

**THE VOICING OF ETHICAL AMBIGUITIES BY THE SELF IN POST-  
APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE**

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for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Literature of Egerton University**

**EGERTON UNIVERSITY**

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## DECLARATION AND RECOMMENDATION

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## **DEDICATION**

To my late father,

For the love and blessings;

To Prof. Wilson Langat,

For starting off and signing out my higher education journey.

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## ABSTRACT

The dismantling of apartheid in South Africa inspired hope that it was possible to build a new society committed to negotiating an inclusive future for all. However, as the actual work of rebuilding the nation began, it emerged that the attempt to morally transform the different segments of the society affected by apartheid presented an overwhelming problem. Post-apartheid South African fiction revealed the ambiguities that existed between remembering apartheid in the present as tainted by memories of the past on the one hand, and the aspiration for a new ethic on the other hand. These ambiguities have been amplified by post-apartheid writers who have broadly adopted the first-person point of view in their work. Using selected texts of such writers, this study determined the ways in which the construction of the first-person point of view magnifies ethical ambiguities; established the ethical ambiguities of the self as framed through the first-person narrative voice; and examined the ethical ambiguities emanating from the relationship between the self and the collective. The study operated on the assumptions that post-apartheid South African literature envisages ethical ambiguities voiced through multiple first-person narrative voices; that the multiple and often contradictory first-person narrative voices reveal ethical ambiguities of individuals burdened by divergent memories; and that post-apartheid South African literature narrated in the first-person point of view represent fractured voices of selves unable to reconcile their aspirations with communal expectations. The study applied narrative theory to analyse the interlinks between the narrative as a mode of discourse, and ethics as a product of narrative representation. Adopting the constructivist paradigm, the study used strategies of textual analysis to map point of view and guide in the analysis of the extent to which narrative strategies magnify ethical uncertainties. The findings of this study led to the conclusion that post-apartheid South African literature has adopted the first-person point of view as a formal strategy that insightfully project the ethical aspect of human life. This study has drawn attention to the difficulties of effecting closure in situations such as that of South Africa where memory functions to define shifting identities of self. The study contributes to conversations on the construction of nationhood and to nation building in South Africa. It recommends studies along the lines of the need for a re/examination of social/gender subversion as a strategy towards addressing enduring ethical challenges in the country. It also calls for reformulation of a space for redemptive racial dialogue in the pursuit of a moral South African future.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background to the Study**

The dismantling of apartheid in South Africa inspired hope that it was possible to build a new inclusive society, a Rainbow Nation, and to cast into oblivion the deformed way of living in the apartheid past. The aspirations of a significant number of the different segments of the post-apartheid South African society – the privileged, on the one hand, and the former oppressed and the disadvantaged, on the other hand – exuded hope and confidence in a future untainted by the memories of the past (Tutu, 1999). However, as the actual work of rebuilding the nation started, it began to emerge that, whereas the task of instituting political, economic, and social changes was fairly straightforward in understanding, the moral transformation of the society presented a daunting problem.

The question of how the great majority of the black population whose dehumanisation under apartheid had turned them into a mass of scarred souls, could be transformed into agents of ethical regeneration was a hard one. The greatest challenge for the black population lay in creating partnerships with their former oppressors in the process of establishing a new ethical dispensation in the country. The difficulty arose out of the fact that trauma is haunting and particularly difficult to heal, as Caruth (1996), writing on the challenge of memory in post-traumatic contexts, affirms. The process of that healing requires going back to the root cause of that pain, that is, to the apartheid past, which is precisely what the majority in the post-apartheid society wanted to bury. The former oppressors, feeling tainted by their complicity in past wrongdoing, and repulsed by the perceived resentment against them afterwards, found it difficult to fit in the new dispensation (Verwoerd, 2001). The fact that a number of the oppressors did not welcome the end of apartheid, and would have wanted to continue with the privileges of the past, made the situation more confounding.

Since the past could not be forgotten, South Africa armed itself to first confront it, before it could embark on the project of the ethical rebuilding of the society. In the years that followed the euphoria of the immediate post-apartheid era marked by promises of sweeping social, economic and political reforms, discussions on the ethical consequences of apartheid for the lives of South Africans dominated the national agenda (Sanders, 2000). In furtherance of the ethical agenda and rebuilding efforts, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established as an instrument to bring closure to the moral pain inflicted in the past by establishing and publicly acknowledging the “truth” regarding apartheid experience as stamped in the testimonies of disappearances, brutalities, deaths and racial economic

inequalities, among other ills, in an attempt to realise broad social reconciliation. The founding fathers of the Rainbow Nation, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela, envisioned that once reconciliation was achieved, it would be possible to institute a new ethical order in line with the country's established social, political and legal institutions (Mandela, 1994; Tutu, 1999).

TRC indeed managed to provide a platform for public acknowledgement of the horrors of the apartheid past through the testimonies during its sittings. The Commission looked into gross human rights violations during apartheid, assembling a montage of significant memories of victims, witnesses, and perpetrators in the form of testimonies, public confessions, admissions of guilt, and requests for amnesties (TRC, 1998). But the achievement of the goal of reconciliation encountered a challenge: how were those who perceived themselves as victims of apartheid to deal with the "established truth"; how were they to accommodate the painful memories invoked during the TRC proceedings; and how were the memories, now officially acknowledged and thus made even more vivid and valid, to fit into the desire for unconditional social integration, and a subsequent coherent societal ethics?

Under these circumstances, remembering apartheid and building a new ethical dispensation in South Africa became two closely intertwined processes. The past remains a significant archive from which an ethical future is negotiated and re-imagined. Various monuments, museums, statues, symbolic institutions and other memorial spaces define and curate South Africa's collective memory. As the majority of its population aspire to move to a new ethical state of being, memories of the past, particularly those that signify legacies of continued domination, coalesce and encroach on their consciousness at the present (Murray, 2013; Ndletyana, 2012). The tensions between painful memories and the earnest aspiration for a new ethical order persist, bringing uncertainties with respect to ethical choices and moral expectations.

Since the trauma of the past is still active in people's minds, particularly the black people, the revisiting of certain histories is problematic. The process of the formulation of an ethical code fails to be disinterested and neutral, and is constantly subverted by acts of remembering. A situation of conflicting and competing interests ensues. On the one hand, there is an aspiration to a future that mirrors the ideals espoused in the formation of a post-apartheid Rainbow Nation characterised by a forward look, away from the imperfections of the past. On the other hand, there is a backward looking and prejudiced interest in the past that is unable to resist the demand for compensation for past wrongs. The prejudiced view is

compounded by the lack of homogeneity in experiences and aspirations of the different cultural groups (former oppressed and oppressors; those born after apartheid without direct memories of oppression who can only relate to the past intersubjectively; and those with first-hand experience of apartheid) who have divergent memories, and hence different ethical positions.

In the conjoining of memory with the effort to triumph over the pain that memory causes, South Africa is not dissimilar to other countries coming out of traumatic experiences, like former Yugoslavia and Rwanda in the 1990s, and the histories of the Auschwitz concentration camps during the holocaust (Dauge-Roth, 2010; Hartman, 1996; Obradović, 2016). In such post-traumatic societies, the revisiting of the memories of the past is a critical turning point towards national reconstruction. Scholars such as Tzvetan Todorov (2002; 2010) and Hannah Arendt (1994) have written extensively on the subject of ethical reconstruction in traumatic contexts. Other scholars, writing concerning the role of literature in those situations, address the construction of post-traumatic identities and subjectivities in the light of ethical pursuits of different communities (Dauge-Roth, 2010; Hartman, 1996; Levitt, 2007; Spargo & Ehrenreich, 2010). The tensions that individuals go through as they relate to the memories of the past are revealed, even as these individuals attempt to make sense of their contemporary existence mainly through remembering and personal reflection.

With the end of apartheid and the consequent embrace of fundamental freedoms and human rights, previously marginalised groups have shifted from the margins to the centre, and their voices are now being heard. Post-apartheid South African literature has captured competing voices that continue to define the multiple ways of looking at the nation's transforming social, cultural and political practices. Fiction of the post-apartheid dispensation such as Laureta Ngcobo's *And They Didn't Die* (1990), Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (2003) and Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* (1998), remembers the past by archiving the memories of women as corollary to national reconstruction. These works of fiction form a body of literature that fuses together significant images, memories and recollections as part of the attempts to narrate the South African nation, as it tries, in Benedict Anderson's (2006) words, to imagine a new state of being, belonging and citizenship for the country away from the past.

Stressing on the difficulties and ambiguities of remembering the past, novels such as Zoe Wicomb's *David's Story* (2000) and Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* (2001) focus on how different individuals and communities address bitterness and betrayal regarding past violations which magnifies the difficulties of healing in the present. For these writers, the

imperfections of the present regarding family and community – and work, as Damon Galgut’s *The Good Doctor* (2003) shows – are demonstrated in the many levels of betrayals, suspicions and conflicts in the contemporary South Africa. Other texts such as Zakes Mda’s *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002) revisit the past to contextualise the immoralities of apartheid, particularly as they affect individuals and communities in the current dispensation. Novels such as J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1999) signify how race straddles the complex negotiation of power and authority in the shifting social, economic and political formations after apartheid. In such texts, the transition has been riddled with new forms of entrapment, social unrests and cultural upheavals. Other writers focus on the political aspects of the recovery of the past. Niq Mhlongo’s *Way Back Home* (2013) re-imagines the recovery of the past through the lives of political actors who were in exile during apartheid, and connects the past to the story of discontent in post-apartheid South Africa. In these texts the inconsistencies of the nation-in-formation are brought to the fore.

