ANC and the wider nation. The reader can relate the history that pertains to Baartman to attitudes to women in the South Africa of the narrative present: a contemporaneity that is marked in David's Story by rape and torture. As is the case with the representation of the slave Antje of Bengal in The Rights of Desire, the contrapuntal reading afforded by this representation of female experience across historical periods offers insight into the way that the historical treatment of coloured women has shaped their treatment in the present.

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<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Alexander wrote The Venus Hottentot in 1990 and Barbara Chase-Riboud published Hottentot Venus in 2003. Several plays and poems have also been written about Baartman, a documentary film The Life and Times of Sara Baartman has been produced, and South Africa's first off-shore environmental protection vessel is named after her.

The reader is confronted both with the suffering of Saartjie Baartman at white male hands, and the contemporary sexualised stereotyping of the coloured woman in a modern anticolonial resistance movement. This is illustrated through the rape of Sally whilst on ANC training, and the treatment (including sexual torture) of Dulcie during her period of detention in Quatro Camp and subsequent years. Quatro Camp was, ironically perhaps, a detention camp for dissidents within the ANC who protested for greater democracy within a movement that declared its primary political aim to be the achievement of democracy. Driver has pointed out that, to David, elements of Dulcie's past remain unrepresentable (Driver 2001: 232). If David's Story were to represent details of what happened to Dulcie in Quatro Camp, then this would require David (as representative of the male ANC comrade and, therefore, the post-apartheid government) to confront his own past as victimiser as well as victim. On a wider scale, the novel testifies to ANC complicity in human rights violations in its own detention camps. David's refusal to tell the story of Dulcie's experience in the camps is a powerful indication of his complicity in her treatment: his failure to face up to his collusion in her fate represents what at the time was the ANC's denial of abuses in Quatro Camp.

#### **4.5 The African National Congress, Female Representation and Sexual Torture**

Other than the documented abuse that took place in its detention camps, the ANC has a chequered history with regard to the treatment of women. The ANC was initiated two years after the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910, on January 8 1912. Originally named the South African Native National Congress, its aim was to increase the rights of South Africa's black population. It was renamed the ANC in 1923, and its military wing MK was formed in 1961. The ANC was founded by John Dube, Pixley ka Isaka Seme and Sol Plaatjie and its original membership, as Anne McClintock has observed, comprised predominantly

bourgeois, colonially-educated males (McClintock 1997: 106). For the first thirty years women were excluded from full ANC membership, although levels of female activism within the organisation increased, demonstrating that there is no direct correlation between acknowledgement/acceptance and activism. On a national level the ANC aimed for unity and inclusivity, in terms of its internal organisation: by excluding women from full membership, however, it remained exclusive and hierarchical. By way of compromise wives of full members were granted auxiliary membership from 1931, and accorded certain duties in connection with this (McClintock 1997: 106). While the ANC Women's League was launched in 1918 (in response to women's increasing politicisation after the 1913 Pass Laws), it was not until 1943, and after years of insistence, that women were granted full membership and voting rights within the ANC. Women, then, remained marginalised from the institution of resistance yet still participated in the struggle against apartheid.

Dulcie's fate as an ANC member is linked explicitly to her sexual and racial identity. Rape, as an extreme form of torture, is debated in front of her and is rejected as 'being too good for her kind' (Wicomb 2001: 178). It is pertinent at this point to look at Wicomb's brief analysis of My Son's Story by Nadine Gordimer. In this novel the illegitimate son of a coloured schoolteacher and a white woman writes the story of his father's infidelity and mother's ensuing political activism, the father not being able to write his own story. The closing words of the text withhold any possibilities for representation that may have existed, as they state that it can never be published. With regard to this novel, Wicomb suggests that it is not the coloured individual per se whose story is unrepresentable, rather the coloured activist within the ANC, 'whose relations with the organisation turn out to be problematic' because of his highly sexualised behaviour (Wicomb 1998: 103-4). Wicomb suggests at this point that 'the coloured story is destined to be suppressed' (Wicomb 1998: 104), a hypothesis perhaps borne

out in the publication of her own novel two years later, which indicates precisely that sexual behaviour within the ANC is what makes that aspect of the past unrepresentable (whilst also attempting to make aspects of this history public).

David's Story fails to clarify whether Dulcie's torturers are white security police or ANC comrades, the ambivalence reinforcing public perceptions of the levels of racialised violence in the contemporary nation. The presence and non-presence of her mind/consciousness in her body creates a form of resistance to what is happening: ostensibly Dulcie accepts the pain inflicted on her body passively, her mind elsewhere as she removes herself from the pain that is enacted on the physical body, 'the body performs the expected – quivers, writhes, fails, squirms, stretches – but you observe it from a distance. It is just a matter of being patient. Of enduring.' (Wicomb 2001: 178). The presence and absence/non-presence here reinforces the way in which the visible aspect of the female body, already established in the text as an arena for political resistance, can also function as a medium for more personal resistance. Dulcie recalls her refusal to have sex with her male ANC colleagues, the way in which she 'resisted the male comrades, [their] having worked out that fucking women was a way of preventing them from rising in the Movement' (Wicomb 2001: 179). Ironically, perhaps, the skills she has gained through her involvement with MK are used against her attackers: she on occasion has to chase after them, using guns against them. Through recounting Dulcie's experience of violence from within the ranks of a resistance organisation, Wicomb is adding a literary or imaginative dimension to events already recorded by the ANC in the little-publicised Stuart Commission Report of 1984, in which 'widespread complaint that people in administration use their positions to seduce women comrades' is reported (ANC 1984: 3). Additionally, long-term stay in the camps in Angola is shown as leading to comrades 'rationalis[ing]

indiscipline, dagga smoking, drinking and rape by the fact of their being so long in camps under abnormal conditions' (ANC 1984: 6).

However, Dulcie's subject position both within the ranks of the ANC and within national politics remains marked by ambivalence. She is a comrade, but she is also female, and coloured. She occupies a triple object position in relation to the apartheid state, but also is doubly objectified within the structures of the ANC as resistance organisation. Her identity is defined at the point of intersection of racialised and gendered power discourses, with the political focus of the armed struggle and her relative position of authority within MK failing to counter gender as a historically inscribed power mechanism. David's Story is written out of chronology, with episodes from Dulcie's past interspersed with the present, with Sally's past and present and with extracts from a more distant Griqua history as well as the narrator's present. The disconnected and diverse images Wicomb presents of Dulcie's past stand as an allegory for unresolved national trauma. They are concomitant with the residual psychic trauma that their disorderly presentation would imply. David himself is also recorded as displaying signs of trauma as, for example, his tinnitus is triggered when he tries to recall events surrounding Dulcie. His trauma is reflected in the fragmented, traumatised nature of the text that testifies to the impossibility of constructing a seamless narrative of a disturbed past.

Dulcie is regularly sexually assaulted and tortured during her membership of MK: the traumatic encounters are marked by flashbacks, a known symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder, to the unassimilated corporeal signifier of a stinging sensation in her nose:

The men in balaclavas come like privileged guests into her bedroom, in the early hours, always entering the house by different routes, ridiculing her enforced bolts and locks, the secret code of her Securilarm system. She wakes up and with every sense aquiver, mentally follows them over the fence, along the garden path,

through the chosen window... Now they come without a sound, but the stinging in the bridge of her nose preceded conscious knowledge of their arrival...

One of them carries a doctor's Gladstone bag filled with peculiar instruments and electrical leads... Sometimes in the delirium of pain she wishes to say something soothing, comforting, for she knows that he does not understand the ways of the world, the ugly secrets of war, that he has stumbled upon them without warning, without training. But she cannot trust the words to come out unmangled. Out of delicacy, she does not speak, remains dry-eyed. One day she will weep like a gargoyle. Tears will fountain from every orifice, including the man-made ones, washing away the grimy contact, washing her retinas clean, so that she can see clearly how things stand in the world. The new world that is (Wicomb 2001: 82).

Through representation of sexual torture, the text clarifies the distinction between past, present and future worlds. Her past trauma is revisited in the sensation in her nose, and the flashback to the scene of torture, and the future in the possibilities of reconciliation symbolised by the TRC.

The catharsis, or intrasubjective reconciliation, that will afford Dulcie the clarity of vision she desires within the post-apartheid nation will not be achieved until the parameters of the social world are altered. When the narrator pieces together an account of Dulcie's experiences at the hands of men who may well be her comrades, David inexplicably fails to provide an articulate response, 'he stared at me impassively, shaking his head, refusing to speak' (Wicomb 2001: 82). However, whether his early incalcitrance is due to guilt, complicity or loyalty to his former comrades, he is then prompted to recall an incident related to him by Dulcie of abuse by male comrades in the ANC. When the recruits had been starving in the desert in Botswana, Dulcie was badly stung whilst retrieving honey from a bees' nest: she came round from her ordeal to discover that the male comrades had eaten all the honey, leaving none for her. This incident "fits" with the findings of the Stuart Commission, which published a report on its investigations into the conditions in the ANC camps in Angola. The report tells of the lack of food available for the comrades, and of the poor treatment of women (ANC 1984: 1-21). She shows David the scars on her body left by the bee stings,

marks that stand as a metaphor for male betrayal: David notably is able to articulate his complicity in this over and above his own narrative. Partial resolution to her injury and betrayal is demonstrated at the very end of the novel, as Dulcie (in her only moment of physical presence to the narrator) lies in the garden, with honey oozing from her body. Wicomb describes her as ‘covered with goggas crawling and buzzing all over her syrup sweetness, exploring her orifices, plunging into her wounds’ (2001: 212). Dulcie accepts the invasion of her body, reclaiming the torture that was enacted on her in Quatro, the physical dissolution of her body mirroring the ‘silver puddle’ of words that leaks from the narrator’s computer as a bullet ‘explodes’ into it. (Wicomb 2001: 212). As the body dissolves, so does the concrete form of its narrative.

Dulcie’s experience in the ANC conforms to a pattern within resistance organisations of employing sex as a means of repressing women and limiting their progress through the hierarchy. Elaine Brown, former chairperson of the Black Panther Party,<sup>13</sup> states in her autobiography that ‘a woman in the Black Power movement was considered, at best, irrelevant... If a black woman assumed a role of leadership she was said to be eroding black manhood, to be hindering the progress of the black race. She was an enemy of black people’ (Brown 1994: 357). This is supported by Susan Stern’s autobiography With the Weathermen, which recounts her involvement with The Weathermen, a revolutionary splinter group of Students for a Democratic Society, which operated in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. Stern writes of the way in which The Weathermen demanded an end to monogamous relationships within its membership and tells of a night when a woman in a monogamous relationship was raped. Stern could hear the incident through a partition wall, and recounts the women protesting “‘I don’t want to. All I can think about is Justesen. I love him. I don’t

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<sup>13</sup> The Black Panther Party operated in the United States between 1966 and 1977, before disbanding due to financial issues and internal conflict. Elaine Brown was its final chairperson, and the first woman to hold this position within the organisation.

want you, I want Mike” (Stern 2007: 176). Her rapist’s response is that ““You have to put the demands of your collective above your love. Nothing comes before the collective...”” (Stern 2007: 177). This concept of the individual needs of women and their “individualist” needs possessing the capacity to hinder the national is echoed in a statement made by Govan Mbeki, father of President Thabo Mbeki, to the TRC. In his response to the challenges posed by family life to members of the liberation movement who wanted to keep their activities secret from their families, he states that ‘women created problems for the liberation movement because they wanted to know’ (Mbeki, cited in Ross 1996: 19).

Stern’s words echo those of the MK Commander who rapes Sally, David’s wife. Sally has a gendered and pathological relationship to national politics and, like Dulcie, has a history of active membership of MK. Most specifically, during her training in Mozambique her object status is constructed and perpetuated in relation to her gender. Unable to swim to the standards set by her trainer, the solution (to him) was clear: ‘A fuck, that’s what you need, and she saw his bulging shorts and knew that her time had come, as she had known it would come sooner or later, this unspoken part of a girl’s training’ (Wicomb 2001: 123). I suggest that this assertion of male potency is an inverted response to the political impotency imposed by apartheid. In the relationship between Sally and her trainer, allegorical of national political relations, Sally as woman is standing in for the social structure that the trainer, who stands for the resistance movement, is unable to defeat. Her conquered body, which dissolves during the act of enforced sex, takes the place of the emasculated black male identity, assuming a new object position.