Writing has charted new frontiers in the representation of the social, cultural, economic and political realities of contemporary South Africa. Works of fiction such as Ivan Vladislavić’s *Portrait with Keys: Joburg and What-What* (2006), and Phaswane Mpe’s *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001), among others, focus on economic and political contradictions in urban and peri-urban areas of South Africa. Of the post-apartheid literary sphere, a great deal of attention has focused on the changing dynamics in (peri)urban areas, in particular on the changing politics of ownership and control of spaces.

A good number of works have focused extensively on shifting cultural norms in the post-apartheid dispensation. A recurrent strand in the literature is the representation of a largely youthful population who are deeply resentful and frustrated by a limiting social, economic and political environment. Writers such as K. Sello Duiker (2000), Duiker (2001), and Zukiswa Wanner (2010) devote their attention to the analysis of the interrogation of homosexuality and the problems of defining queer sexual orientation in South Africa, mixed-race relationships, the black middle class, as well as the challenges of xenophobia and multiculturalism, especially as they affect the youth. Futhi Nthshingila’s *Do Not Go Gentle* (2014) and Jonny Steinberg’s *Three Letter Plague* (2008) interrogate HIV/Aids and the associated stigmas. Such works interrogate how communities wade through hope and betrayal. Others post-apartheid fiction such as Maxine Case’s *All We Have Left Unsaid* (2006), Sifiso Mzobe’s *Young Blood* (2010) and Mary Watson’s *Moss* (2004) address issues of domestic violence and the pain associated with abuse and silence. Like a substantial number of the texts on the post-apartheid dispensation, the novels interrogate ethical issues

related to redemption, healing and forgiveness over past violations.

The question of personal memories and private / individual connections to the past is a dominant feature in post-apartheid literature. In the representation of personal memories about the past, a number of South African narratives such as Rian Malan's *My Traitor's Heart* (2000), Gillian Slovo's *Red Dust* (2000), and Antjie Krog's *Country of my Skull* (1998) underwrite significant aspects of South Africa's collective memory broadly gleaned from the hearings of the TRC, buttressing certain legal, national and political perspectives to the understanding of the collective aspirations of South Africans. These works rely on the autobiographical and confessional narrative strategies to address important questions emanating from the pursuit of truth and reconciliation in South Africa. The foregoing is arguably the mood and character that post-apartheid literature has closely mirrored, with works that take a more personal and largely private reflection of the past.

Post-apartheid South African literature has been increasingly concerned with the ongoing efforts to build an ethical precept for the new South Africa. It has thus inevitably been engaged in the representation of the difficult work the society and the individual undertake in this respect while coming to terms with painful memories of the past of apartheid. A significant number of literary works are devoted to the reflection on and resolution of complex ethical questions, to the unravelling of the correct ethical judgment about significant national issues when that unravelling is complicated by the burden of memory, by its demands, and by its claim to have a say in what is right. One enduring feature of this literature is the steady focus on a culture of introspection, of turning inward into the material realities and circumstances of the present moment (Irlam, 2004). What is of significance is that, quite often, most post-apartheid texts are narrated through introspective and autobiographical voices.

A number of post-apartheid writers, Antjie Krog (1998), Njabulo Ndebele (2003), Ivan Vladislavić (1996), Zukiswa Wanner (2010), Songeziwe Mahlangu (2013), Lauren Beukes (2010), Rachel Zadok (2013), Kgebetli Moele (2006), Thando Mqgqolozana (2014), among others, intertwine histories and memories of communities largely through individual and personal voices. These writers have taken cognisance of the ethical ambiguities and economic and political anxieties confronting the post-apartheid society in the pursuit of freedom and economic emancipation. Most of these works, in reflection of Achille Mbembe's (2016a, 2016b) reading of the South African post-apartheid moment, represent images of uncertainty and unsettlement through the first-person narrative point of view. The fiction gesture towards a reflective and contemplative examination of the ethical anxieties after the

disorientation of the past. The extensive use of the first person signals the central role that point of view as a narrative strategy plays in enunciating and amplifying ethical issues more cogently. The choice of the first-person point of view is arguably consistent with the desire to represent multiple post-apartheid sensibilities.

Post-apartheid literature amalgamates ethical issues with a stylistic choice and narrative positioning that magnifies individual choices, duties and obligations of South Africans. This ethical dimension, intimated in the writings of Derek Attridge (2004), Judith Coullie (2014) and Mark Sanders (2007), points towards the need for critical examination of the role of the first-person narrative perspective in the revelation of profound ethical concerns in literature. What deserves attention is the extent to which the fusion of the ethical issues with the first-person point of view as a stylistic option magnifies the role of the individual in staging these concerns.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Recent critical attention in the study of South African literature has focused on this literature's concern with the reconstruction of the social, cultural, economic, and political circumstances of different communities in the re-imagining of the nation beyond apartheid. However, little attention has been dedicated to post-apartheid literature's engagement with the representation of ethical ambiguities as they unfold in contemporary South Africa. This is despite the existence of a variety of contentious racialised, communal and cultural voices competing for attention in a nation with different personal and collective interests. Of note is how different voices are mediated in narrative discourses that signify ethical uncertainties among individuals and communities. What is more crucial is that there is a growing corpus of post-apartheid literary writing that remains to be critically explored, which has that has predominantly used the first-person point of view as a narrative strategy to frame ethical uncertainties through first-person narratives. This study has critically examined how the voice as used in post-apartheid literature, by nature of its construction, amplifies ethical uncertainties of individuals, even as the individuals attempt to situate themselves within the South African national collective. This study thus investigated the voicing of ethical ambiguities by the self as represented in post-apartheid South African literature written in the first-person point of view.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The study sought to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To determine the ways in which the construction of the first-person point of view magnifies ethical ambiguities in post-apartheid South African literature.

- ii. To establish the manifestations of the self, framed through the first-person narrative voice as it navigates through the ambiguities in the search for truth and authentic existence in post-apartheid South African literature.
- iii. To examine the ethical ambiguities in the relationship between the self and the collective to which the self belongs in post-apartheid South African literature.

#### **1.4 Research Premises**

The study is based on the assumptions that:

- i. Post-apartheid South African literature envisages ethical ambiguities by magnifying multiple narrative voices through the position of the narrators and the orientation of the texts narrated in the first-person point of view.
- ii. The presence of multiple and contradictory voices in the first-person point of view in post-apartheid South African literature reveal ethical ambiguities brought about by multiple and often irreconcilable truths as processed by individuals seeking closure from the contentious history of apartheid.
- iii. Post-apartheid South African literature narrated in the first-person point of view represent fractured selves whose aspirations are not consistent with the expectations of the community.

#### **1.5 Justification of the Study**

The study is significant in a number of ways. The study contextualises ethical pursuits in South Africa as a country that has gone through a complex political history. It thus provides an opportunity for an analogous examination of countries such as the former Yugoslavia, Cambodia, Rwanda, the United States of America, in which discussions of national reconstruction and progress inflects the renegotiation of personal and collective identities. The focus on divergent histories, memories and private conversations is significant in the contextualisation of dialogue relating to the multiplicity of narrative experiences and the divergence in ethical circumstances among communities.

In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, the study contributes to the negotiation of the role of individuals in fostering discourses on collective nationhood in the aftermath of violence and strife. The findings of the research provide insights into devising strategies for closure regarding the past. For countries that continue to seek redress over past injustices, including attempting to change constitutions, renaming sites or maintaining continuous conversations relating to the future, the study provides insights into the motivations behind certain demands and expectations from individuals and communities, and the ethical and legal decisions that countries would take in the course of seeking redress. In such contexts,

the study emphasises the need for the consideration of divergent voices when imagining national projects and initiatives in the attempt to build responsible communities. The study also resonates with Kenya, where discussions surrounding truth, reconciliation and justice are firmly on the national moral agenda.

The outcome of this study has the potential to guide historians and curators interested in developing and curating projects of national heritage, archives, and public memorials, as well as other scholars interested in similar nation building strategies. The study also has the potential to guide in the development of initiatives geared towards national unity, such as on peace, reconciliation, integration and cohesion among communities with diverse racial, ethnic and cultural identities. More importantly, this study points towards the critical nexus between literature and the first-person point of view in the amplification of ethical discourses.

### **1.6 Scope and Limitation of the Study**

The study focused on fiction of the post-apartheid dispensation narrated through the first-person point of view. The narratives are representative of a growing body of South African literature that dwell on the representation of the South African self in the narrative. The creative works offered incisive cultural commentaries on the major ethical ambiguities facing contemporary South Africa, and provide instances in which individual ethical positions can be evaluated. The works chosen for consideration canvass ethical ambiguities facing contemporary South Africa. These texts, by employing significant narrative strategies such as use of authorial distance and narrative positioning in the first-person point of view, connect South Africa's post-apartheid traumatic histories to ethical uncertainties arising out of past memories. These memories are reflected through voices mediated in the narratives, which reveal individual and communal tensions. These creative works are: Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*, Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, selected stories from Ivan Vladislavić's short story collections *Missing Persons* and *Propaganda by Monuments*, Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207*, Thando Mgqolozana's *Unimportance*, and Niq Mhlongo's *After Tears* and *Dog Eat Dog*. These chosen texts graphically engage with ethical issues affecting the South African communities of different racial, cultural, ethnic, class, and educational backgrounds. The texts capture competing narrative voices that challenge notions of truth, racial identities, educational reforms, the myth of communal solidarity in South Africa, and the accompanying individual tensions.

There were potential limitations to the study. Firstly, the focus on the first person locked out the second-person and the third-person narrative point of view, with equally significant ethical concerns. However, the study canvassed, where necessary, specific ethical

issues addressed by fiction written in other narrative perspectives. Secondly, it may be seen as a drawback that the first-person narrative strategy is subjective. In mitigation, the study investigated the subjectivity of the first-person point of view, linking its subjective mode to the negotiation of ethical ambiguities as represented in selected texts.

### **1.7 Definition of Terms**

**Appropriation:** used to refer to images and symbolic memories from myth and historical sources as used in the fictional narrative.

**Authenticity:** used to refer to the perception regarding accuracy, originality or truthfulness of historical representations.

**Black Consciousness Movement:** it is used to refer to the political philosophy that was fronted by Steve Biko to assert freedom, human rights and dignity for black people in (apartheid) South Africa.

**Commemoration:** this study applies the broad meaning of commemoration as underlined by Marschall (2009: 1) to include "... the (re)naming of streets, cities, and public buildings; the construction of new museums, documentation and interpretation centres; the reenactment of battles and historical events; the identification and official marking of new heritage sites; and the installation of memorials, monuments and public statuary".

**Decolonisation:** it is restricted to the recent intellectual and philosophical responses to the legacies of colonisation as reflected in intellectual debates in South Africa, and the ensuing intellectual and deconstructive responses to reform.

**Entanglement:** used in respect of voices whose aspirations for a future untainted by memories of the past find themselves succumbing to it.

**Estrangement:** used to denote a voicing strategy in which the self is disengaged or detached from particular historical realities.

**Ethical Ambiguities:** it is used to refer to ethical disagreements, or uncertainties that result from a person's own (subjective) struggle to formulate an ethical principle, hence leading to controversies regarding actions and their consequences.

**Focalisation:** a perspective that draws from Genette's (1980) theory used to identify types and orientation of (first-person) narrators.

**Intersubjectivity** involves the capacity to approximate the self into others' feelings, intentions and thought processes. This feeling for others is rendered through the development of the self's ethical dimensions of consideration and empathy.

**Mediated narratives:** as secondary narratives that are re/interpreted or re/conceived as emanating from primary narratives, such as of the TRC in this case.

**Self** refers to the identity constructed through the first-person point of view in the narrative. This definition takes the cue that “an investigation of the self must necessarily involve the first person perspective” to reflect on consciousness and self-awareness of the represented narrative self (Zahavi, 2005: 8)

**Self-knowledge:** constitutes strategies by which an individual creates his/her own identity through reflection on his/her own past memory, and fashioning that memory to define his/her identity. Self-knowledge is identified from the individual’s first-person experiences.

**Self-reflexivity** refers to the ability of the self to stand back and reflect on the self’s feelings, motives and reactions.

**Ubuntu:** An African ethical precept that privileges the obligation of an individual towards a collective goal.

**Visibility:** used in reference to the self’s capacity to reflect and acknowledge what and who they see and relate to in their own consciousness.

## **1.8 Literature Review**

The Literature Review is divided into five sections. The sections situate the relationship between ethical uncertainties and the self as represented in the narrative. It also focalises on the place of narrative point of view in the representation and analysis of ethical issues in literature.

### **1.8.1 Introduction**

The first section investigates the role of collective memory, commemoration and mediated histories in structuring ethical dialogue in post-traumatic contexts such as that of South Africa. Making a case for the need to investigate the relationship between memory and ethics in South Africa, particularly on the enduring tensions between remembering and forgetting and the attendant ethical tensions, the section begins to lay out the uncertainties and historical inconsistencies regarding memorialisation in South Africa. It then projects specific historical realities that are mediated through personal voices and represented largely in the narrative. From the voices, the section identifies how ethical uncertainties ensue from mediated memories represented in personal narratives.

The second section explores the place of the self in the South African collective. By investigating the relationship between the self and community, the section attempts to delineate the place of the personal self within the South African black community. To do this, the section argues that the dilemmas of the black community largely draw from the bigotry and communal intolerance of apartheid. Referring to the significant attempts to remember the South African community after apartheid through the Ubuntu ethic, the section

seeks to explain the enduring tensions between communal demands and personal obligations.

Building on similar socio-cultural, political and racial contexts, the third section examines contentious aporias that result in disoriented and fractured selves, and hence ethical dilemmas. Drawing from theoretical contexts and specific historical realities from countries such as America, the section envisages the place of the individual in the negotiation of ethical questions. The main objective of the section is to establish how ethical uncertainties ensue as individuals navigate through economic, social, cultural and racial ambiguities.

The fourth section focuses on the self as realised dialogically in the first-person narrative perspective, and envisages the construction of ethical aspirations of the self through a focus on self-reflexivity and intersubjectivity. This section evaluates the interconnectedness between the self and reflexivity as a mode of narrative orientation. The section attempts to show how self-reflexivity in the narrative brings about ethical questions through narrative intersubjectivity. It then argues how intersubjectivity becomes a critical turning point towards redeeming ethical life for individuals.

The fifth section offers a literary criticism on ethical questions in literature, paying attention to the ethical concerns that the creative works under study envisage. The section also contextualises the chosen prose fiction in the study.

### **1.8.2 South Africa's Collective Memory and National Reconstruction**

The push for the formation of a new national culture premised on ethical aspirations for a progressive and inclusive future is a dominant concern in societies with changing social, cultural, economic, and political circumstances. In post-war nations such as former Yugoslavia, Germany (after World War II) and Rwanda (after the 1994 genocide), the United States of America (after slavery and the Jim Crow), the formation of legal and political institutions after violence provided a framework for constructive discussions on erasing the memory of the conflicts and encouraging a positive outlook of society (Gates, 2019; Martinon, 2013; Ottley & Kleinhaus, 2010; Sorabji, 2006). In those societies, the focus has been on sustaining memories that foster collective aspirations of the diverse communities. Yet in other contexts, as was the case with Bosnia in the 1992–1995 conflict, “bad memories” may re-ignite clashes and disagreement, rendering the imagination of freedom in such contexts impossible (Sorabji, 2006). The uncertainties of memorialisation for each specific country for the most part depends on each country's past and the unique historical circumstances.

Memories that make up a country's collective memory might present a multiplicity of symbolic expressions which may produce ambiguous meanings. Remembering the past in the

process of building a new ethical dispensation requires an understanding of each country's historical past. Writing in the context of the Holocaust, Geoffrey Hartman (1996) argues concerning the subjective nature of memories. He contends that some memories may be inconsistent or inaccurate when judged against historical realities. In addition, some memories by individuals may contain (inter)subjective memories of others, which are not necessarily truthful, and which ultimately are collated as part of collective memory (Green, 2004). Furthermore, some personal memories may support or challenge official and/or collective memory. As Cathy Caruth (1996) argues, recovery of past memories also occurs long after the trauma, which accentuates forgetting, and renders forgotten memories out of collective consciousness. Caruth (1996) meditates through the ambiguities that are brought about by the attempts to remember the trauma of the past mainly as a matter of historical obligation. Caruth's (1996) study offers an opportunity for closer engagement with finding historical connections with particular aspects of traumatic experience.

The South Africa's historical situation presents particular ethical dilemmas. Apart from having been institutionalised through a racially partisan political patronage, apartheid lasted longer than many other cases of conflict (such as in Rwanda and in the former Yugoslavia), before it was finally abolished. Even then, the vestiges of this system are arguably being felt in different aspects of the country's social formation (Rotich, 2015). Consequently, some of those revisiting and rewriting the apartheid past are not necessarily the direct perpetrators or victims of the apartheid system, but secondary/ indirect participants who may have encountered this past primarily through narrative, or as documented in collective memory. For this kind of group, their memories are mediated through historical records, memories and second-hand witness accounts, rendering their vision and perception of the nation uncertain and indeterminate. A number of fictional works considered for this study feature young South Africans who grew up at the twilight of apartheid, who are often referred to as the "born-free" generation because their lived experiences of apartheid are limited.

Writing regarding the "born-free" generation, Malaika wa Azania (2014) contextualises the uncertainties of young South Africans whose celebration of a "post" apartheid freedom has been thwarted by the realisation that it has not been possible to completely break free from the shackles of the past. In labouring about the inconsistencies of freedom in post-apartheid South Africa, Azania's (2014) memoir echoes Booker T. Washington (2009 [1901]) in the exploration of the discontents of freedom and the ensuing ethical uncertainties of enslaved populations. The South African experience draws useful

lessons from the post-slavery America in considering how individuals without direct memories of the past negotiate ethical uncertainties at the present. As Michael Higginbotham (2013) argues with respect to the Jim Crow policies in America, stories of black struggle against historical victimisation triggered feelings of black self-victimisation among communities and individuals born after the formal end of oppression in America. Writing on the effects of slavery and Jim Crow legislation on black history in America, Randall Robinson (2000) and Louis Gates (2019) also make a case regarding the absence and the anonymity of the memories of black people as slaves in America's collective memory, even though memories of slave owners dominate the archives and memorialisation. South Africa's condition is similar to the American situation.

South African history has been regarded as inconclusive mainly because the stranglehold of apartheid negatively skewed the (re)presentation of the black population. Scholars of South African history have pointed out the difficulties of reconciling "official memory" as contained in historical records in the decades of apartheid with the actual social, political, and economic circumstances of South Africans of different racial orientations (Attridge and Jolly, 1998; Du Pisani & Su Kim, 2004; Murray, 2013). Du Pisani and Su Kim (2004) claim that South African "formal" history is incomplete in explaining the totality of the South African experience. Writing with respect to how the TRC mediated aspects of South African history, the scholars assert that alternative contexts of reading the past are necessary for a wholesome understanding of the social and historical circumstances of the different races. The study sets out in some way to evaluate the uncertainties brought about by divergent historical memories. Going by the perspectives of Du Pisani and Su Kim (2004), this study argues that the South African narrative can provide a crucial perspective for the understanding of history as mediated through narrative, and may fill the gaps of what might be regarded as the incompleteness of history in explaining the totality of the South African experience.