This seemingly inevitable/widespread sexual initiation constitutes that part of the ‘training’ in which trauma resides, that which cannot be spoken. The aftermath of the trauma is the

dissolution of Sally's body as well as the very words which might describe her experiences. After having sex with the comrade, in an emotional transition that implies the historical violence within the resistance movement not addressed by the TRC, Sally 'lost her fear, found her body dissolving, changing its solid state in the water through which she then moved effortlessly' (Wicomb 2001: 123). In submitting her physical body to the metaphorical corpus of the nation, in a similar way to that in which Dulcie submits her body to the narrative, Sally surrenders her womanhood to nationalist objectives, achieving a goal of wider political freedom at a cost: 'she told herself, no point in being fastidious, there were more important things to think of, there was freedom on which to fix her thoughts' (Wicomb 2001: 123). The act of sex, then, is seen as having the power to dissolve the boundaries of the gendered body, transforming it into what seems to be a more gender-neutral figure that is able to meet nationalist objectives. The challenge to the reader is twofold: on the one hand there is the difficult concept that rape could have the positive outcome of relaxation; on the other sits the notion that women might occupy a subservient position to nation, and that rape might be a necessary stage on the route to national liberation, denying woman a physically intact role in the post-apartheid nation. Rape, additionally, is presented as an acceptable, and accepted, part of armed struggle.

#### **4.6 Dulcie and her Archetype**

By naming her central female character Dulcie, Wicomb fulfils specific and more generic objectives. She is able both to memorialise the experiences of Dulcie September, and to posit the experiences of the Dulcie that she has constructed within a historical tradition of female combatants. By revisiting a certain type of female experience across generations and fictional boundaries Wicomb, like Brink with his characterisation Antje of Bengal, demonstrates the ways in which abuse of the female body circulates through historical periods and assumes a

timeless dimension. She actively writes the figure and pathology of the coloured woman into the history of both ANC and nation, whilst at the same time paying tribute to Dulcie September's contribution to the liberation struggle. She offers this additional dimension to the limited information submitted to the TRC on Dulcie September by tracing the racialised origins of psychological trauma through the story of an individual fictional character, at a point in history when Dulcie, like Trijntjie of Madagascar, is no longer able to speak for herself.

Dulcie, David's comrade, friend, and maybe also ex-lover (the text establishes David's attraction to Dulcie and hints at a sexual relationship without confirming it), is the figure through whom many of the experiences of a female ANC activist are represented. The character of Dulcie never actualises during the text until the very end: like Brink's Antje her presence haunts the narrative rather than appearing in it. The nearest she comes to physical presence is her ghostly and diminishing appearance in the narrator's garden at the end of the text. As well as a visceral body, Dulcie is not accorded a biography. In direct contrast to the kinds of narratives favoured by the TRC, David remains unable to offer the narrator any concrete biographical information about Dulcie, stating that he does not 'need to flesh her out with detail', rather referring to her in language that connotes Edvard Munch's The Scream as 'a kind of scream somehow echoing through my story' (Wicomb 2001: 134). Dulcie is thus denied a visceral presence in the novel, represented instead as a tormented spectre that, like Antje of Bengal, haunts the narrative present with the unassimilated trauma of the past. Her symbolic, transhistorical function is clarified when, after being pressurised by the narrator to write down some facts about Dulcie, David returns with a bundle of paperwork about Saartjie Baartman. The first page of his writing demonstrates to the narrator that he has been trying to write about Dulcie:

Because her name is written several times and struck out. Then there are beginnings scattered all over, and at various angles that ignore the rectangularity of the paper, as if by not starting at the top or not following the shape of the page he could fool himself that it is not a beginning (Wicomb 2001: 135).

David's narrative of Dulcie resists pen, paper and chronological representation. In a more allegorical sense, by refusing to fit into the confines of the paper or the accepted system for writing, it resists the framework for traumatic narrative provided by the TRC. His inability to write about Dulcie, but to articulate something of the narrative of Baartman perhaps suggests that trauma which lies closer to him, in terms of both emotions and temporality is not resolved enough to be spoken of. By speaking of Baartman, David links Dulcie to a longer history of exploitation of coloured women in South Africa. In a similar manner to that in which Brink uses Antje of Bengal to comment on the conditions inhabited by the modern-day slave, Magrieta Daniels, Wicomb uses the narrative of Saartjie Baartman, a coloured female archetype, to explore the social position of coloured women in the more recent past. Dulcie's story, which the text refuses to name as such, is a narrative of the violence enacted on the female body through history. The violence that has been inflicted on Dulcie's body, marked in the present by the scars on her back, stands as an allegory for the wider colonial violence of slavery. The story of Dulcie herself is, for David and Wicomb/the narrator, unsayable perhaps because it relates so closely to their own stories

From the beginning of the text Dulcie's identity is firmly placed within a context of political activism. Her initial introduction to the reader is as an agent of political violence, in keeping with the identity of her political archetype Dulcie September. Wicomb's description of her is redolent of Lady Macbeth, captured in cameo as she washes 'the sticky red from her hands, watches until the water runs clear and shakes them vigorously' (Wicomb 2001: 18). This image reflects that of Ruben Olivier in The Rights of Desire slashing the tyre of his love-rival

Zach, and walking back into the house with the blade afterwards (Brink 2001: 131). The visual image of woman as political activist is enduring and vivid and pre-empts a trope of cleansing that runs through the text: given the national “cleansing” that formed the context of the novel’s production, this is a leitmotif with special significance, blood simultaneously demonstrating qualities of sacredness and defilement.

This image of Dulcie foregrounds the representation of the physical elements of the national struggle: however, Wicomb qualifies this by drawing the reader’s attention to the endless possibilities of interpretation inherent in fictional representation, and allowing David the space to explain his perception of the comparison between Dulcie and Lady Macbeth as flimsy, ‘You would get it wrong, quite wrong; besides power has never held any lure for her’ (Wicomb 2001: 18). Polyphony, in this sense the addition of extra voices and perspectives into the narrative, offers a contrapuntal supplement to the narrator’s vision. As discussed in more detail in Section 3.1, this offers a form of democracy, which the narrator later chooses to flout by ignoring David’s requests regarding what to include. Yet, even though like other images within the text, that of the female combatant cleansing her bloodied hands is open to interpretation, it is enduring and provides a frame for exploring the events in Dulcie’s life that have led to this point. This abreaction of Dulcie’s violent history is supported by intertextual references from a literary canon that represents a wider geographical struggle for liberation from a traumatised past, that of slavery. For later in the same passage Dulcie is represented as a victim of racial violence, self-likened to Sethe from Beloved. Like her literary predecessor, Dulcie’s back and psyche bear the scars of torture that, although in all likelihood inflicted by her comrades in arms, also carry meaning within a discourse of historically inscribed racism. Her back is:

Marked with four-cent sized circles, forming the corners of a small inner square, meticulously staked out with blue ballpoint pen before the insertion of a red-hot poker

between the bones. The smell of that singed flesh and bone still, on occasion, invades and then she cannot summon it away (Wicomb 2001: 19).

In a repeated example of metatextuality Dulcie is compared to Sethe, ‘a woman in *Beloved* whose back is scarred and who nevertheless is able to turn it into a tree’ (Wicomb 2000: 19). Through an explicit comparison of the two characters, Wicomb links Dulcie’s scars to those caused by a wider colonial history of racial and gender-based domination. This is linked to the origins of South Africa’s Griqua population, David and Dulcie’s genealogical predecessors, and which come into play in the novel via David’s quest to explore his ancestry. It also connects the novel to a literary canon of feminism and political resistance. In this way Dulcie’s biography becomes part of a text that is pre-empted as being resistant to dominant national politics. Because it demonstrates violence against women as being transhistorical and translocational it pertains to a different kind of historical chronology than that proffered by the TRC.

Wicomb’s intertextuality, while affirming a wider sense of victimhood than that permitted within a specifically South African context, emphasises the extremity of female suffering and resistance. Ironically, given that Dulcie is never properly given a body in the text, it is corporeal imagery that connects her experiences to those from a wider literary and anticolonial past. This continues with references to texts that link her actions to the broader history of women’s roles as agents of resistance in the worldwide struggle against colonial domination. The ambivalent status of the politically active woman is reinforced, as is that of Dulcie as MK combatant. In a paragraph deeply reminiscent of Frantz Fanon’s accounts of the ways in which women in colonised Algeria used the veil, a visible signifier of their gender and racial otherness, as a means of smuggling arms into the French-controlled areas of Algiers, Wicomb describes the attire of female ANC comrades on a training mission. In

Algeria, women became tactically invisible as a means of mocking the colonial gaze that regarded the veil as a means of perpetuating their object status. Wicomb's description of Dulcie, then leader of an MK cadre, accords her an authoritative gaze, emphasising the hierarchy that operated within the ranks of MK and writing the female comrades into an anticolonial struggle shared with the women in Algiers. Wicomb rewrites the historically and culturally objectified female body, liberating it from the colonial stereotype of *steatopygia* and associated concupiscence that was inhabited by Baartman. As the figure of the woman is removed from a racialised and sexualised historical discourse, the visual signifier of woman is accorded a revolutionary function that resists far more than the apartheid state:

There, on a training mission in the Venda, in a cave, she had watched the sharp black shadows of young women as they entered, crossing from lurid light into darkness. They came in traditional dress, gaudy green shifts under pink crossover pinafores draped over straw bolsters for buttressing the hips and buttocks into exotic insect shapes. When they left days later with piles of wood balanced on their heads, they filed past her searching gaze, their bodies a mere hint of movement within the sculpted shapes, the AK-47s perfectly concealed (Wicomb 2001: 19).

The Manichean imagery prevalent in this passage invokes Fanon's focus on the divisions inherent in the colonial landscape, emphasising the contrast between the darkness of the environment occupied by women living under apartheid, and the perceived light of the world beyond the armed struggle. In imagery that focuses on the searching power of the colonial gaze, Dulcie's ambivalent status as high-ranking comrade and object of apartheid is marked as she inspects the trainee guerrilla fighters. The 'exotic' shapes of the young comrades mirror the sexualised pathology of the female body prevalent in colonial discourse: the *steatopygic* forms fetishised in the colonial mind are exaggerated by the straw bolsters that conceal the weapons. By reinscribing a colonial stereotype Wicomb manages to create a new iconography of resistance that extends beyond apartheid. Additionally, Wicomb rewrites *steatopygia* into her construction of the Rain Sisters, a female version of a traditionally male aspect of Griqua folklore. The women, 'the queens of *steatopygia*' are chosen to carry water

to the promised land, their body shapes no longer symbolising a negative sexuality, but revised into 'women who had been shaped by God into perfect vessels' (Wicomb 2001: 153).

The coloured female body though, as a historical marker of the point of intersection between gender and race, symbolises something different for Dulcie. Her regular nightly torture echoes a more juvenile version of torment she suffered whilst at school, indicating that violence against women is inherent in social relations and is part of the wider trauma that precedes apartheid. The earlier incidents are also accompanied by 'the stinging sensation in the nose... that signals the desire to cry' (Wicomb 2000: 80). In childhood Dulcie is regularly subjected to a playground taunt that pre-empted the sexual torture inflicted by the comrades. The repeated chant of 'Dulcie-pulcie-kroeskop-poeskop' illustrates the inscription of psychic trauma at the point of intersection between race and gender, with the narrator conjecturing in the absence of any more concrete testimony that this may have triggered Dulcie's involvement in the anti-apartheid struggle, and that the stereotype of the female body can in fact be a mechanism for resistance:

It was then, as they rhymed her blackness with her cunt, that she bit back the tears and discovered the strength in her thin arms and legs that sent the little shits flying one by one into the dust, even if her gymslip got torn to shreds. Those limbs, since built into solid trunks of muscle, are still activated by a stinging in the nose (Wicomb 2001: 80).

The image of Dulcie's legs, the corporeal manifestation of her reaction to past trauma, as trunks is once again reminiscent of Morrison's character, Sethe, whose scars from past violence resemble a tree on her back. Like Sethe, Dulcie bears the inscription of trauma on her body, the scars testifying to resistance and survival, symbolised by the tree's supportive function. In rewriting and re-presenting part of the textuality of slavery the scars also signify that it has not yet ended.