If the South African history is fickle in the representation of the totality of the South African experience, it would be worthy to investigate the position or authority of "narrative history" as complementary vision of accessing the "truth" about the material conditions of the communities in South Africa. Chapter Three of this thesis delineates the alternative versions of truth that exist between historical truth as officially acknowledged and truth that is mediated through the narrative. Scholars including Hannah Arendt (1963) and Tzvetan Todorov (2010), who explore mediated histories in post-conflict societies, provide invaluable lessons that can be used to interpret the South African context. Writing about the historical

reconstruction of memory in post-war nations, Todorov (2010) argues that it is difficult to represent the actual truth pertaining to troubled traumatic pasts. Todorov surmises that although instances of violence and massacre constitute crucial memory for troubled nations, such nations can only effectively deal with closure with the past by forming symbolic institutions which function to mediate history through the representation of good and evil as imagined by communities. Building on the pioneering work of these scholars, the study explored the possible links between mediated histories and the ethical significance of narrative representation in the selected texts. In particular, it considered how Krog's *Country of My Skull*, Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, and Vladislavić's *Missing Persons and Propaganda by Monuments and Other Stories*, have framed narrative truth against the history of South Africa in order to represent the vexed ethical questions drawing from race, gender, social and the political situation of South Africa.

Arendt's focus on narrative representation, as well as on the position of the author in the narrative, are critical standing points for the analysis of the South African situation. Arendt's emphasis on history highlights the significance of the individual narrative in representing the actual historical realities of specific countries. Writing with respect to the Holocaust totalitarianism, Arendt imagines the tensions and ambiguities between individual morality and collective trauma, providing useful lessons to the study on the effects of evil on individual liberties and on collective consciousness in post-conflict societies.

South Africa's situation confronts similar ethical challenges as those faced in World War II France during the Nazi occupation, the genocide in Rwanda, the genocide during the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia, the slavery and the Jim Crow in America, and in other post-conflict zones. To mediate the historical past is what countries such as Rwanda have done – to privilege the complexities of remembering the horror of war and massacre by evaluating and negotiating through diverse narrative accounts about the 1994 genocide in the hope that the process would privilege the good over the evil (Dauge-Roth, 2010; King, 2010). Rwanda, and of course South Africa, instituted truth commissions to provide a room for the narrative to contribute to rewriting and reframing a post-conflict mediated history of the respective countries. Chapter Three contextualises how Krog's *Country of My Skull* and Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* prioritise the obligation of remembering the past as necessary for ethical regeneration. The narratives collate diverse stories that contribute to the construction of South Africa's narrative history.

Remembering the past is at the core of individual self-realisation and the development of personal identity. According to Jeffrey Blustein (2017), a fundamental reason why

individuals and communities pay tribute to the past is because individuals have a duty to remember. The duty arises out of the fact that remembering past events function in designing and negotiating personal identity. Making sense out of one's identity, and consequently the attempt to find meaning out of disruptive and disjunctive memories, provides the opportunity for individuals to cope with the present circumstances.

The South African situation has confronted issues of memory in diverse ways. Extensive studies have been conducted on the role of memory in the re-imagination of the post-apartheid nation. Ashley Sheriff (2014), Martin Murray (2013), Heidi Grunenbaum-Ralph (2001), Attridge and Jolly (1998), Sabine Marschall (2009), and Annie Coombes (2003) identify significant stores of memory and heritage sites in South Africa. The scholars contend that memory in South Africa is continuously being debated and reworked with respect to changing social, economic and political realities of the country, and collated along racial and class lines. However, these studies have tended to look at collective images in general without emphasising what the images mean to individuals, or what their responses and reactions to them are from an ethical perspective. This study has expanded and focalised on some of the images and memories explored by the scholars to the extent in which they are represented in the narratives under examination.

Significant memories in South Africa have been recovered, remembered, reconceived, or renegotiated in the transition from apartheid to democracy, leading to multiple, convergent and/or divergent meanings associated with particular memories. Judith Coullie (2014), Shane Graham (2003) and Grunebaum-Ralph (2001) argue that in order to make sense of the significance of memories in post-apartheid South Africa, it is important to consider not only the memories that have been documented and remembered by individuals, but also the critical aspects of memory that were necessary to push out of consciousness, to blank them out of memory, to forget. In critical ways, certain aspects of memory have had to be repressed, and/or forgotten as an obligation to move forward (Matheson, 2017).

As it stands, the tensions between remembering and forgetting points at the existence of ethical uncertainty wrought in memories in post-apartheid South Africa. South Africa is faced with two possible "obligations" to memory: on the one hand, there is an obligation to remember certain images and aspects of memory, while on the other hand, there are memories that require restraining, suppressing, and silencing. Mcebisi Ndletyana (2012) seems to suggest that the attempt to rename certain commemorative sites reflect the uncertainty with respect to memorialisation. More importantly, it would be relevant to consider how the renaming of certain commemorative sites, as Ndletyana (2012) observe,

motions towards the ethical ambiguities related to the obligation to remember, and the obligation to forget, in South Africa.

The multiple responses to images of memory suggest that commemorating the past remains basically as an ambiguous ethical undertaking. The situation is compounded by opposing viewpoints regarding the status of memorialisation. Are blacks in South Africa, for example, being “forced” to forget certain memories of apartheid in favour of more “progressive” or accommodating memories of national reconstruction? Is the desire for a multicultural collective future propagated mainly by the political class redefining what memories to forget, and what to remember? Are the memories of apartheid still raw and fresh in people’s minds that it is not easy to blank them out quite easily? Is the attempt to forget some of the memories of apartheid *ethically* significant, or necessary? Are the white South Africans thinking that they can escape the burden of the past through conditional forgetting, while the blacks think they have a duty to remember what was done to them as was the case with respect to the American experience documented by Robert O’Meally and Genevieve Fabre (1994)? These questions can best be answered through the interrogation of the place of truth in the reconstitution of the South African society after apartheid.

This study has taken an interest in Coombes’s (2003) assertion that black and white communities in South Africa attach different meanings to certain significant images of memory. For example, black anti-apartheid icons and activists killed during apartheid, such as Robert Sobukwe, Solomon Mahlangu, Hector Pietersen or Chris Hani, as Marschall (2009) surmises, are remembered through the personal sacrifices they made to the freedom struggle. Chapter Five of this study reflects on the meaning and significance of some of these memories, while providing a contextual analysis of what they stand for, and why they continue to inspire a section of the South African population, particularly the blacks. With respect to other significant memorials, Chapter Four has amplified in closer detail why certain sites of collective memory have continued to be enduring sights of violent confrontation and ultimate removal from the archive of collective memory, especially those that continue to signify apartheid. The study has therefore paid particular attention to how characters in their own first-person voices have responded to particular images of apartheid and colonialism, such as to the memories of Hendrik Verwoerd and J.G. Strijdom, among other visible memorials. For the white community, as Coombes (2003) observes, some of the(se) monuments are etched in their memories as a reminder of personal struggle and communal solidarity in the face of historical odds. Chapter Four enunciates ethical ambiguities of narrators and characters as they challenge the authenticity of these

monuments, which seem to exude contrasting interpretations. From the competing and contrasting visions of memories and their place in history, the study has envisaged ethical ambiguities arising from the characters' and narrators' positions with respect to changing historical circumstances. The focus on Vladislavić has offered a more critical engagement with symbolic monuments, photographs, and statues, as individuals relate personal stories with them.

The competing and contrasting memories in South Africa appear to illuminate the contention by Avishai Margalit (2002) that different historical circumstances for communities create ambiguous symbolic memories. As will be observed in Chapter Four, individuals relate their memories with significant historical events. Writing concerning the relationship between memory and ethical discourse, Margalit (2002) argues that societies preserve memories that are significant to the lives of individuals and communities. Communities attach symbolic and interpretive meanings to stored memories, building foundations for symbolic ethical projects, such as constructing memorial sites to signify reconciliation after the ravages of conflict and war. Margalit's study intimates the possibilities of interrogating the relationship between ethics and historical circumstances. This study has expanded on the interrogation of the complex relationship between memory and the development of ethical behaviour of individuals in post-traumatic societies as advanced by Margalit (2002) to locate the ethical valence of significant events in the lives of individual South Africans.

Narratives of post-conflict societies offer a clearer nexus between memory and ethical discourse as critical aspects of reconstruction and nation building. Writing about the contributions of literature to national reconstruction after the Yugoslav wars, Dragana Obradović (2016) evaluates the critical role the (re)organisation of memory plays in the formation of a new nationhood. For Hartman (1996: 10), literature constitutes "memory-institutions" that mediate the past and the present, providing an appropriate context by which present and past ethical obligations can be delineated. According to Obradović, post-war literature imagines a different society shaped along alternative national and nationalist discourses while envisioning ethical concerns related to blame, guilt, remorse, forgiveness, and reconciliation. In Slovenia in the former Yugoslavia, for example, ethical pursuits and projects of national reconstruction formed the basis of the reorganisation of the memories of the past as a national goal. The refashioning has been an attempt not only at coming to terms with the past, but also altering it to fit the present (Obradović, 2016). This study takes the cue that the reframing and the reorganisation of memories in the South African narrative are significant in national reconstruction and in (re)directing debate relating to ethical

sensibilities. The study holds that the push for ethical debate in South Africa informs the ongoing dialogue relating to finding closure about the past and forging forward to a future based on mutual consensus. For Arendt (1994), the negotiation of moral questions often occurs long after war, as individuals revisit the horror from a rational point of view. Ethical issues, as Zygmunt Bauman (1989) also contends, can only be evaluated after the dust of violence has settled and the individuals begin to rationally appraise the past in the spirit and the shadow of entrenched political and social institutions. This serves in part to highlight the significant proposition of this study – that the evaluation of ethical questions in the South African context can rationally be appraised at the present moment.

Béatrice Pouligny et al. (2007) argue that in post-conflict societies, strategies for rebuilding are necessary. Strategies for reorganisation of society embody questions of identity, justice, and reconciliation as revealed in economic, social, and historical systems. The scholars argue that mass crimes affect individuals, but trauma is conceived mainly through collective remembrance. The scholars indicate that there is a need to shift from an exclusive focus on collective memories to significant personal memories in order to appreciate the role that individuals play in order to address particular ethical questions. This study picks this view to evaluate the trajectory of the significant nation rebuilding strategies of the different South African communities, emphasising on the function of literature in such contexts.

This study is concerned with significant aspects of South Africa's collective memory, including the meanings attached to particular political events, histories, and other images of cultural and national heritage. It focuses on how these aspects of memory are envisaged in the thoughts, speeches, conversations, and discourses of individuals as manifest in the narratives, and how they envisage and direct major ethical questions in (post)apartheid South Africa. The study has therefore uncovered particular ways in which South Africa's individual narrative stories have, in the words of William Ocasio et al. (2016), influenced South Africa's view of history and historical events. The particular memories of focus on this study are expanded on Ocasio et al.'s (2006) identification of commemorative sites in the form of images, documents, archives, publications, museums, and repositories. More significantly, it would be possible to interrogate the contention of the scholars that individual memory acts as a valuable repository for individual ethical positions.

### **1.8.3 The Self in the Collective**

Apartheid in South Africa was an immoral movement against the black collective. The policies of apartheid were divisive and contravened the unity and cohesion of particular

communities. As such, criticism of apartheid went hand in hand with a move towards a broader communal ethos that recognised collective aspirations among diverse communities in the pursuit of equality and human freedom. The official end of apartheid drew communities to re-member themselves into a seemingly collective community in an attempt to create community partnerships, to regain lost dignity and respect for human rights, and to push for collective social and political aspirations for all in the Rainbow.

Since the end of apartheid, the South African community has focused on critical moral obligations in an attempt to foster humaneness, friendliness, reciprocity, responsibility, and togetherness necessary in the recovery of human dignity, and the embrace of interconnectedness in spite of cultural differences. Desmond Tutu, the celebrated spiritual leader of South Africa, emphasised the need to patch up the social fabric of the society that had been shredded by years of anti-communal apartheid policies. He has passionately supported a model of a social, economic, and political culture that emphasises communal aspirations as a strategy for the re-membering.

The question of re-membering the community is at the core of moral issues in post-apartheid South Africa. In the negotiation of moral concerns affecting the South African society, the focus on community provides closer engagement in the representation of the past of apartheid as remembered by communities. Some scholars, including Kwasi Wiredu (1996), D.A. Masolo (2006; 2010), and Mabogo More (2006a; 2006b), have envisaged the centrality of collective participation in dealing with injustices, such as those of apartheid. The scholars focus on interdependence among individuals in communities as a strategy for the reconsideration of the social, economic, and power structures in order to foster racial cohesiveness among different communities. The belief in community, embraced through Ubuntu, has emerged as a significant African ethic that is located within a philosophical and religious praxis that envisages an African worldview and proposes ethically practical solutions to national and global challenges (Gaylard, 2004; Nussbaum, 2003; Shutte, 2001; Wiredu, 1980). Rob Gaylard (2004) and Barbara Nussbaum (2003) mainly focus on notions of agreement and unity among communities. This study pays more attention to the investigation of the role individuals play in negotiating through ethical ambiguities. The intellectual engagement with the South African community in recent times has been one of recovery, first as an aspect of reviewing significant memories of the past which are related to communities, and, secondly, as an attempt to configure and define the notion of togetherness in respect of changing circumstances.

In the pursuit of the fundamental dream of togetherness, the social and political

philosophies of Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Albert Luthuli, Steve Biko, and Robert Sobukwe, among others, have continued to provide critical directions on state formation, and on cultural and political renaissance, after apartheid (Mandela, 1994; More, 2006a; 2006b; Tutu, 2006). Critical discourses on their philosophies have focused on their significance from a collective perspective, and little prominence has been rendered on how individuals relate to their philosophies from their own private and personal viewpoints. The recent recovery of Biko's political philosophy as espoused in the Black Consciousness Movement, and Frantz Fanon's critique on black consciousness as a decolonising strategy, attempt to situate the role that communal solidarity plays in the social, cultural and political situation of black people in racialised environments (Biko, 1978b; 1978c; Fanon, 1967; Mbembe, 2016a; More, 2014; Nyamnjoh, 2017). Biko's and Fanon's philosophies are particularly critical to the South African society in the intellectual debate on the legacies of colonialism and apartheid, and the consequent need to decolonise the (African) mindset. Taking a departure from the extensive preoccupation with collective identities, this study has taken a critical review of how Biko's and Fanon's philosophies define individual identities as represented in post-apartheid fiction in their conflating of political philosophy with the search for humanity through a call to political action, especially by a young born-free generation studying in universities which are still steeped in epistemic violence as legacies of apartheid.

The main problem affecting the community in (post)apartheid South Africa relates to the continued legacies of racial and colonial domination. Since the lifeline of racism in South Africa lay in dismembering communities through separations, forced removals, disappearances, deaths, among other ills, the interrogation of the effects of enduring racial legacies and the attendant dislocation is necessary in the decolonial attempt to revise how the post-apartheid community is trying to member itself. In this regard, the study appropriates racial experiences in contexts like America to attempt to explain the problems of race and the effects it has had on communities generally (Robinson, 2000). Decolonisation in South Africa has sought to speak to and against, and attempted to shed off, the effects of race and racism in South Africa. As Valentin-Yves Mudimbe (1988) also argues in relation to the construction of the African self, the dismantling of the legacies of colonialism lay in decolonising the African mindset (Mudimbe, 1988). However, as Chapter Five shows, these decolonial attempts are imbued with ethical uncertainties.

Decolonisation has demonstrated the interplay between communal solidarity and personhood in South Africa. As a critical movement that envisages transformation through resistance, decolonisation attempts to re-centre dialogue around the role of the individual in

instituting social and political reform in communities (Mbembe, 2016b). In recent times, the academy in South Africa has provided a fertile site for the interrogation of the effects of the legacies of colonial domination on individuals and communities. As observed by Achille Mbembe (2016a), the challenges facing the entire post-apartheid South African education systems pan out most of the limiting and oppressive circumstances of the South African communities. Mbembe (2016b) links the demands for socio-cultural, economic and political reforms by a largely educated youthful population in South Africa with individual fracture and frustration which has fuelled demands for decolonisation. Decolonisation in South Africa has been motivated by the search for justice and equality. The crusade has featured consistently in the fight against racism, xenophobia, sexism, class tensions, and patriarchal oppression. The personal fractures and ethical anxieties facing South Africans in higher educational institutions are insightfully contextualised in Mqolozana's *Unimportance*, Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* and *After Tears*, and Moele's *Room 207*. Chapter Five interrogates how the black student navigates through discontent and unsettlement over poverty, educational underachievement, and racial and economic disadvantage, which continue to define the black community in the current dispensation. By evaluating the ethical uncertainties resulting from unmet expectations, the study attempts to entwine individual fractures with communal aspirations.

Locating the place of the individual in the realisation of community goals, Thaddeus Metz (2011) and Thaddeus Metz and Joseph Gaie (2010) argue that virtues such as support of kinship ties, sharing, and reciprocity are dictated by personal motivations. By placing the individual as the determinant of the realisation of community goals, the scholars recognise two significant aspects of Ubuntu: the development of individual personhood, on the one hand, and the negotiation of communal solidarity, on the other hand. However, the realisation of community goals essentially depends on individual fidelity to the ideals of communal solidarity.

Scholars such as Kwasi Wiredu (1980:23; 2010) and Adam Ashforth (2003) have written concerning the social significance of the individual self as reflected through family and kinship ties. They contend that the family as a basic unit of community is critical in the development of a person's selfhood. They also add that social, cultural, and political circumstances shape the definition of one's personhood. The studies suggest that the desire to conform to community ideals presents a crisis in the realisation of one's personhood. The scholars intimate the possibilities of uncovering the tensions and crises of the individual emanating from communal aspirations. Writing about the moral crisis of South African

society, Ashforth (2003) traces the dilemmas of individuals who have to meet family demands for economic reciprocity and generosity on the pressures to meet communal obligations. The South African novelist Phaswane Mpe in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001) imagines the ambiguities of the South African Ubuntu ethic in a convoluted neoliberal democracy. For Mpe, economic problems and overdependence are directly responsible for individual dilemmas and the consequent crises in the representation of personhood.

The focus on the South African family is one of the critical pillars in understanding the constitution of the South African community. Niq Mhlongo's *After Tears*, for example, illuminates how the family as a basic unit in the constitution of the community reveals community aspirations, tensions, and ambiguities as reflected through family histories and collective stigmas. The South African family mirrors moral anxieties occasioned by histories of migrant labour, exile, death, and imprisonment among communities. Of significance to the study is how novels such as Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* conjoin private narratives with public and social histories to illuminate collective anxieties of communities as reflected in families.

Family anxieties, and by extension, collective anxieties, pose a dilemma between the individual's push for freedom and liberty, and the aspiration of collectivism in the community. As Swartz (2006) contends with reference to the state of citizenship in South Africa, the belief in communal solidarity tends to conceal certain aspects of individual demands for "private" ethical issues, such as the pursuit of individual justice. Chapter Five of this study interrogates the contention that the concern for community impairs fundamental individual rights and freedoms and the sense of autonomy. The study interrogated the contributions of the changing social and cultural norms occasioned by urbanisation, political neoliberalism, and globalisation in the loss of community ideals in South Africa. Niq Mhlongo, Kgebetli Moele, and Thando Mqgqolozana interrogate ethical ambiguities related to the collective push for individual liberties in urban and educational settings where individual aspirations are not always consistent with communal expectations.