The most problematic aspects of the violence against the female body that is depicted in David's Story are that it is not solely enacted by men, or by whites. The details that are given of Dulcie's torture reveal institutionalised female complicity, as a female nurse is shown to assist proceedings. The accompanying litany of imagery associated with recipe books and the domestic sphere, 'tenderise, baste, seal, sear, sizzle, score, chop' brings an additional, domestic, female stereotype into the framework of torture and violence (Wicomb 2001: 178). The lexis that implies this stereotype both reinforces the visceral reduction of Dulcie's body to traumatised flesh and, in its presentation as a mantra that might be used to distance her physically from what is happening, reinforces the additional horror at female involvement in her torture. It is through the illustration of female participation in violence against women, and through the presentation of ANC combatants being complicit in the almost internecine torture and abuse of a coloured comrade that traditional perceptions of gendered and racial violence are shown to be themselves being violable in the face of national trauma. The trauma that is represented in David's Story marks a wider sector of the population as possible perpetrators than the proceedings of the TRC. In this sense the categorisations that exist within the national body are destabilised. Men are emasculated by apartheid's structures, and are seen to re-enact their trauma on women, some of whom move into the role previously enacted by men. Because victims are not presented as being straightforwardly victims, and there is clear crossover between the categories of victim and perpetrator, the stereotypes that are demonstrated as being the foundation of the racial categorisations of apartheid are destabilised.

Through the partial representation of the narratives of Dulcie and David, which like Gordimer's My Son's Story, are shown in the novel's closing phrases to be resistant to complete representation, Wicomb refuses closure to this chapter of South Africa's history.

The 'shrapnel of sorry words' and the 'impossible hybrids' of leaked and fragmented narrative that flow from the narrator's bullet-shattered computer to finally 'scramble [her] story' are the final and enduring images of David's Story (2001: 212-3). They offer a powerful indictment of the power of violence, and of its ongoing presence in the contemporary nation as well as the narratives that have shaped it. In so doing they pay tribute to those who have been affected by it in the past and will continue to be in the future. By refusing to disassociate violence from the stereotyped and ongoing identity of the coloured South African woman which, of course, is Wicomb's own racial and gender identification, she reminds the reader that elements of the past remain unaddressed. In this way the novel supplements the historical narratives that have already been offered to the post-apartheid nation to remind the reader that the many questions that remained unanswered by the TRC should and will continue to haunt democratic South Africa.

## Chapter Five

### Writing the Self into a National Past: Three South African Autobiographies

*When the Truth Commission started last year, I realised instinctively: if you cut yourself off from the process, you will wake up in a foreign country – a country that you don't know and that you will never understand (Antjie Krog).<sup>1</sup>*

#### 5.0 Introduction

Historically, South African fiction has been shaped by a relationship to national politics. The African National Congress (ANC) conscripted writers and artists into the struggle against apartheid during the mid 1980s. The ensuing creative output from those sympathetic to the liberation cause comprised a historically specific canon of highly politicised fiction and established a binary opposition between creative textuality and legalised racism as propagated by the apartheid state. Since the collapse of apartheid, fictional writers within South Africa have been relieved of their duty to resist racial politics, and have been able to explore new textual, political and temporal possibilities. Post-apartheid textual production and reception have subsequently been shaped by the new moral consciousness personified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which has replaced the nationalist hegemonic structures of apartheid.

The ANC produced a Draft National Cultural Policy in 1994 which clarifies the link made by the post-apartheid government between creative texts such as cinematic, literary and artistic works and national policy. In this policy the ANC confirms its

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<sup>1</sup> This quotation is taken from Country of My Skull by Antjie Krog.

regard of culture as ‘an integral component of the process of development... [that] can play a facilitative or destructive role in the unfolding of the developmental process... [which is] of the highest priority in our country at present’ (ANC 1994: 1). The policy further elucidates the connection made by the ruling party between creative textuality and the containing strategies of the fledgling democracy by stating that the efforts that had previously contributed to the resistance movement ought now to be ‘re-channelled to promote a culture of democracy’ (ANC 1994: 1) which, the document states, will then ‘promote the development of a *unifying national culture*’ (ANC 1994: 2, my emphasis). To this end, the ANC offered funding to artistic ventures, outlining its perception of the nationalist function of each discipline, and stating that the publishing industry has ‘a key role to play... in the promotion of South African writers and through them, the values associated with nation-building, unification, democracy and development’ (ANC 1994: 6).

Partly due to this increased funding of textual ventures, and partly because South African writers are beginning to experiment more with both form and content, a new proliferation of texts is now available to a wider national and international audience. The removal of an explicit mandate to resist nationalist politics has led to several differences in the types of literary texts being produced in South Africa. It has freed writers to experiment with form and structure as well as content: the lifting of censorship has meant that writers wishing to address the past no longer have to make recourse to allegory or other such ruses, but may address the past of the nation directly and in whatever literary form they choose.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the lifting of

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<sup>2</sup> In South Africa, allegory such as that produced by Coetzee, offered a means of representing the past that escaped the strictures of censorship. In South America, the preferred form of resistance literature was magical realism, which gave way to the testimonial form following political change. A similar

restrictions regarding the racial and historical representation that could be contained in a fictional text has meant that post-apartheid writers who still choose to write about politics or the past are able to reproduce aspects of personal and national pasts, such as racial discrimination, institutionalised violence or the histories of non-white races, in ways previously denied to them.

This post-apartheid democratisation of literature, personified by new stylistic freedoms combined with a relaxing of the prior moral obligation to “write” history, has transformed the national literary scene and, in the process, availed the work of South African writers to an international audience, allowing it to compete for readership in a global environment. An additional and more specific effect is that in the post-apartheid era writers are able to testify directly to personal historical experiences, no longer having to prioritise fiction as a means of addressing national politics. The autobiographical or testimonial form, which has burgeoned in South Africa since the institution of the TRC, liberates the writer to explore and challenge the boundaries of the totality of individual experience as opposed to those of the nation. Moreover, this literature is produced in response to the confessional climate engendered by the TRC. Superficially at least, it imitates its structures and intention to achieve psychological abreaction through testimony. By experimenting with, manipulating and reformulating the testimonial form in response to the specific historical trauma and institutional constraints of South Africa the writer can challenge the unificatory and containing agenda of the post-apartheid state, thus affording the texts an acutely complex function that extends beyond that of cultural resistance. These texts, as products of a highly unusual cultural and historical space, in many

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pattern can be observed in South Africa, where allegory has made way for autobiography, both fictional and historically accurate.

ways reflect the specificity of their context of production. Since the end of apartheid the requirement to resist an oppressive state no longer exists in quite the same way: while part of the texts' function is to affirm the changes that have taken place in national politics there remains, however, a desire on the part of many contemporary artists and writers to retain and represent active memories of past trauma and, by association, to create a kind of "interference" to the operations of TRC, which aspired to lay aspects of the past to rest through narrative acts. Any resistance present in the texts, then, is likely to be to this act of conciliation rather than to the TRC itself, as the processes of appeasement of the traumatic aspects of national history that would lead to their "burial", could be interpreted as a form of forgetting. This literature seeks to actively remember the past, especially those aspects that have been officially laid to rest by the TRC. As Nietzsche argues in the second treatise of On the Genealogy of Morality, the act of remembering the pain of the past is what separates us from our own individual sovereignty (in the sense that he advocates learning to forget as a means of relinquishing the hold of painful memories and achieving integrity). So, by engaging in the "moral" act of remembrance or representation of the apartheid past, fictional writers are limiting the potential of their own selfhoods and individual psychic health. This self-imposed restriction and pain manifests as various forms of disturbance in the texts. According to Nietzsche the making of human memories, the arguable purpose of these texts, 'was never done without blood, torment [and] sacrifice... all of this has its origin in that instinct that intuited in pain the most powerful aid of mnemonics' (Nietzsche 1998: 38).

## 5.1 New South African Autobiographies

This new South African autobiographical genre, in its form, content and readership very much the product of historical transition, reflects the liminality of the TRC itself. From the conception of the Interim Constitution to the close of the hearings themselves, the TRC signified moral and political interregnum in South Africa.<sup>3</sup> The cultural and textual space engendered by the TRC has been characterised by a profound need to document the past and is deeply marked by historical trauma, yet at the same time looks towards a future that is defined in oppositional relation to that past. This ambivalent or Janus-faced drive to address past and future in the name of progress, like Walter Benjamin's angel of history, whose 'face is turned towards the past... [and who] would like to stay, awaken the dead and make whole what has been smashed', but who is prevented from so doing by the violence of a storm which 'irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned' (Benjamin 2008: 4), has produced a genre of texts that have a specific relationship with national history.

In keeping with the widespread desire to come to terms with the past that was promoted by the TRC, these texts record both the veridical and semantic "truth" of that past.<sup>4</sup> Texts, then, become a medium for documenting and disseminating the past, functioning as memorials to the apartheid past yet also offering resistance to official versions of that past which are being used to shape the national present and future. The liminal historical moment of the TRC facilitated the production of personal historical stories of a nature that were prohibited in the past. Given that

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<sup>3</sup> I refer to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as "liminal" in the sense that it hung in the middle of a whole range of definitions and institutions as well as historical periods, being in all senses of the word transitional. See Chapter One for further development of this concept.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter One for further discussion of these terms, and the different versions of truth at stake during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission proceedings.

autobiography written in response to a well-documented sequence of national historical events functions as a point of contact between the national and the individual story, I will examine the effect of this connection between personal historical narrative with the story of a nation at this particular point in its historical and moral development. I will analyse the features of this specific historical juncture that stimulate the production of personal stories and propel them into the public domain. In the same way that the cultural space of the TRC is shaped by trauma and resists repetition of past power structures, the achievement of these autobiographies is to variously bear linguistic and structural witness to traumatic pasts and to interrupt, or contend, the placatory stance the ANC has taken towards past violence, both within and outside its own ranks.

My Traitor's Heart by Rian Malan, Boyhood by J M Coetzee and Country of My Skull by Antjie Krog have in common that they were written by established writers of Afrikaner heritage between 1990 and 1999, the transitional period during which the apartheid state ceded to the "New" South Africa. Decolonisation in South Africa, however, was not marked by the same degree of violence as the same process in many other countries. In The Wretched of the Earth Fanon argues that the colonial relation is always marked by violence and force, from its inception, through perpetuation and eventual dissolution (Fanon 1990: 28-56). He states that violence is the means by which freedom from colonisation is achieved, 'Violence is... seen as comparable to a royal pardon. The colonised man finds his freedom in and through violence' (Fanon 1990: 67). He also cites the unificatory function of violence as a component of the colonial relation:

...the native's violence unifies the people... Violence is in action all-inclusive and national.

At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect (Fanon 1990:74).

This violence, while highly present in the pre-colonial and colonial stages of South African history remained, due to the intervention of the TRC, largely nonattendant to the nation's decolonisation. My Traitor's Heart, Country of My Skull and Boyhood, I argue, reactivate the violence and anger, the 'blood and bad dreams' (Malan 1990: title page), and the "guilt", "bad conscience" and related matters' (Nietzsche 1998: 35) absent from South African decolonisation. On this level the texts represent a refusal to allow the past to "sleep" that resists full integration into a national consciousness characterised by the propitiatory rituals of the TRC.

Like the ideological focus of the TRC, which sought to integrate national and individual narratives to achieve closure to traumatic past events, all of these texts feature authorial desire to articulate, interrogate and integrate aspects of personal and national histories. Yet, beyond these basic similarities, the texts and writers engage differently with the apartheid state and its successors. As a journalist, Malan went into self-elected exile in the United States, returning to South Africa in the 1980s. He wrote My Traitor's Heart ostensibly to investigate the involvement of the Afrikaner nation and, by implication, himself in a wider national history of racial domination. As a widely published poet and radio journalist, Krog played a leading role in the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) team that provided radio coverage of TRC hearings. Country of My Skull interweaves the story of the TRC with extracts from testimonies and episodes from her own past, some fictional others not, detailing the emotional breakdown that she suffered whilst reporting the hearings. Boyhood is one of two autobiographical novels published by Coetzee since the end of apartheid,

and in it he recounts the story of his Cape childhood, blending autobiography with comments on contemporary national politics.<sup>5</sup>

## **5.2 Autobiography and the Socius**

What are the features of the post-apartheid era that stimulated the production of personal stories and a desire for them to enter the public domain? The dismantling of the oppressive state mechanisms of apartheid, combined with theoretical abreaction of national trauma as signified by the TRC, engendered a profound shift in the national political consciousness. One sign of this new cultural climate is an abundance of storytelling, in the form of state reportage, radio and television broadcasting, documentary films, testimony, fiction and autobiography. There are many examples of the ways in which, when a traumatic event occurs on a community-based or national level, individuals within that community seek a sense of belonging and identification with what has happened.