From the foregoing, there is an ambiguous relationship between the self and community in South Africa. While Ubuntu presents ideal conditions for the realisation of a post-racial South African community, the socio-political, cultural and economic realities complicate the realisation of communal solidarity. The study interrogates how literature challenges, and/or supports, the representations of community, and details the perspectives from which they negotiate the ambiguous relationship between the individual and the community. In dealing with novels like *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, it would be significant

to consider how community ideals and personal freedoms are not always in tandem, and how that contributes to ethical ambiguities.

The sense of community and communal solidarity has been threatened by unease and unsettlement over the slow pace of reforms, contrary to what was anticipated in the embrace of the Rainbow Nation. Because the South African community is, for the most part, defined along ethnic, racial, national, or family ties, some individual actions have demonstrated positions that have worked against the dreams of a collective ethic. Moral tension is brought about by a negated sense of communal solidarity in South Africa, which pits the collective dream of multiculturalism with desires for individual attainment, which has led to the crisis of the self.

Xenophobia is one of the greatest threats to community in South Africa in so far as multicultural unity is concerned. Decades into the Rainbow, xenophobia appears to be an enduring challenge to the reconstruction of the South African community. It has worked against communal aspirations of a united South African community (Rotich et al., 2019). Xenophobia bears an ethnic and racial-based nationalism that is similar to the apartheid nationalism that sought to define a narrow sense of community in order to privilege one community over another (Clark & Worger, 2013; Irlam, 2004). The situation is made more complicated by waves of divisive ethnic nationalism and a political culture that continues to redefine and restrict the meaning of community, largely through citizenship and belonging (Neocosmos, 2010). The lack of Ubuntu is an indication of a fractured social and political life that disavows the dream of a multicultural South Africa that sought to recognise the dreams and aspirations of everyone in the Rainbow nation, including those from elsewhere in the continent. Moreover, the problematic political culture has failed to sustain a broad-based dialogue on building consensus on contentious discussions related to nationhood, citizenship, and belonging. The net result has been that native South Africans have been left to individually and collectively project their anguish and frustration on the enemy without – those who do not technically belong to the Rainbow Nation.

#### **1.8.4 Ethical Dilemmas of the Self**

Todorov (2010) and Arendt (1994) affirm that when suffering and traumatic pasts are shared through memory, the focus on individual actors during particular historical events serve to illuminate the ethical significance of those events. Writing out of traumatic historical situations, the scholars underscore the ambiguities of memory as mediated through personal accounts, which mostly depend on the (inter)subjectivity of the mind, and the specificity of the human experience. The scholars contend that individual choices and decisions during

historical violence and war are revealed in discourses relating to individual complicity and guilt. To a large extent, the study seeks to tease out the ambiguities resulting from past individual recollections.

Arendt's focus on moral issues of guilt and responsibility and the attendant ethical disagreements in political contexts as the Nazi occupation, offers historical lessons for the South African context (Arendt, 1958; 1963). As was the case with respect to the Nazi occupation, nefarious and evil schemes were politically created in the guise of supporting collective ethnic nationalism. Arendt's exposition of the trial of Adolf Eichmann (1963) shares similar moral questions to those of apartheid. Considered a key architect in the transportation of Jews to their eventual massacre during the holocaust, Eichmann pleaded innocent to the charge of aiding and abetting mass crimes during his trial in Jerusalem. In his defence, he argued that he had done commendable, professional service as expected of him by his nation (Lasok, 1962). His rejection of responsibility for his actions during the holocaust bears close resemblance to the denial of responsibility over the circumstances of apartheid by a section of the white South African community. What has not been explored in the South African context is the ethical significance of the actions of particular architects of apartheid, including Eugene de Kock, Dirk Coetzee, and Joe Mamasela, who arguably, in similar contexts, can be considered to represent the manifestation of evil in the South African society during apartheid. Krog's *Country of My Skull* examines the actions of some of these characters, magnifying instances in which the horror and extent of their complicity in apartheid is documented.

Apartheid in South Africa was instituted along divisive political lines with a quest for white social and economic autonomy through separate development. Arendt's view of history, particularly of the ambiguities of the confluence of state sanctioned nationalist movements, inform the critique of the changing historical circumstances in South Africa from the invasive nature of apartheid to the divisive post-apartheid characterised by dissent and xenophobia. This study examines the extent to which the works of fiction considered re-story and contextualise historical realities in the narrative. Borrowing from Todorov's (2010) analysis of the contestations between good and evil, the study reflects on the effects of the chaos of the past on fractures on personal identities, and on ethical concerns such as guilt and the search for redemption, the search for freedom, and responsibility.

In South Africa, instances of ethical disagreements abound with respect to individual obligation. The past is full of instances of individual experiences of suffering that form the basis of historical remembrance and re-storying at the present. For example, stories of

violence and insularity of the 1960s and the 1980s which serve as painful reminders of individual suffering have resurfaced even after apartheid. Incidentally, the last two decades have also witnessed uncannily similar challenges in the stories of victimisation, violence and xenophobia, as Michael Neocosmos (2010) puts into context. What is of significant interest now, which communicates the urgency of this investigation, is that even largely public responses to traumatic situations have been fused with the consciousness of the personal self, in which pain and suffering provides an avenue for the representation of victimhood, especially by black people, as noted by Schutte (2015), regarding post-apartheid disenchantment. This study has explored how ethical disagreements stem from the ambiguities of attempting to represent traumatic experiences of others.

Writing regarding racial disagreements in America, John Arthur (2007) observes that decades of oppression and white domination have accentuated feelings of disenfranchisement and victimhood among the black community. Underfunding in predominantly black schools has sustained underachievement by black children, defining a social environment in which attendant social ills such as unemployment, crime, wrongful arrests and convictions, permeate. As a consequence, black communities have paid the price, with stereotyping and racist policing practices taking a toll and accentuating black suffering. These experiences bear an uncanny resemblance to the South African situation. The decades of violence and oppression of apartheid have conditioned a predominantly restless black population whose views about race and its inclinations have produced ethical uncertainties. With generations of perceived racial unfairness and lack of access to justice, a new wave of uncertainty has gripped the two nations. As Arthur (2007) observes, there is an undecided difficulty in assessing issues of equity, equality and fairness regarding black and white populations. This has been compounded by a new wave of uncertainty marked by racial scapegoating, in which the racial card is being flagged to play victim, in most cases as a form of gaining entitlement and/or attempting to destabilise racial binaries, as observed by Michael Higginbotham (2013), regarding the American experience. This experience of inverted victimhood produces a new uncertainty that fuels self-defeatist strategies employed by sections of marginalised communities as an attempt to even up with their former oppressors.

In a situation relevant to the South African context, Linda Alcoff (1991) raises the question of complex ethical disagreements that speaking for others pose. The “problem” she envisages relates to the ethical dilemma of representing the experiences and consciousness of others, particularly from a privileged point of view. This study appropriates the dilemmas of speaking for others to the uncertainties of representing, or attempting to represent, individuals

from other races and/or communities, as observed in Chapter Five. It will also apply to the ambiguities of representing different racial, economic, and political contexts. This is the challenge that this study poses: to what extent is it ethically ambiguous to represent gender and race by writers speaking from outside the grid, such as the female gender concerns in Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, or the critique of black moralities in Krog's *Country of My Skull*?

In a context like South Africa where race appears as a watermark for various economic, social, and cultural aspects, greater attention and proper interrogation is needed in uncovering the nature and extent to which individual characters – and by extension the writers – position themselves in the telling with respect to representing others' experiences. This aspect is significant, because it has been noted that racial assumptions and perceptions change over time. The study, in particular, pays closer attention to writing that inscribes race and racism as a significant marker of identity and the accompanying crises in personal identity.

Writing about white/liberal guilt in America, Julie Ellison (1996) informs that changing historical circumstances have affected perceptions about racial categories. Faced with an uncomfortable past, the whites in America have had different and differing notions about racial identification that has brought varying positions relating to guilt, complicity, blame, and embarrassment. Exploring the influence of race on identity in America, Kwame Appiah (1994) argues that racial identification poses ethical dilemmas because it affects the ways individuals see themselves, and consequently, the ways they see others.

One source of moral disagreements in nations like America and South Africa with histories of racial profiling is on the negotiation of national and political policies along racial lines. The connection of racial categories to the broader social and economic engagements is bound to produce crisis in the self, and consequently produce complex individual and collective identities. In South Africa, the foundation of apartheid rested on nesting socio-economic and political differences on racial categories. As Wilhelm Verwoerd (2001) argues, apartheid was largely an ideological movement that was primarily designed to foster white "group privilege". As an outgrowth from a political system whose membership was largely white, apartheid came to represent the whims and aspirations of the majority of the white population. Verwoerd (2001) argues that while it is easy for the majority of the white South Africans to acknowledge the atrocities and disenfranchisement caused by apartheid, the question of taking moral responsibility has been a complicated affair. Encompassing such issues as guilt, blame, privilege, revenge, and empathy and reconciliation, Verwoerd

imagines the dilemmas of arrogating collective responsibility of the apartheid past to all the whites as the guilty. This study takes cue from Verwoerd (2001) that moral responsibility is particularly ambiguous for those who were born after the fall of apartheid, as some might be unfairly blamed for racial privilege. What the study has sought to interrogate is how individuals might be misguided by their perceived marginalisation and pain to unfairly blame others for their present predicaments.

The foregoing argument by Verwoerd (2001) allows us to test and evaluate the limits of shared/ collective responsibility in the South African context. By addressing how race and privilege continue to be the source of ethical controversies among communities in the current dispensation, the study has situated the lived experiences of apartheid as felt by the individual characters represented in the literature. One ethical complication with dealing with the economic legacies of apartheid is that individuals are called upon to take responsibility for past events that were done for collective reasons. It means that some individuals are expected to acknowledge and possibly ask for an apology for the failures caused by others and to take individual atonement for public sins.

Writing with respect to the negotiation of moral dilemmas arising out of conflicting situations, Thomas Nagel (1979) argues that a focus on individual public lives reduces individual culpability for crimes committed during their tenures. Aware of ethical concerns of obligation, Verwoerd (2001), however, does not completely absolve white individuals from blame for the wrongs committed during apartheid. She maintains that whites generally have moral answerability for the wrongs committed during apartheid. Both Nagel (1979) and Verwoerd (2001) underscore the ambiguous ethical positions in “post”-conflict societies where the legacies of race continue to affect the majority of the population. This study has critically examined the extent of moral answerability with respect to individuals and characters in the selected creative works, while reviewing the political and international focus on apartheid as a movement that was against the black collective, as McCauley (1985) evaluates.

The violence of the past, particularly by sanctioned movements such as apartheid, reveals contradictions in the negotiation of moral issues. Writing regarding the conduct of war and the moral dilemmas occasioned by it, Nagel (1972) argues that even though war and massacre may justify the use of certain forms of violence, it is often morally inexcusable to kill your enemy if there were other ways of dealing with that situation, including capture. There is evidence that apartheid in South Africa broke this cardinal policy of war, as certain acts of war remained unjustifiable in that context. If we have to focus on the significance of

responsibility for the aftermath of apartheid, Nagel's (1972) distinction between a claim to innocence and moral guilt provides an accurate frame to read the effects of apartheid and some of its enduring legacies. For Nagel (1972), even situations where individuals are innocent may not absolve them of moral guilt. Individuals may be legally innocent but still remain morally guilty through association. How can apartheid be appraised with respect to responsibility from the white race? To what extent are the South African whites, the Afrikaners, expected to be responsible for the wrongs of apartheid? These questions can best be answered by reflecting on the experiences of similar historical and racial contexts, like America.

Political and social circumstances affect questions of responsibility over the wrongs of the past. Writing concerning responsibility and ignorance with respect to ethical questions, Michelle Moody-Adams (1994) argues that individuals often manifest their behaviour in a problematic way when trying to justify their actions within cultures. Her explanation relating to "cultural impediments" (whether one knew what was happening) and "affected ignorance" (choosing not to be informed about what was happening; a state of indifference to the wrongs committed) is applicable to the South African context. Using the chosen novels and short stories, the study has evaluated what individual South Africans say with respect to the atrocities of apartheid, and examined their role and complicity in averting, opposing, or supporting the system. In such an engagement, the study has emphasised the place of the individual within collective acts of disobedience against and towards state institutions, and the corresponding moral implications of such acts. Michael Walzer (1967) argues that the question of rebellion and disobedience emerges because people rebel in the full knowledge that they belong to a certain group, or that they are generally doing it in the interests of their specific group. Applied to the South African context, the argument appears to inform the dissimilar strategies and responses towards apartheid by different individuals and communities. Walzer's line of reasoning forms a basis on which we can analyse the obligations of diverse South Africans, including the political leaders, the whites and the blacks, their unique circumstances, and the extent to which they could be held morally responsible.

However, while individual responsibility for past misdeeds can be guided by various political and social circumstances, and to an extent, the place of each individual within the collective, certain aspects of redress can only be imagined through collective participation. This is why this study believes it is useful to scrutinise the nexus between the individual and the community in order to ascertain the position of the self with regards to ethical positions.

The study emphasises the significance of the Ubuntu ethic in fostering certain forms of ethical conduct in communities. Aspects such as reparations for past misdeeds can be thought of from a collective context, but as Verwoerd (2001) argues, that does not imply individuals per se are morally responsible, or that they can undertake reparation through individual initiatives. Writing concerning the uncertainties that originated from reparative efforts in America, Arthur (2007) argues that it is difficult to compensate for past wrongs. He contends that it is quite impossible to identify who to give out reparations to, or who should receive reparations, on account of multi-layered historical experiences and timelines. In view of these uncertainties, I have evaluated how the literature under consideration addresses ambiguities of guilt and remorse over past misdeeds.

### **1.8.5 From Self-Reflexivity to Intersubjectivity: Framing the Ethical Voice**

Discussions on the construction of subjectivity with respect to the first-person point of view have long been a subject of concern in moral philosophy (Durfee & Rodier, 1989). Philosophers, including G.W.F. Hegel, Immanuel Kant, and Emmanuel Levinas, and writing on the subjectivity of the self, advance the critical role that individual memory and consciousness play in the negotiation of the subjectivity of the first person (Kant, 1934; 1981; Hegel, 1979 [1807]). Other scholars, including Dan Zahavi (2005), maintain that personal experiences that assess individual will and motivation to action, private desires, and ambitions, are represented reflexively. These reflexive experiences, Zahavi claims, establish the unique interconnectedness between the self and the experiences rendered through the first-person perspective. This study borrows from Zahavi's (2005) focus on the self as a product of narrative positioning in the first person to provide a framework for the study in the analysis of narrative experiences that embody human experiences through the first-person narrative perspective.

Reflexivity imagines the onus of personal reflection on the creative aspects of the human consciousness as mediated by experience. Through reflexivity, individuals desire to understand themselves and their role in negotiating an ethically justifiable world. How does the engagement with the first-person point of view, and therefore of reflexivity, function to negotiate ethical questions? Firstly, the first-person point of view, by its own "ability" to turn inward, is an appropriate perspective that mediates the autobiographical and the introspective self. Introspection validates personal reflection that is crucial for individuals as they try to make sense of their lives and as they attempt to create and rewrite histories about themselves. The question of personal reflection in the narrative is the subject matter of scholarly interest in writings by Mark Freeman (1993), Jerome Bruner (1991, 2004) and Catherine Riessman

(2002). Building on the foundation of the reflexive self on the uniqueness of human consciousness, these scholars lay particular emphasis on the role of personal/ first-person narratives in the re-creation of personal identities. Bruner (2004) cogently argues that the first-person point of view mediates reflexivity through the self by its textual construction of “self-narratives” achieved through fictionalisation (Bruner, 2004). These studies lean towards the emphasis on the creative aspects of the first-person narrative point of view in the narrative.

Arguing regarding the reflexivity of the self in traumatic contexts, Freeman (1993) contends that when the first-person point of view is used to capture personal reflection and introspection after trauma, diverse emotional experiences are captured in a therapeutic manner, allowing characters to personally and evocatively respond to harrowing situations and live through them. The psychological perspectives by Freeman (1993), Bruner (1991, 2004), and Riessman (2002) not only attempt to explain why the self is constantly being rewritten and renegotiated through narrative experiences as contended previously, but also to account for the multiplicity and diversity of narrative experiences. The study has paid close attention to the ways in which human consciousness and personal reflection are contemplated in multiple narrative experiences. It has attempted to answer the question of how individual consciousness (which constitutes the self) finds prominence in the analysis of the narrative. Since voice (and the multiplicity of voices) is the perspective from which narratives explore human consciousness, this study has sought to understand the aspects of the first-person point of view that capture the self-reflexive experiences emanating from the speaking self.

Scholars such as Sydney Shoemaker (1963) and P.F. Strawson (1959) emphasise that voice is a product of narrative construction. Shoemaker (1963) and Strawson (1959) make a case regarding the construction of individual consciousness in the narrative. Shoemaker (1963) argues that the construction of the identity of the self is best captured in the first-person narrative point of view. Shoemaker considers significant ways in which memory is used to negotiate processes of the development of individual consciousness. According to Strawson (1959), the “I” narrative perspective occupies a special place in the negotiation of the self, because on the one hand, it encapsulates issues of self-knowing and self-understanding that envisages a positive outlook on life, and on the other hand, on instances of self-doubt that explain the contradictions of the self, and hence the ensuing moral uncertainties. The study expands the focus on the duality and fragility of the self by the scholars to the analysis of how the self in the literary narrative negotiates ensuing moral disagreements. Using the observation of Shoemaker (1963) on the construction of identity of

self as captured through the first-person narrative point of view, the study has investigated how literature mediates reflexivity, or the introspection of the self, through the fictional construction of “self-narratives” as a strategy that captures the multiplicity of human consciousness as drawn from past experiences. This introspection of the self is what manifests through intersubjectivity.

Intersubjectivity is a product of the multiple and dialogic narrative experiences. According to Zahavi (2005), intersubjectivity results from the multiple experiences of self that are manifested in first-person narratives. Following on Zahavi, this study has broadened the conversation on the confluence between narrative perspective and the self as explored by Zahavi (2005) to the evaluation of ethical questions arising out of narrative representation of personal/ first-person experiences. As already observed in the preceding sections, questions of moral responsibility are invariably addressed by the self, which is manifest in the first-person voice in the narrative. The extension of responsibility to others is a step towards the acceptance of the larger community in which aspects of empathy, consideration, and reciprocity take shape. The responsiveness to community forms a critical process of transferring self-reflexive experiences to the appreciation of the intersubjective nature of the narrative in fostering ethical projects in communal contexts (Karpiak, 2003).

Extensive studies have been conducted on the role of intersubjective personal narratives in psychological and ethnographic research, and these often focus on the ethics of narrative interpretation (Bruner, 1991; Riessman, 2002). This study proposes that studies of personal narratives in literature provide similar strategies for understanding processes of change in societies generally. This study suggests that South African literature’s engagement with the first-person point of view is a strategy that effectively constructs multivocal and often ambivalent voices in contemporary South Africa.