For instance, a new generation of Britons directly encountered national trauma following the terror attacks on London on 7 July 2005.<sup>6</sup> The bombings and uncertainty regarding individual fates quite naturally prompted widespread media coverage and demand for information relating to perpetrators and victims: in a larger, cultural sense, the attacks engendered a commonplace desire for individuals to locate their own experiences within the broader national story of the day's events. For many, daily narratives were newly defined in relation to the bombing, and a prolific and intense need for individuals to forge personal links with the national trauma was

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<sup>5</sup> The other is *Youth*, which details the years Coetzee spent in London as a student and young man.

<sup>6</sup> I am not in any way wishing to imply here that the bomb attacks of 7 July 2005 were Britain's first encounter with national trauma, or that this trauma in any way exceeds other worldwide incidents: the event simply provides a contemporary point of reference for the cultural processes outlined here and in other parts of my thesis. There are many other examples too.

evident in a range of media.<sup>7</sup> The drive to either support or counter the dominant collective narrative or, more simply, to become a part of it by mapping it against individual narratives parallels a wider sequence of events that took place during and after the TRC hearings in South Africa, when fictional writers as well as “ordinary people” either spoke or wrote themselves into a broader cultural narrative.

The personal confessional narrative of autobiography produced within the specific national context that is the focus of this thesis stands more theoretically as a medium by which the “I” of the individual subject is integrated with the “we” of the collective or national subject. The processes enacted by these texts, which comprise a superficial endorsement of the cathartic nationalist mantra that “revealing is healing”,<sup>8</sup> counter the historiographic hegemony of the TRC on a far more profound level than on which they supplement it. They problematise the notion that factual revelation leads to psychic closure, demonstrating fundamental lack of resolution in terms of narrative sequence and structure, resisting classical narrative forms.

This will be discussed further in relation to individual texts in an examination, for example, of the ways in which the texts revisit the generic structures of the Bildungsroman, which in its classical pre-capitalist form seeks resolution by uniting the narrative subject with the structures of the social world. Malan, Krog and Coetzee, writers working within the constraints of the social and political conditions of post-apartheid South Africa, are unable to reproduce the classical Bildungsroman. Their texts reinvent the genre and comprise a powerful literary and testimonial response to

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<sup>7</sup> *The Guardian*, for example, invited members of the public to submit obituaries of friends and relatives killed, entitling the series ‘Ordinary Lives’. Many other newspaper editorials featured the journalists’ own experiences of being in London on 7 July 2005, even if they had not been anywhere near the relevant locations.

<sup>8</sup> See epigraph for Chapter One.

the new national conditions, proffering dissent to the new social order primarily through withholding resolution and closure to the stories they tell. By centralising national margins through representation of the differences that have resided in the national periphery for so many years, the texts play crucial and critical roles in the textualisation of South Africa's diversely traumatic past and challenge the possibilities of redemption and reconciliation offered by the post-apartheid state. However, while self-conscious resistance to the non-violence of the national political transition may be one motivation for this textual nonconformity, the impact of trauma on memory and its narrative representation should not be underestimated: although desirable, it may not be possible to represent some aspects of the past within the confines of existing narrative conventions. Indeed, there are also some aspects of the past which are "unspeakable" in the post-apartheid nation, such as any positive impression of life in the past, and the narrative disruption evident in these texts can be read as a reaction to or an unwillingness to accept such restrictions.

The TRC has functioned as a powerful signifier of post-colonial nationalism in South Africa, manufacturing and occupying what Partha Chatterjee would term a new 'sovereign domain' within a society that was initially characterised to a great extent by demands for truth and reconciliation. The aspect of post-apartheid nationalism occupied by the TRC is, according to Chatterjee (1999: 6), the space which retains and nurtures a cultural identity that is distinct from that of its precedent or models. As marker of the spiritual,<sup>9</sup> or inner, domain of a new nation, this aspect requires protection from external influences, unlike other more material facets of the nation which will develop readily and adapt their identities in order to retain parity with

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<sup>9</sup> I am using the term 'spiritual' self-consciously here in reference to the highly ritualised cultural arena of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and in particular its hearings. See Chapter One for more detailed explanation.

other nations. Chatterjee makes this distinction in order to contend that this spiritual zone, against the more material zone, is the site where the new imagined community of the nation is brought into being (1999: 6). Morality, as a cultural code, and its dissemination are core components of the spiritual zone of nationalism and the moral impact of the TRC effected a dramatic national transition with regard to this element of cultural output. Whilst it exposed and resisted preceding nationalist structures throughout the process of decolonisation, the TRC principles that now need to govern the nation can be seen as having a clear neo-colonial nationalist function that is evidenced by the output of policies relating to the newly constructed moral categories of truth and reconciliation. Alongside policy documents and mass media saturation, the TRC triggered a range of cultural production such as films, documentaries, plays and novels, the social role of which was outlined in the Draft National Cultural Policy. Like the other forms of cultural textuality, novels have more than one function in the spiritual domain of culture. Whilst operating on one level simply as aesthetic or artistic works, their broader function is to stand as historical markers of place and time, and as media via which counternarratives to the dominant hegemony can be delivered to the public.

As mentioned, the ANC acknowledges the resistance function of the creative arts during the apartheid era (ANC 1994: 1), yet while its motivation of resistance to a dominant hegemony may be similar, the canon of counternarratives provoked in relation to apartheid differs from that which has responded to the TRC. Texts that impugned the apartheid state tackled past inequalities largely on racial grounds. My Traitor's Heart, Country of My Skull and Boyhood challenge the dominant moral narrative of the TRC and operate on a more complex level. They confront the

narratives of the colonial past by representing aspects of a history that was suppressed by preceding nationalist structures. However, they also contain implicit and explicit reactions to the contemporary nation, constructed as a product of the cultural and political past of South Africa, and therefore bear a dependent relation to the cultural discourses and narratives of the preceding nationalist conditions. The texts counter some aspects of the postcolonial climate, such as its oversimplified analysis of race as an axis of oppression, but replicate others, like its belief in confessional structures and the narration of the past. However, in the same way that the texts are not able to completely reproduce the conventions of existing narrative forms, the replication of the TRC's moral structures is also incomplete, and this is what functions as counternarrative. It is in this context that the three autobiographies analysed in this chapter form a layered and complex response to two dominant forms of nationalism, that of apartheid and the TRC.

On one level post-apartheid literature represents a break with the preceding national history of apartheid. The recurrent lack of conventional narrative chronology in autobiographical texts interrupts the assumption of the progressive continuity of colonial nationalism, with the structure and form of texts indicating the presence of unresolved psychic trauma, connecting trauma and the history of apartheid. They embody a link between the national fragmentation that occurred in South Africa as a result of apartheid, and the psychic fragmentation experienced by traumatised individuals, for example as post traumatic stress disorder. This relationship is evidenced by the textual fragmentation that manifests variously in each of the autobiographies.

### 5.3 My Traitor's Heart by Rian Malan

My Traitor's Heart makes a very early and explicit link between the visceral human corpus and the body politic, connecting the concept of political or moral treachery with the life force of the human body. The subtitle 'Blood and Bad Dreams: A South African Explores the Madness in His Country, His Tribe and Himself' expands this metaphor to include the psyche, the site of traumatic residue in the human body, in a postcolonial trilogy of mind, body and nation-space, framing the text with the lexis of trauma.<sup>10</sup> Blood is a mythopoeic signifier of life, heritage and the teleological, genealogical continuation of the national subject, and has been accorded particular signification in South African textuality as well as lived politics.<sup>11</sup> The subtitle links blood syntactically with disturbed sleep, a powerful cross-cultural signifier of post-traumatic stress disorder that stands as a physiological representation of unresolved psychic trauma. Paradoxically, uninterrupted sleep is suggested as the affirmative other. The human body operates as a containing device for blood: the act of blood transgressing a boundary to enter the psyche challenges the integrity of the body as metaphor for nation, and questions the accepted chronology of memory as a prehistorical entity enters the realm of memory, disturbing its sequence. By choosing this as his title, Malan draws attention to his own psychic disturbance as well as that of the nation, citing his personal experience of insanity as a base from which to explore the madness that exists within the nation state.<sup>12</sup> This is a paradoxical relation.

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<sup>10</sup> I have referred here to the subtitle of the British edition of the novel: the American edition has as the second part of the title 'A South African Exile Returns to Face His Country, His Tribe and His Conscience'.

<sup>11</sup> I am thinking here of texts such as God's Stepchildren by Sarah Gertrude Millin. Blood has, in a South African past, been a signifier of racial classification, itself inseparable from structures of nationalist power. Malan disassembles the prior encoding of this relationship between colonial subject and state, making the link between blood and past trauma explicit.

<sup>12</sup> Freud makes a link between dreams (signifier of disturbed sleep) and perceived insanity. See The Interpretation of Dreams (1954: 88).

As discussed in Chapter Two, insanity is representative of the normative judgement of the state; the mad appear mad to an external body of judgement not to themselves.

Malan's self-declared insanity destabilises not only the authority of the author, and calls into question the nature of his work (in the sense of Foucault's suggestion that a madman is incapable of producing an artistic work) but also jeopardises his public identity as a liberal opponent of apartheid. Because his text connects individual and collective subjectivity in an exploration of the national unconscious it has the wider political effect of destabilising liberalism itself as a moral opposition to apartheid. Additionally, because madness itself is posited as a tool with which to explore madness, the reader is subject to the contradictory and unsettling dual signification of authenticity and doubt (in the sense that the writer can clearly empathise with the subject material but has also proclaimed himself insane and is therefore a potentially unreliable witness).

The primary indices of residual psychic disturbance in the text are to be found in its narrative structure, the disturbed and disrupted nature of which is evidenced by the subsidiary narratives. Cast as bad dreams, they fragment Malan's genealogical and personal narrative in a manner reminiscent of the intrusion of the national margins into Afrikaner political hegemony. My Traitor's Heart was written in 1990, as national political and structural reforms signalled the beginning of the end of apartheid. Malan's original and highly self-conscious intention was an exploration of the historical implications of the life he left behind in South Africa: '[the book] was supposed to be about the Malan clan, and our bloody trajectory across three centuries of African history' (Malan 1990: 410). To this end, the main part of the text opens in the manner of a traditional testimonial text, with an attempt at chronology delivered

via a litany resonant of testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and entries to the Register of Reconciliation, in which the author, before narrating the rest of his story, situates his origins in the Malan dynasty:

...I guess I should begin at the very beginning. I am a Malan, descendant of Jacques Malan, a Huguenot who fled the France of Louis XIV to escape being put to the sword for his Protestant faith... Jacques the Huguenot was the first Malan in Africa. In the centuries since a Malan has been present at all the great dramas and turning points in the history of the Afrikaner tribe (Malan 1990: 13).

This linear image of the Malans' historical presence in South Africa represents the teleological narratives of Afrikaner history, which contrast dramatically with the fragmented narrative that is the final product of My Traitor's Heart. It serves also to place Malan's genealogical origins outside of apartheid and its nation-state and into a wider, international community that is not subject to the same apartheid history. The litany politicises Malan's origins, locating him within a succession of political rebels and exiles, and integrating the marginalised consciousness of Malan as a contemporary writer with a cultural history that is scripted by colonialism. Through beginning in this way the text draws on the received tradition of western autobiography that centres the individual subject in a temporally progressive narrative and implies to the reader that, like the narrative of the Afrikaner "tribe", Malan's own history will be explored in chronological sequence.

However these expectations, engendered by the model of the classical Bildungsroman that tracks the chronological journey of the protagonist to a socialised conclusion, are destabilised by the subsequent narration of the nation's "ghost stories". In their lack of chronology they depart from the immediate environs of Malan's personal and ethnic genealogy, and their intrusion into what might be termed the master narrative of

Malan as perceived sovereign textual subject challenges both the authority of autobiography as a hegemonic narrative structure and the received teleology of the past. One interpretation of this is that, by fragmenting the original singular purpose of the author's narrative, they grant a plurality to national history that extends beyond that of Afrikaner Christian nationalism as the dominant voice of the past; another that there is an inherent acknowledgement that the nation is itself a multiplicity. Malan presents the stories as a series of unassimilated traumatic narratives, and by framing the first of the textual junctures with a quotation from the exiled Afrikaner poet Breyten Breytenbach that refers to the 'heartspace' of the nation, he extends the corporeal analogy from the beginning of the text to journey into the emotional interior of the national body, articulating the trauma that resides there. The residual trauma in the text points to an additional reading of the textual form; that the fragmentation and disruption inherent in the narrative are textual symptoms of the impossibility of wholeness, or that (if the wholeness of the nation is indeed a multiplicity) that this will always lie adjacent to the text. In other words, the historical trauma of apartheid has rendered the production of an intact, conventional autobiographical narrative imprescriptable, or impossible.<sup>13</sup>

Without exception the stories are brutal and shocking. Functionally, they pre-empt TRC hearings in the way that they bring previously unwitnessed stories of the past into the public domain, and name past victims whose stories have not been publicly recognised. By including these marginalised narratives within his own, Malan facilitates the textual erosion of cultural boundaries and peripheries. They represent

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<sup>13</sup> My use of the word 'imprescriptable' is a reference to Derrida (2002: 33), who asserts that some events from the past exceed the communicative capacity of words: I am extending this to refer also to the structure of texts, which are similarly rendered "out of bounds" by historical trauma, their formal and historical limitations placing boundaries on the past which at present is not able to be contained within these.

the untold suffering of apartheid as national past, and their juxtaposition to Malan's own narrative highlights the unresolved trauma implicit in both textual strands. The stories of Moses Mope, Simon the Hammerman and Dennis Moshweshwe personalise and vocalise the horrific trauma inherent in the national past, haunting and interrupting the story that Malan originally intended to tell. As the 'blood' of the past they disturb national chronological narrative and, by association, that of Malan also. The story of Moses Mope, a young Zionist murdered on his way to church by a drunken policeman who mistook him for a political activist, is accorded a representative as well as personal testimonial function. To this end Malan reports that Mope was just one of 750 blacks to die in 13 months and:

...stands here to represent the untold slaughtered innocents, the black babies choked on tear gas, toddlers crushed by armoured cars, little boys shot on the way to the shops, innocent bystanders clipped by "stray bullets", and, yes, even the legions of martyred comrades, because there was something very innocent about a black child confronting an armoured car with only a rock in his hand and anger in his heart. Moses Mope stands also in representation of the thousands injured by rubber bullets and bird shot up to that point, the tens of thousands lashed with whips, and the hundreds of thousands teargassed because they were no longer content to have, as Samuel Mope phrased it, fuck-all (Malan 1990: 151-2).

Malan's reportage of Mope's story initiates the representation of a group of people whose experiences had previously existed at the textual margins of the nation, in this instance the disempowered racial majority. As John Beverley describes in relation to Latin American testimonios, these are groups of people disempowered by national structures and previously excluded from authorised means of representation (1996: 25). The inclusion of their narratives in My Traitor's Heart has a resistance function: as a manifestation of democracy it resists a certain type of hegemony, and its very existence in a published text stands as testimony to social change and trauma survival. As Malan makes the fragments of reportage about Mope explicitly representational, synecdochical rather than allegorical, they invoke and testify to what Beverley terms

an 'absent polyphony' (1996: 28). These voices lend depth to the text and allow for the representation of subject positions other than Malan's own: by testifying to the increasing multiples of 'the thousands injured by rubber bullets', 'the tens of thousands lashed with whips' and 'the hundreds of thousands teargassed' (Malan 1990: 151-2) these hitherto unvoiced experiences are included in the text and are added to historiography. However, their presence in the text also testifies to the justification of the ANC victory as being always already-violent, and to the real trauma haunting Malan's present being the peaceful decolonisation arrived at without war. The text is evidence of the impossibility of producing a South African autobiography as a monologue, that Malan is not able to write exclusively about the past that he has lived, and that the experience of historical trauma in South Africa was plural and cannot therefore be reduced to a singular textual experience.

The voices, signified by the narrative of Mope, simultaneously enhance and destabilise the text, which is consequently able to affirm several selfhoods within one narrative, and to afford entry into literary forms to groups of people who would otherwise be excluded. Malan's multiple focus is perhaps the only way that the traditional Bildungsroman<sup>14</sup> is able to survive in post-apartheid writing, with the author taking the role of interlocutor rather than sole protagonist. Malan brings text to an audience that would not otherwise receive it: yet, because his interlocution originates from a specific and highly politicised cultural background, the audience of the text remains largely class/race defined as the politics of reception have not yet

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<sup>14</sup> Franco Moretti argues that the classical Bildungsroman is only a possibility in a pre-capitalist world, where the stability of the text rests in the network of family connections that function as a metaphor for a social pact. In order for the text to achieve conclusion, the youth has to pass into maturity and the protagonist to merge with a new world. However, in a capitalist world, with open social forms, social connections no longer function as the highest possible value, and there are therefore not able to stabilise the text and offer a conclusive outcome for the protagonist.

altered fundamentally within the nation. Via his representational function, though, Mope is also elevated from a purely textual status and accorded the status of historical signifier: he is the protagonist of his own narrative, but also a signifier of a black man who has been abused under apartheid. Mope is represented as an individual condemned by the historical and cultural inscription of his race, protagonist of his own tragic historical narrative, but also as a signifier of South Africa's racially violent past. He symbolises those dispossessed and violated by history and, importantly, his narrative represents a caveat against the future repetition of this pattern. In this sense, the telling of the story of Moses Mope perpetuates the cycle of trauma in order to ensure its proper registration in the present, providing historical record but also offering a value-statement that this should not happen again in the future.

There is historical function to the reportage, nonetheless. Symbols of Afrikaner nationalism are delegitimised and accorded new signification by trauma. The narrative of Dennis Moshweshwe interweaves the cultural history of the Afrikaner *braaivleis*, cited by Malan as 'no mere barbecue... a profound cultural ritual, recalling the days when the Afrikaners rode the empty plains on horseback and brought down buck with a single shot', with the traumatic narrative of the individual subject (Malan 1990:133). By choosing this form of representation to narrate the story of Moshweshwe, who was beaten to death by drunken Afrikaners during a barbecue party, Malan frames it with deep evocations of nationalist and cultural ritual. Even the lexis used to describe the exact mode of his death is historically pre-empted and culturally inscribed: Malan writes that Moshweshwe 'died of a *kafferpak*, meaning a "kaffir hiding"' (1990: 138) in order to locate his death within a wider historical tradition, the language of which enshrines human fates. Afrikaans becomes the medium via which Moshweshwe's death enters national history. The language that is

used to articulate the mode of his death is accepted in Afrikaner culture and therefore historically normalised. It reinforces the opposition between Afrikaner culture and Moshweshwe's and accords a historical function to his death.

Simon the Hammerman is also presented as victim of a white psyche that has been historically encoded with trauma. Simon is the perpetrator of a series of violent murders, carried out in response to a dream he had some years previously. Like Mope, his narrative is unique, but Malan represents it as 'yet another demon from the depths of a disturbed white subconscious' (1990: 191), here referring to his own traumatised psyche as well as that of the Afrikaner nation. Simon's narrative also takes on national signification, challenging the domination of Afrikaner history by presenting aspects of the Zulu past.

However, it is the narrative of the Creina and Neil Alcock that presents the greatest challenge to both Afrikaner hegemony as symbol of Malan's past, and South Africa as characterised by the TRC, and it is only in the charged atmosphere of the present that this can be so. Neil Alcock was a politicised white farmer, who quickly gained a name in the apartheid era for his sympathetic attitude towards Africans and his willingness to act on their behalf at his own expense, for example by organising deliveries of surplus milk (that the government had demanded be dumped in the sea) to African communities. Following his marriage to Creina Bond, at which a young Gatsha Buthelezi was best man, the couple lived a semi-reclusive, impoverished and politically active life in kwaZulu-Natal, establishing among other ventures an agricultural co-operative. Following Neil's assassination Creina maintained the lifestyle the couple had chosen. The story of the Alcocks comprises the final section of My Traitor's Heart. Thus it occupies the physical and psychological space that

would be expected, in a contemporary moral context, to form the space of conclusion, or reconciliation, in narrative as well as national politics. On journeying to Msinga, a violent, factional and economically-challenged settlement deep in the rural heartland of kwaZulu-Natal, Malan uses the story of the Alcocks to tell an individual narrative as well as the wider social experience of the past. He draws attention to the specific reasons for its social, economic and geographic marginalisation, yet draws wider parallels between Msinga and the fate of a wider black population under apartheid. His purpose in journeying to Msinga was to interview Creina Alcock about the life of her late husband Neil. However, Creina is protective of her story and will only tell it to someone she deems an appropriate witness, questioning Malan until she is sure he is a worthy recipient. It is at this point that the narrative style shifts:

uncharacteristically, Malan does not detail his responses to Creina's questions, and the removal of the 'I' creates silences in the text which impact on its wider significance, and reflect the structures of some testimonies to the TRC. The syntactic shift removes the focus of the narrative to Creina who, despite being referred to in third person, takes the moral lead in the narrative. The text is thus distanced once more from the conventions of its genre: notably it is at this point that Malan casts doubt on the motivation of the text to date, unsettling his own personal narrative. He states, 'I was tired of lying so I told the truth. I told her I was searching for a way to live in this strange country – for an alternative, if one existed, to the law of Dawid Malan' (Malan 1990: 343).

Like earlier narratives within the text, the stories of Creina and Neil Alcock are framed by the wider experience of their geographical community, and contextualised within a wider history of apartheid, which would imply a representative function to their narrative, like that of Moses Mope's story. It is a narrative which also mimics

the structure of TRC hearings, in which an appropriate degree of witnessing is established and an individual narrative is situated within a historical and social context. Similarly, as Creina tells Malan her husband's story, she anticipates a pattern in many TRC hearings identified by Fiona Ross (1996) whereby women's testimony tended to consist of the stories of their husbands and families rather than privileging their own narrative. Malan does not, however, accord the Alcocks' stories a representative function: Creina's narrative is presented as the unique history of two people set apart from their race and cultural backgrounds, differing in structure and mode from those preceding as the text moves closer to the expected space of "truth" or reconciliation.

This departure represents a degree of psychological and textual closure for Malan, although in an unconventional manner. Malan achieves resolution in his articulation of aspects of Creina's whiteness that he is not able to access in himself, and he drops his investigative journalist stance to plot his own resolution through self-investigation and textualisation, 'I'm so deeply enmeshed in half-truths and fictionalisations of myself that I'll never escape until I tell the truth' (Malan 1990: 410). In terms of what it offers by way of national or communal resolution, though, the text's closure is unsettling and ambivalent. Through Creina, the story of Neil's assassination in a Zulu ambush is presented as a tragic narrative, mollified by powerful textual imagery of a party held by the local community to celebrate his life, and the tenuous possibility of racial harmony and national reconciliation and redemption offered by the unprecedented closure accorded to Neil's spirit by local community representatives. But, it is possibly more significant that Creina, the survivor is female. Jacqueline Rose

(1996: 146) has noted the implication of her gender, that it is a woman who rises out of the text as it draws to a close:

the Zulus heaved and ululated joyously, carrying a lone white woman along with them, teaching her how to dance. Creina was smiling shyly and moving stiffly, but you had to start somewhere; in coming to terms with Africa as in learning how to dance' (Malan 1990: 424-5).

This final, and very emotive, image of the re-centralisation of Creina, a white woman marginalised in Msinga, offers the tempting possibility of racial reconciliation as a final image within the text. The vision is effected by blood, the original signifier of national disharmony and segregation. It is unclear as to whether Creina is intended to represent the nation: however, she does stand very clearly for an incomplete closure to the events of the past. Her husband is dead, she is alone, and there is no clear indication regarding the certainty of her future in Msinga. The closure she offers, although incomplete, is subversive. Her survival offers an antithesis to the masculinist Afrikaner cultural narrative, and her iconic final dance is a powerful signifier of resistance and triumph. As Creina dances, at first hesitantly, in what may be her ritual of reconciliation as she integrates with the Zulu community of Msinga, she is surrounded by blood, the ahistorical signifier that transcends or counters the notion of teleological narrative literally and figuratively, 'blood on the walls, blood on the floor; blood to wash the sins and sorrows of the past away' (Malan 1990: 424). The ending of a narrative is traditionally where possibilities of narrative and historical closure are offered. My Traitor's Heart looks to the future, but it is uncertain and founded on violence and bloodshed. The certainties of reconciliation are rendered doubtful by Malan's acknowledgement of the sacrifice of his original textual project, intended to be a whole but actuating as fragments: he has explored the margins of his own psyche and those of the nation, recentring these margins textually. It seems that once he has

written the traumatised fringes of the national consciousness he is able to articulate his own psyche as fragmented and pathological in a reference to the ongoing trauma of his race:

I have told you several murder stories, but the true subject of this narrative has always been the divided state of my own heart. I have always been two people you see – a Just White Man, appalled by apartheid and the atrocities committed in its name, and an Afrikaner with a disease of the soul (Malan 1990: 412).

In portraying his schizophrenia as a product of culture and the political and economic history of the nation, Malan extends the heart metaphor of his title to link pathology, as a product of trauma, with the body politic and, therefore, the traumatised individual psyche with the national unconscious. The “murder stories” that he tells can be accepted as symptomatic of post-traumatic stress disorder on a national level, and offer the main form of resistance to dominant textual conventions.

#### **5.4 Country of My Skull by Antjie Krog**

This device is echoed in Country of My Skull, which also blends fiction, autobiography and fragments of testimony and reportage in order to reinscribe the past in a new medium. Like Malan, Krog has created a pastiche of narrative voices and styles which enable her to register the heterogeneity of the national past within a text that is ostensibly telling an Afrikaner story. In her text the polyphonic voices are represented via testimonial extracts from the TRC that intrude directly into the main narrative rather than being transcribed into the third person via an interlocutor like Malan. The multiple “I’s” of these experiences are voiced directly in the text and are given their own agency and equal textual status to the Afrikaner narrative.

Krog's autobiography was published in 1999, following the close of TRC hearings. Textually, it reflects the space of the hearings themselves as an intercultural encounter and, like My Traitor's Heart, is a site where fictional reconciliation could potentially take place. As with My Traitor's Heart, Krog's choice of title once again links the nation and pathology. She intersperses episodes of personal and familial narrative with the story of the radio broadcastings of TRC hearings and extracts of testimony from those hearings to blend national and personal narratives. The story of the broadcasting, an element of national history and the medium via which many of the previously marginalised narratives of the national past entered national historiography and were disseminated to the public, makes up the majority of the text alongside fragments of testimony, with Krog's own life story comprising just a fraction of the space. This structure decentralises Krog, both as author/protagonist and Afrikaner, and subverts the expectations of the autobiographical genre by integrating the narrative of the sovereign subject with that of the newly polyphonic nation. The sanctity of western individualist narrative is eroded as it shares textual space with other national subjectivities. As the text decentres the Afrikaner, and simultaneously represents the relationship between different historical periods, it erodes the boundaries between a diverse range of subject positions and shows the past to haunt and interfere with the present.

Like Malan, Krog identifies herself from the outset with Afrikanerdom as the dominant national heritage. The subtitle attached to the first section of the text, 'They never wept, the men of my race' is a confession of complicity and establishes identification between Krog, as contemporary cultural subject, and an Afrikaner history to which she accords blameless implication in historical events. Yet it also

differentiates her, as a woman, from the male Afrikaners who committed atrocities in the past, and who comprise the main cultural identification with Afrikanerdom as a highly gendered national identification, its violence enabling its hyper-masculinity. André Brink suggests that what is perceived as the masculinity of Afrikanerdom is itself the result of a historically specific social “silence” regarding the role, for example, of women in the founding nationalist narrative of the Great Trek (Brink 1998: 15). Krog’s highlighting of the gendering of Afrikaner history, then, offers resistance to historical and cultural perceptions of race, identifying her as a woman, marginalised from the masculinist Afrikaner mainstream and, as potentially repentant, distinct from the guiltless majority. She breaks the silence, distinguishing between the historicised roles of Afrikaner men and women. Krog’s relationship with her ethnic and cultural heritage is therefore represented as ambivalent, alongside the categories of victim and perpetrator, and the dominance of Afrikanerdom is destabilised.

The opening section of the narrative consists of TRC background information and testimony and Krog does not directly mention her personal history until sixteen pages into the text. Given that the text’s opening focuses on the national transitional context, offering explication of the Interim Constitution, the subsequent personal narrative is framed by ambivalence and a profound sense of the in-between. The first few pages focus, via a rendition of the hearing of Eugene Terre’Blanche, on a version of Afrikaner history that is complicit with racism and violence and highlight the ambivalent cultural space occupied by Krog and her family. After several pages of reportage, she yearns, ‘as if back into a womb I crawl’ (1999: 6). The violence of the nation prompts, in a manner reminiscent of Otto Rank’s writing, her psychic retreat to a time and space that, as the place prior to the violence of birthing, is pre-social,

pre-historical and therefore pre-traumatic.<sup>15</sup> Unlike the protagonist of the classical Bildungsroman, Krog is looking to a past that lies beyond a history that is defined by guilt, not to the future, which would in a traditionally structured text offer a state of totality or engagement with the social world: in so doing she is effectively removing herself from the social solution of testimony. As Afrikaners, Krog's family would be generally regarded by the nation shaped by the TRC as perpetrators, yet the intermittent reflections of past trauma and hardships undergone by her parents and brothers at the family farm imply victimhood. Through recollection of her brother's experience of dealing with intruders at the family farm, protection of the land being a cornerstone of Afrikaner cultural identity, she cites him as stating that 'he is forcing me to point a gun at another human being and to pull the trigger... and I hate him for that' (1999: 17). At this point of merger between the narratives of politics and personal space, the cultural boundaries between victim and perpetrator also conflate, creating newly ambivalent subject positions and destabilising the moral categories promoted by the TRC in order to define what was right and wrong about the past.

The blurred boundaries between historically informed subject positions are emphasised by the range of Krog's narrative and the degree to which it is fragmented. The multiple voices of her narrative echo the structure of the TRC Report, restoring marginalised voices to a central narrative. Like Malan's stories, the extracts of testimony in Country of My Skull are horrific. In offering a textual representation of these experiences, the narrative forms a bridge between past and present, contrasting the violence of the past with the non-violence of the present, and parodying the

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<sup>15</sup> In 'The Trauma of Birth', his essay on sexual gratification written in 1952, Otto Rank writes about the child that wants to recover its memory of being in the womb, stating that the fact this is not possible is due to the repression of the trauma of birth. He argues that the neurotic is a human being who cannot overcome the primal feeling of anxiety that arises from birth and will continue to feel pain from the internal psychic world (the antithesis is the hero type, who strives to feel pain on a physical plain).

essence of contemporary national politics. The disjointed language of Country of My Skull facilitates the articulation of memory. The fragments of testimony resist the unifying function of semantic structures, and their silences testify to far more than the actual words written, 'This inside me... fights my tongue. It is... unshareable. It destroys... words' (1999: 40). Following several pages of these interrupted and incomplete vignettes, Krog reflects on the tradition that has taken place with regard to the way that "the nation" is communicated, 'In the beginning it was seeing. Seeing for ages, filling the head with ash. No air. No tendril. Now to seeing, speaking has been added and the eye plunges into the mouth. Present at the birth of this country's language itself' (1999: 43). The fragmentation of traumatic memory comprises the dialogue of the new nation, as an extra sensory layer is added and memory is articulated into historiography. The post-apartheid nation is marked by the lexis and structure of trauma as the limitations of language to record traumatic events is acknowledged.

The autobiography, Krog's testimony, reflects the narrative structures proffered by the TRC. The semantic structures of her text indicate the presence of trauma, as does the fragmented and polyphonic nature of the text. She steps aside from her own language use to outline the techniques employed by the media to transform raw testimony into news bulletins, testifying to the culturally "processed" or constructed nature of these narratives. As testimony is rendered newsworthy, she interrogates the mechanisms that determine what aspects of the past are worthy of media dissemination as well as the ways in which the existing genre of the news bulletin can be 'moulded to our aims' (1999: 46) in order to suit the purposes of a self-conscious nationalism. As she continues to document the ways in which she and her colleagues manipulate "truth"

into a nationalist form, she intersperses the text with fragments of her own poetry, disturbing the continuity of the narrative and offering the reader the possibility of creative interpretation. Poetry marks the shifting and erosion of semantic boundaries: it is the medium via which she chooses to tell the story of her own grief, inferring that reportage is not the appropriate medium via which to record her grief, as the concept of “truth” enters a different cultural paradigm, literary structures distancing the event from the narrator. She recounts the process by which, like Wicomb’s character of David in David’s Story she resists “truth”, the moral definition of the nation and the code under which she is working, highlighting that the lexis of the TRC is failing to produce its promised moral fluency:

The word ‘Truth’ makes me uncomfortable.  
The word ‘truth’ still trips the tongue.  
‘Your voice tightens up when you approach the word “truth”,’ the technical assistant says, irritated. ‘Repeat it twenty times so that you become familiar with it. *Truth is mos jou job!*’ [‘Truth is your job, after all!’]  
I hesitate at the word, I am not used to using it. Even when I type it, it ends up as either *turth* or *trth*. I have never bedded that word in a poem. I prefer the word ‘lie’. The moment the lie raises its head, I smell blood. Because it is there... where the truth is closest. (1999: 53-4)

As in My Traitor’s Heart, blood has entered the psyche as the site of potential reconciliation. And, like Malan, Krog testifies to an emotional state that is destabilised by trauma, and this is reflected in the language and narrative structures of the text. Her declining mental state is recorded in terms of the language she uses and that she testifies to, semantic structures having been used previously in the text as a benchmark for personal and national psychic integrity. She refers to the destructive effect that testimony to the past has had on language, reflecting as their impact on her increases, that they ‘grow next to one another in the vapour of freshly mown language’ (1999: 70-71). Her control over the structures of her own language

diminishes as her breakdown progresses. This is reflected in the proximity of TRC testimony to snippets of her own psychological reflection, bringing the two closer together, and increasing use of ellipsis as semantic structures collapse. These gaps, or silences, form part of Krog's own testimony to the past: she loses her own grasp of language, which she has referred to as 'a language from paradise' (1999: 73), and her disjointed narrative begins, to resemble the structures of victim testimony to the TRC, in seemingly conscious mimicry. Language functions as a moral signifier of her cultural status, and as she reflects on the alienation that her relationship with the TRC has brought to her family relationships she states, in language redolent of Adorno's post-Auschwitz proclamation, that her own language production should cease as a marker of this, 'No poetry should come forth from this. May my hand fall off as I write this' (1999: 74). Physical limitations to language may not exist, but there are some restrictions based on the morality of certain narrative forms.

However, the poetic genre is also the means by which Krog believes that certain traumatic events can be relegated to the past. It is a narrative form which can be used, like reportage, to control and manipulate text, and render it accessible to a specific audience. She reflects on the structures of the TRC, which transcribed testimony from its original oral form in order to produce nationalist documentation, in the way that she represents the testimony of an illiterate Xhosa shepherd, Lekotse, as a poem that takes up four pages of text. Krog emphasises that she has given the shepherd's narrative 'in the exact words in which he spoke it' although it differs stylistically and is therefore distanced from the original (1999:328). She is anxious to explain the cultural specificity of the metaphors and images that Lekotse has used to describe the story of a police raid on his home, such as his comparison of the police to a jackal, 'the shepherd's enemy... he means that the security police exceed his worst

expectations of evil' (Krog 1999: 330) to an audience that might not understand the significance of what he has said. In so doing she assumes the role of interpreter and interlocutor over and above that of reporter, adding another layer of cultural meaning to testimony that has already been translated into English from the original Xhosa by the court translator. She also performs a version of what reconciliation might mean in practice within the post-apartheid nation, a getting to know the other. In manipulating his testimony into the genre of epic poetry she imposes the rhythms and silences of her culture and history onto the words of Lekotse. She inserts line breaks and rhyme patterns, applying a colonial/western filter to the shepherd's language, adapting it in order to make it accessible to a specific audience and imposing the boundaries associated with her own experience upon it.

The leitmotif is also a feature of Krog's testimony. In her explication of Lekotse's testimony she draws attention to his use of leitmotifs, such as the jackals and his constant references to questions and answers. She introduces the literary device of a fictional affair, via which to liken her relationship to the TRC to something illicit that is drawing her away from her family and to illustrate the extent to which the TRC has permeated the personal lives of those subject to its structures, allowing her to interrogate the value of truth through metaphor. In a statement that is the direct antithesis of TRC ideology, her husband states 'I will never forgive you'. She responds by listing the functions of storytelling in relation to coming to terms with the past, explication which is countered by her husband's terse response to 'stop talking crap'. Dialogue ensues regarding the value of truth commissions, the advantages of truth and the fact that Krog cannot find the language to explain 'why something so right is so wrong' (1999: 299). The act of ascribing to the framework of truth and

reconciliation in a subjective situation, where the “truth” being told is based on a fictional event completely upturns the criteria for nation-forming established by the TRC, as the fictional framework casts doubt upon the currency of truth. The fictional dialogue between Krog and her husband refutes the notion espoused by the TRC, which is that truth is something that will be given freely in order to facilitate healing, ‘there is always a basic truth... all of that is negotiable with the things I already know. So the more I know, the more you will confess. What truth I don’t know you will never tell me’ (1999: 300). The “confession” that immediately follows this discussion is a series of very abrupt extracts from testimony about aspects of the past that had not previously been touched upon in the text, testimony to abuses within the ANC, ‘the ANC kept us in freight containers. No ventilation’ and relating to sexual abuse on men, ‘all of a sudden, I found someone pushing a finger right up my rectum. And this was one of the most humiliating things that happened to me’ and ‘on Robben Island they lined us up... This sodomising happened to us’ (Krog 1999: 302-303). The narrative device of the affair which highlighted the limitations of the TRC and of language itself has prompted airings of the margins that remain largely silenced by the structures of the TRC and, indeed, by much of the literature produced by and about it.<sup>16</sup>

The ongoing theme of juxtaposition of personal and public, the intersection at which TRC proceedings operate and which provide the locus of new national foundation is a site of realisation for Krog, and a measure by which she can gauge the success of the

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<sup>16</sup> I refer in particular here to the Report of the TRC, the hearings themselves which, other than three hearings dedicated to women’s experiences, did not accord a specific space to more marginalised experiences of the past, like abuses within the ranks of the ANC and abuse of a sexual nature against men as well as the experience of homosexuals under apartheid. Even in a text like Attridge and Jolly’s Writing South Africa gendered experiences of apartheid and the past are minimal and could be interpreted as tokenistic.

TRC. When her son calls her at work to ask for a word that rhymes with “Vlakplaas”<sup>17</sup>, Krog expresses psychological release on a level unprecedented in the rest of the text, ‘a massive sigh breaks through my chest. For the first time in months – I breathe.. Maybe this is all that is important – that I and my child know Vlakplaas and Mamasela’<sup>18</sup>. That we know what happened there’ (1999: 199). At this point Krog and the reader experience a kind of resolution, although it is on a private rather than public level, and occurs part way through the text, not at the end where reconciliation would traditionally be expected.

A specific section of the text is dedicated to narrative of the testimonies of women, and Krog uses this as a means of making public the testimonies of women who had very often told the stories of what happened to their families rather than themselves. Notably, this testimony is not integrated into the main body of testimony, implying that gendered history is not yet part of the main body of national history. In its separation from the rest of the text this section of narrative reflects the structure of hearings, which had a discrete women’s section, and it is here that Krog includes testimony relating to rape and to the constant fear of violation against the female body. But, on a wider scale she testifies, as does Wicomb in her representation of Dulcie in David’s Story to the complicity of the state in the oppression of the narratives of women, and how they are often discredited. After she tells the story of Rita Mazibuko who was allegedly multiply raped by ANC comrades, the reader is told that ‘the Truth Commission does not utter a single word in Mazibuko’s defence’ (1999: 280), here implying that there is a line of continuity between the power

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<sup>17</sup> Vlakplaas was a farm near Pretoria that was used as a base by police hit squads.

<sup>18</sup> Joe Mamasela was the head of the Vlakplaas unit.

structures of the apartheid state and the ANC.<sup>19</sup> However, the testimonies of women become a forum for the regendering of truth, 'Truth has become Woman. Her voice, distorted behind her rough hand, has undermined Man as the source of truth. And yet. Nobody knows her' (1999: 84). This represents a fundamental rewriting of history, especially given the masculinist Afrikaner grand narrative that forms Krog's cultural origins. The unconventional syntax highlights the unpredictable source of historical truth, and Krog is also forced to confront the complicity of her racial heritage in the past. The hearings – as the public presentation of truth – force her to confront on a personal level the implications of her ethnicity. She recalls feeling herself 'go cold with recognition' as she faces 'the nightmare of [her] youth' (1999: 134), attempting to distance herself via the statement that she is 'not of them' (1999: 135).

Her continued observation and analysis of her personal reaction to the perpetrator hearings is interspersed with reflections of the nature of Afrikaner nationalism. In an acknowledgement of what might be equated with Anderson's interpretation of the spiritual domain of national identity, Krog has to accept that she shares a common cultural code with the Afrikaners who are giving testimony. She admits that she 'cannot read the codes of black people', citing as evidence for her racialised version of language the fact that she and Charity Kondile have different perceptions of the expression on Dirk Coetzee's face as he testifies (1999: 354). Whilst intellectually she resists a sense of cultural and national belonging, she reluctantly acknowledges that 'they are as familiar as my brothers, cousins and school friends', and questions whether there is any cultural distance between herself and the perpetrators of apartheid other than 'the one I have built up with great effort within myself over the

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<sup>19</sup> Rape and sexual torture were common practices under apartheid. The report of the Stuart Commission that details conditions in the ANC training and detention camps in Angola records the proliferation of rape within the ranks of the ANC (ANC 1984: 6).

years' (1999: 144). This declaration of a distance within acknowledges the splitting of the subject under apartheid, the schism in national belonging that is effected by trauma, and she acknowledges in the same breath as her acceptance of this internal alienation that 'what I have in common with them is a culture – and part of that culture over decades hatched the abominations for which they are responsible. In a sense it is not these men but a culture that is asking for amnesty' (1999: 144). Krog is unable to ignore this dichotomy within herself, which is signified by her simultaneous hatred and compassion for the perpetrators. This internal conflict manifests physiologically as Krog breaks out in a rash. When her doctor diagnoses this as trauma-related, her response occurs on two levels, making a similar connection to Malan between trauma and pathology, 'I get pills and ointment, and key into the Internet search engine: collective+guilt' (1999: 146). In the same way that the body is able to express the physical manifestation of a disturbed psyche, the broken text expresses the narratives of different sectors of the past.

Krog's narrative progresses from an acknowledgement of the fragmented identification of her psyche to an analysis of the fragmented national consciousness of South Africa, and the margins that "haunt" the wholeness of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's agenda in much the same way as the stories of Simon the Hammerman and others resonate throughout My Traitor's Heart. Her text reterritorialises, just paragraphs after her analysis of her own psyche that is split by trauma, the marginalised narrative of Chief Buthelezi, who refused to participate in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was regarded by the international community as a unificatory discourse. Immediately after this, Krog reinforces the notion of the TRC operating with its own margins as she recounts the case of Mrs

Charity Kondile, who rejected the dominant national action of forgiveness, and declined to offer her pardon to Dirk Coetzee who had killed her son before burning his body on a barbecue. She problematises reconciliation as a singular national narrative, outlining the different visions of reconciliation held by Tutu and Mbeki, before discussing at length the specific nature and consequences of the torture aimed at women. As if to emphasise the metaphorical haunting of the text by its unreconciled margins, Krog describes the more literal haunting of the Parliament buildings by two ghosts from the past, those of the former Speaker Louis le Grange and former Prime Minister Louis Botha. Krog also recounts how the building bears witness to another former Prime Minister, Verwoerd, whose bloodstain recurs on the carpet where he was assassinated, despite repeated cleaning.

## **5.5 Boyhood by J.M. Coetzee**

Boyhood, published in 1998 as the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission drew to a close, looks at the past in a more literal way than the preceding texts. As one of the country's most well-known and respected writers and academics, this novel which is generally regarded as Coetzee's autobiography, made a considerable impact on its national and international audience. It was the latest addition to a canon that, since the end of apartheid, has made a marked transition towards autobiographical, or testimonial, content.<sup>20</sup> The endorsements on the back cover of the Vintage edition of Boyhood, whilst comparing the text favourably to his preceding work in terms of literary content and finesse, draw attention to the historical

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<sup>20</sup> This is in contrast to the earlier part of his oeuvre, which featured texts like Foe and Waiting for the Barbarians that relied heavily on allegory as a medium through which to narrate aspects of national history censored by the apartheid state.

and psychoanalytic functions of the text.<sup>21</sup> These excerpts reflect the nationalist prioritisation of the attainment and textualisation of veridical record of the past. They identify the autobiography-as-testimony as a mode of representation and dissemination of the kind of “truth” that nationalist rhetoric posits as a necessary waystage on the route to reconciliation, the desired social resolution. The production and reception of the writing of the early part of Coetzee’s life is thus framed with the lexis of truth and reconciliation. Hence the exterior packaging of Boyhood creates its classification as a testimonial text. The text was published when the confessional climate in South Africa was at a mass-mediated height and complements the nationalist initiative of coming to terms with a racist past. It explores two aspects of a traumatic past: that which was lived by Coetzee as an Afrikaner cultural subject growing up in the Eastern Cape in apartheid South Africa, and the personal past of the child John Maxwell Coetzee. Like My Traitor’s Heart and Country of My Skull, the text weaves individual with national historical narrative, with Coetzee writing his own history from an Afrikaner perspective, creating a version of this specific cultural past that can be witnessed within a contemporary moral context. While Krog’s and Malan’s texts also deal with the moral implications of an Afrikaner heritage, psychic residue as manifestation of historical trauma is mobilised very differently in the form and structure of Boyhood than in the earlier texts

The form and content of the text both represent past trauma and, in adapting the accepted textual model of the Bildungsroman which Coetzee is unable to adhere to under impossible conditions, resist also the textual and psychic closure espoused by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s moral hegemony. The genre of the

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<sup>21</sup> Comment is passed on the way that Coetzee ‘makes sense of his past’ (Independent on Sunday), and the manner in which he describes his life with ‘skill... exactitude and... relentless’ (The Times) to present an ‘uncannily accurate picture of the way things were in South Africa’ (Literary Review).

classical Bildungsroman, as outlined by Franco Moretti in The Way of the Word, stands as a teleological narrative of youth, moving chronologically to a marked ending which brings many of the events of the text to resolution, thus according their meaning (Moretti 1987: 5-7). This level of narrative focus on the normative chronology of one life, according to Moretti, unites the various facets of the individual personality, strengthening and centring the Ego within its own structure, uniting it with a social universe. Thus a narrative “whole” is constructed, and the highly cohesive (and containing) text does not need to acknowledge events or the passing of time outside of this unit (Moretti 1987: 16). The emphasis of the narrative structure of the classical Bildungsroman is on closure or resolution, to the “journey” of the protagonist, but also to relations between individual and society as representative of internal and external cohesion. Moretti observes that the classical Bildungsroman always concludes with marriage, the ritualised institution that offers closure for the social foundation of the family, as well as being a powerful metaphor for a social contract which links the individual with society (1987: 22). Happiness, within the familial unit, as the conclusion of the narrative ‘marks the end of all tension between the individual and his world’ (Moretti 1987: 23). Once the protagonist has become one with the new world created by marriage or other symbolic social/familial harmony the plot sequence can cease, the text’s meaning having been fulfilled by the newly established stability of social relations. As a representation rather than critique of everyday life, the narrative represents the totality of the protagonist’s social world, parameters that are rapidly rendered untenable by the onset of capitalism, which opens out social possibilities from those symbolised by the family and its values. As such, the classical Bildungsroman is teleological, its clear purpose being to create ‘full and happy men’ (Moretti 1987: 31).

One resolve of the practices of the TRC was to create full and happy men, by unifying the experiences of individual subjects' pasts with the social structures of the present, through the totalising device of chronological historical narrative. While Boyhood may superficially appear to serve this goal by narrating the story of the boy who passes through to young adulthood, there are several aspects of the text that contribute to its withholding this kind of closure, positing it as a counternarrative both to its textual archetype and nationalist goals. The most striking feature of the text is that it is written entirely in the omniscient third person. By centring the individual within a social and historical narrative, this supports western notions of the cultural importance of the individual, constructing a unique subjectivity at the centre of the text, yet resists carrying the full impact of the testimonial "I". The use of the third person, which remains nameless for the majority of the text, creates ambivalence around ownership of the testimony, or autobiographical narrative. On the one hand, the narrative focus on the experiences of the individual, growing up in a specific time and place, privileges a single, sovereign consciousness within the text, denying a sense of communal experience, and linking the historical narrative represented to that individual consciousness. On the other, the predominant lack of name accorded to the narrative subject universalises the protagonist's story, allowing it to stand as referent to a wider cultural past.

In the text, the past that Coetzee presents to be witnessed is that of a personal and collective Afrikaner heritage. In the way that the classical Bildungsroman or traditional autobiography manufactures its subject's identity around a cohesive narrative, Afrikaner nationalism was culturally constructed around the master

narrative of the Great Trek which represented, like the journey of the youth into maturity in the classical Bildungsroman, a voyage of discovery into what the Afrikaners perceived as an undeveloped landscape.<sup>22</sup> A form of nationalism invented to unify the Dutch settlers in South Africa, who had no common language until Afrikaans was legally recognised in 1918, Afrikanerdom was a highly masculinist narrative that relied heavily on the construction of specific traditions, rituals and language. In making the Great Trek, the Afrikaner pioneers were attempting to stake their claim on land they regarded as uncharted wilderness: however, as Anne McClintock rightly points out, that land was only empty or uninhabited in the awareness of the trekkers, and in this way the trek represented an incursion into an anachronistic space (McClintock 1995: 369). As a territorial and nationalistic claim, it represented simultaneously the cultural space of the future (in that it was the physical and metaphorical site of the invention of Afrikaner tradition), but was also a retrospective space (in that a journey was made into territories that had already been marked by others). It is with regard to this profound internal temporal ambivalence that the Afrikaner Great Trek parallels Coetzee's textual journey. His "confessional" narrative represents a journey into his own past as well as that of the nation. But because this past is marked by trauma, it is also a journey into the unknown and is part of the construction of a new subjectivity that will emerge from the territorial incursion. The exploration of the timeless space of historical trauma, Coetzee reclaims his past, populated by traumatic events but largely empty of assimilated history, as well as staking a claim on his future.

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<sup>22</sup> Importantly, this landscape was not regarded as empty: contained within it were perceived enemies and threats to Afrikaner development and progress, in terms of both human and animal life as well as the landscape itself.

In Boyhood Coetzee uses the vehicle of Cape life as a means of exploring wider social and cultural issues through personal recollections. As well as relying heavily on the land as cultural territory, Afrikaner nationalism was also defined to a great extent by powerful cultural constructions of uniqueness. These were based primarily, although not exclusively, on racial and gender difference, constructions that manifest themselves in the consciousness of the narrator at several key points in Boyhood. The cultural themes of race and gender are explored as points of intersection between individual and collective experience. The main sites for the exploration of these themes are school and the home or family environment, as metaphoric representations of wider society, and therefore bridges between the individual and social worlds. In this capacity these sites represent the institutions where reconciliation might take place, like that of marriage in the Bildungsroman. Paradoxically, these loci of intersection are in many cases are seen as the source of residual psychic trauma as Coetzee recalls incidents from early childhood. They are frequently marked by cultural difference, whether race, gender or class-related, and represent the protagonist's isolation and resistance to participation in a social world.

This is represented in the text by Coetzee's habitual connection of traumatic events from his past to what the wider social world interprets as signifiers of difference. He is mortified by his mother's hesitant and public attempts to learn to ride a bicycle, temporary resolution being achieved through collusion with his father's repressive ideologies which offers affirmation of his belonging to a collective male identity, 'Women don't ride bicycles... that evening he joins in with his father's jeering' (Coetzee 1998: 3). Yet the solace of cohesive gender identification offers another ambivalent resting place for the protagonist, as he is simultaneously isolated from the

comfortable male camaraderie signified by the memories his father and uncle share of being caned at school. The two men are united by their shared recollection of the trauma of corporal punishment, and their ongoing reconciliation to it. Coetzee is alienated from the brotherhood whilst despising his mother. In being distanced from the men in his family, he separates himself from the male aspect of Afrikanerdom, the heart of national identification. Through this profound and simultaneous sense of belonging and yet not belonging to his parents, wanting to identify with one but not fitting in and rejecting the other, the young Coetzee is seen to have a sense of ambivalent belonging, alienation, otherness and fragmented selfhood, all of which are symptomatic of residual trauma.

Whereas in the classical Bildungsroman, textual and psychic resolution is achieved through the final reconciliation between the protagonist and the social world, Boyhood presents a vision of the intimate domestic world of the immediate biological world shattering as a compound effect of aggression and desire that reaches outside the parameters of the family unit. Whilst watching a boxing match with his father, Coetzee questions the expectation that he should support the South African contestant, and then queries the relief and pleasure that he derives when the home contestant does finally win the match. The ambivalence that he initially felt towards his compatriot, which was based on an intellectual interrogative approach, is replaced by a much more primal desire to be part of a national group. The ensuing celebrations, concomitant with feelings equivalent to sexual desire, lead him to grab his father by the hair in a spontaneous act of aggression that surprises both of them. As he begins to question the solidity of the frameworks that comprise his social world, it is notable that he begins to evaluate the discursive significance of his life. Moretti has noted that

later versions of the Bildungsroman fail to recount the transition from youthfulness to adult realism, or social integration, and suggests that this is a function of the notion of maturation having shifted from story to discourse level (Moretti 1987: 93). The protagonist's evaluation of his life so far as having comprised the accumulation of a succession of autobiographical fragments or stories, that connote heavily in the wider social universe that is driven by power constructions supports Moretti's assertion that the classical Bildungsroman is only a viable genre in a pre-capitalist society, where the family is the highest value. In considering the extreme fictionality of his existence, he speculates what popular opinion of him would be if his subjectivity were exposed as a series of fictional narratives, and if the basis of social identity itself were composed of a series of protective stories. Fiction thus becomes a tool with which to disassemble the perceived solidity of the social world:

If all the stories that have been built up around him, built by himself, built by years of normal behaviour, at least in public, were to collapse, and the ugly, black, crying babyish core of him were to emerge for all to see and laugh at, would there be any way in which he could go on living? (Coetzee 1998: 112)

The extended clauses used by Coetzee to express his psychological panic imply that the social aspect of his life *is* constructed by stories, of an intertwined mesh of fictions, which comprise the aspect of his selfhood which is exterior, or visible to the outside world. It is in this way that the self-protective aspect of fiction becomes evident, as the realisation grows that if the narratives upon which he has founded his existence are no longer present, then the solidity of his existence as a social subject is also jeopardised. The lack of grammatical cohesion in his emotive plea, expressed via clauses that run into one another as the narrative subject cedes control of syntactic convention, is symptomatic of a lack of control over the social world and indicative

that the narrative subject has reverted to the pre-traumatic social state of a child, in an image redolent of Krog's desire to crawl back into the womb.

Language and stories are depicted as a formative component of Coetzee's childhood, and as markers of the transition between different stages of youth. As a child, he loves reading, and the first time in the text that the protagonist is accorded a name, John, is in connection with texts and reading. His nascent, tenuous subjectivity, then, is aligned to the reception and processing of fiction. He fights to retain some autonomy regarding the texts that contribute to his subjective development, churlishly rejecting the Wordsworth recommended by his father, and using it as a springboard from which to query why his Afrikaner parents are such unusually good English speakers. For it is language that signifies to a large extent the liminality that Coetzee inhabits in his daily life, and the way in which he lived between two nations as symbolised by the different cultural backgrounds of his parents. He lives at the same time in both and neither camp, existing in a state of cultural unbelonging that may be the source of his constant inquiry regarding the lives of others. The child wants to be great, to have a selfhood aligned with that of the mature adult at the conclusion of the Bildungsroman, that is public and visible and that will signify maturity and acceptance into the social world. But, the adult Coetzee is a successful writer who reflects on the largely pre-social state of the toddler with nostalgia, in a gaze that upsets the conciliatory function of the text.

The young Coetzee cannot imagine himself dying, or completing the full, teleological journey of the textual subject. He can only visualise himself diminishing, and consequently believes that there is a force that will prevent him from dying, or

concluding his life. In order to do this he retreats to the world of the very young, pre-social child, who is unable to comprehend existing without a mother. He becomes, in the recesses of his imagination, 'a big baby with a big belly and a lolling head' (Coetzee 1998: 113). Yet, alongside this regressive helplessness exists awareness of his capabilities, 'but he possesses this power', as Coetzee becomes aware of the monstrosity of the distended and ambivalent baby who is capable of anything and unable to be harmed.

This power extends to his relationship with his brother. The section of the text that most closely resembles perpetrator testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission follows Coetzee's first concrete encounter with the death that he cannot relate to. It is significant that the death, that of his Aunt Annie, triggers his first encounter with autobiography as a written genre. Aunt Annie's father, Balthazar du Biel, wrote his autobiography, which was then printed and distributed by Aunt Annie. Coetzee's recollection of such a dedicated act of assisted remembering prompts his articulation of what is the most brutal section of his own autobiography. He states:

While the grown-ups drank tea, he and his brother roamed around the farmyard. There they came upon a mealie-grinding machine. He persuaded his brother to put his hand down the funnel where the mealie-pits were thrown in; then he turned the handle. For an instant, before being stopped, he could feel the fine bones of fingers being crushed (Coetzee 1998: 119).

Immediately prior to the telling of this memory, the reader is directed out of a social and historical context that is specifically South African, which draws the confession out of its immediate social environment. Coetzee achieves this by preceding the confession with a detailed synopsis of Balthazar du Biel's life in Germany. As in Disgrace where a similar textual device was used to shift the rhetorical impact of a

violent historical act to Germany rather than South Africa.<sup>23</sup> This narrative device on the one hand has a similar rhetorical effect to the predominant lack of naming of the protagonist, universalising violence that has occurred within South Africa, extricating it from a specific national content and relating it to a broader human condition. Yet conversely it binds an act of historical violence to the highly specific context of Nazi Germany, raising issues relating to the lack of resolution accorded incidents from that epoch of German national history, implying that this might also be the case in South Africa. The frequent references to Coetzee's father's experiences fighting against the Germans in the Second World War, and the casual, yet markedly negative, remarks about the Germans made by his mother. The references combine war, violence and the modern era neatly to produce a value-laden indictment concerning the contemporary moral consequences of violent actions. Yet, Coetzee resists the paradigm of reconciliation as he recalls that:

He has never apologised to his brother, nor has he ever been reproached with what he did. Nevertheless, the memory lies like a weight upon him, the memory of the soft resistance of flesh and bone, and then the grinding (Coetzee 1998: 119).

This “memory”, or confession that has been articulated from deep within a consciousness given a public form by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, clarifies to the reader that Coetzee has not experienced any resolution to the violent act from his past, either in the more traditional form of retribution, or reconciliation. As a marker of unresolved past trauma, then, the attack on his brother represents the initial stages of intersubjective reconciliation in that it has been articulated. However, Coetzee has not been able to bear witness to this particular aspect of his past in a first person narrative, and thus resists the full conciliatory potential of textual recounting

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<sup>23</sup> In *Disgrace* Coetzee makes links between South Africa and Germany through his repeated references to the *Lösung* of the dogs in Bev Shaw's clinic. See Section 3.11.

of the past. He also removes the source of past violence from himself as an individual, extending it via the metaphor of the family microcosm, to the whole Afrikaner nation, resisting a form of textual closure. The discourse marker 'nevertheless' jolts the consciousness of the post-apartheid reader, whose cultural expectation is that apology leads to reconciliation, and who might therefore expect the consequence of unrepentant aggression to be marked by a more affirmative linking device such as 'so' or 'therefore'.

In Boyhood Coetzee has written the disparate trauma of his past, both national and familial. Like My Traitor's Heart and Country of My Skull, the text is multifunctional, commemorating the end of a traumatic period in national history, and on the other testifying to the lack of resolution present in the individual and national psyches. As Petar Ramadanovic points out, this kind of textual representation of historical trauma also functions as a bridge to the future (Ramadanovic 2001: 1). As autobiographical narratives, the texts prevent their subjects from being consigned solely to the past and to history and, indeed, in terms of the resolution that they withhold, they deny the very closure to the past that allows history to tell only the past, perpetuating and memorialising the historical trauma of apartheid.

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