### **1.8.6 Literary Criticism**

A number of scholars, including Judith Coullie (2014) and Mark Sanders (2000, 2007), have argued that writing in South Africa puts an obligation on the writer, particularly in the ways in which writers represent the complex cultural, economic, and political landscape. One such writer who has received extensive critical attention with respect to the dicey representation of the changing cultural, economic, and socio-political anxieties permeating South Africa is J.M. Coetzee. Coetzee’s language, the choice of animals as his characters, as well as his choice of setting and allusions, present him as a writer who envisages the centrality of the ethical debate in the constitution of the South African character in literary discourse (Helgesson, 2004; Kochin, 2004; McInturff, 2007). Critical reviews of

Coetzee's post-apartheid novel *Disgrace*, which is written in the third-person narrative point of view, reveal the complicated nature of the ethical dialogue in South Africa, especially with regard to writing alterity through racial representation (Graham, 2002). Coetzee's narrative ethics also reveal that narrative "truth" can be interrogated from the implied narrative position of the author. Coetzee's novel explores enduring questions relating to the construction of black and white identities in apartheid South Africa, raising ethical issues such as guilt and retribution. David Atwell (1993: 6, 10) argues that history is the "determining and subscribing force" in Coetzee's fiction that frames "the discourse of the apartheid state in its definitive moment of paranoia." In effect, Coetzee's poetics reflect more on the collective apprehensions rather than on individual uncertainties in the context of apartheid. Helgesson (2004: 4, 7) has maintained that Coetzee, alongside Gordimer and Ndebele, reflects on the collective crisis of the 1980s, foregrounds "the constructedness of the terms 'black' and 'white' while just as insistently acknowledging their conflictual significance." This is arguably the reason why Coetzee's *Disgrace* foregrounds the historical significance of the South African landscape of the Eastern Cape on the moral uncertainties of black and white communities. In this text, the third-person point of view functions to manifest ethical and moral questions of communal guilt, communal responsibility, and retribution, with the individual represented as a victim in the whirlpools of historical changes.

Derek Attridge (2004), writing about Coetzee's (early) novels, recognises the role that language, point of view and literary techniques play in the construction of ethical perspectives in literature (655). For Attridge, point of view mediates ethical obligations as embodied in the dynamics of textual representation in literature: "By tracing carefully the experience of reading – and doing justice to the text means, among other things, attending to linguistic and stylistic details with scrupulous accuracy – it may be possible to convey its engagement with the ethical" (2004: 660). While ethics are demonstrably manifest in Coetzee's third-person narrative strategies, the ethical questions are addressed from a collective and historical perspective. For example, Lucy's attitude towards her rape is framed around her acquiescing to the "constructedness" of apartheid and its legacies. She remains detached from what was largely a private matter and fails to speak on it by choosing silence. This scenario intimates the creative possibilities of the first-person point of view in voicing the ambiguities of the self. Sue Kossew (2004: 156) explores similarities in the representation of the TRC in Gillian Slovo's *Red Dust* and in Krog's *Country of My Skull*, but suggests that the latter "expresses the effect of the Commission even more vividly in her chilling account." This is arguably a pointer that narrative conventions of the first-person point of view in the

latter magnify the issues canvassed in the memoir. This study has expanded this view to focus explicitly on the first-person narrative point of view in the selected post-apartheid literature in order to discuss the ethical obligations of the authors.

In significant ways, this study has justified the central place that literary conventions occupy in the construction of meaning in literature, and more particularly, in the evaluation of ethical viewpoints inherent in literature. Michael Eskin (2004a: 561) contends that the primary goal of literary and ethical discourse pays attention to the dynamics of:

the good life in a particular community; of self-improvement and moral perfection; of duty and responsibility to the other and to myself; of just and upright speech and action; of truth and lying; of the moral significance of the arts; of the relationship between speech, ethos, and value; of the very meaning of 'literature'....

Eskin (2004a) foregrounds literature's capacity to reveal outstanding ethical obligations through narrative representation. To him, the analysis of texts must encompass not only the evaluation of ethical ideals of duty and responsibility but also the representation of truth as well as the uncertainty of falsehood. He further contends:

The relation between literature and ethics, I suggest, ought to be conceived of in terms of mutual translatability. On this view, literature's ethically exemplary force would consist in what I call its discursive capaciousness—the fact that it is capable of translating ethics into a 'more developed' text. (564)

Eskin's major goal is to highlight the significance of literature in the pursuit of ethical questions, and draws extensively on Mikhail Bakhtin and Alasdair MacIntyre to underscore literature's thematic areas that conflate thematic concerns such as freedom, hospitality, obligation, and responsibility. The study has paid critical attention to these values as manifested in the selected texts. Eskin further asserts that:

the ethical valence of literature (and art in general) has been located, for instance, in what could be roughly subsumed under the heads of its relation to truth, thematic structure and uses of language, power to effect a change in perception, inherent appeal to responsibility, or capacity of discursive subversion. (2004b: 576)

In this observation, the power of literature in the representation of ethical discourse rests in its capacity to represent multifaceted concerns. It can be argued that the power of literature rests in "literature's metalinguistic, thematic, and semiotic enmeshment with ethics" (2004b: 588). In terms of the orientation of the selected texts, the study has taken a keen focus on how the first-person narrative perspective has provided an angling point to the study of the representation of ethical issues in literature.

Writing concerning cultural and political reforms in post-apartheid South Africa at the fall of apartheid, Sarah Nuttall & Cheryl-Ann Michael (2000) point out that significant critical attention has been dedicated to the analysis of spatial reorganisations after apartheid, particularly in urban cities. A number of literary studies have focused on the changing physical urban spaces and metaphors of movement (Myambo, 2010; Barnard, 2007). A significant number of post-apartheid novels and short stories, inspired by the spatio-temporal reorganisations in cities after apartheid, represent critical aspects of contemporary South African life as affected by the changing trends in the socio-cultural and political life. Mhlongo, Moele, Vladislavić, and Mgqolozana belong to a generation of South African writers who choose the city as a point of inspiration. Studies on their creative works, for example, by Gerald Gaylard (2011) and Lesinaba Rafapa (2018a, 2018b), have focused extensively on the social and material circumstances of communities affected by partisan race relations, discrimination, and social and economic inequalities in predominantly urban centres. The studies have not authoritatively interrogated the implications of the circumstances as lived by South Africans on individual ethical positions. This study has introduced a new dimension in the study of post-apartheid literature by interrogating the ethical ambiguities of characters and narrators living in such highly tense and racialized environments where there exists a grey area between individual aspirations and collective expectations.

Scholars such as Rachel Donadio (2006) and Lesinaba Rafapa (2018b) assert that a critical analysis of the texture of post-apartheid writing ought to consider a representative study of white and black writing. This study considers prose fiction by two white authors, namely Krog (1998) and Vladislavić (1989; 1996), alongside novels by Ndebele (2003), Mhlongo (2004; 2007), Moele (2006), and Mgqolozana (2014). The focus on a considerable number of black writers echoes Donadio's (2006) contention that the post-apartheid dispensation exhibits an expanded space for black writing. Furthermore, critical attention has often focused on white writing, with concerns surrounding white authors' representation of history and ethics framing the debates (Helgesson, 2004: 15; Visser, 2008). From varied, divergent, and complementary perspectives, the works under consideration in this study show the difficulties of formulating ethics for the new South Africa. Written in evocative, multivocal first-person narrative perspective where each individual speaks for and about themselves, and intersubjectively shares stories about others, these works advance competing ethical positions by different individuals and communities.

Extensive studies of post-apartheid South Africa have dwelt on issues of memory,

reconciliation and nation building with regards to Krog's *Country of My Skull*. Scholars, including Mark Sanders (2000; 2007), Judith Coullie (2014), and Shane Graham (2009), emphasise Krog's re/presentation of collective histories through the memories of the TRC. Kim Rostan (2007) evaluates the contradictions in the representation of private and collective memories as provided by witnesses and accounts in the TRC sittings. Through contrasting visions brought about by divergent memories, Krog (1998), Ndebele (2003), and Vladislavić (1989; 1996) focus on memories of particular historical personalities and historical events as crucial images in the making of the South African nation. This thesis interrogates the ethical import of representing critical voices of key historical and political figures and personalities, especially as they are symbolised in the narratives.

Janine Van Rooyen (2007) and Ralph Goodman (2006) contend that Ndebele, in *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, creates archetypes of South African women whose narratives are a corollary to the nation's difficult path to national and historical transformation. Van Rooyen (2007) places the representation of Winnie Mandela (in *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* and in Krog's *Country of My Skull*) as a metaphor for the social and political tensions existing within South African families and communities. What this study has brought to light in Chapter Three is how the private lives of public individuals, when focalised from an intersubjective perspective, provide a window to the negotiation of ethical direction for communities. The focus on personal reflection and remembrance of key political figures and personalities has contextualised the place of memory in envisaging ethical questions in literature.

Critical studies on Vladislavić have emphasised the representation of significant artefacts in the creation of memories in South Africa. What is noticeable in Vladislavić's oeuvre is a constant recourse to the inspiration of public memories that are tied to the contestation of the public space in South Africa, and to an extent, to the contraction of private spaces in those public places. Vladislavić's vision of doubleness in memory can be read along the opposition between private and collective memories. Extensive studies on Vladislavić have focused on the contestation of spaces, particularly in urban centres. Gaylard's (2011) studies deal with the representation of urban poetics and marginality in the literary works of Vladislavić. According to Kudzayi Ngara (2011), Vladislavić's writings imagine the relationship between the South African self and history as mediated through memory. Focalising the experiences of marginal characters and their relationship to stores of memory, Vladislavić creates ethical concerns by impinging personal selves on collective stores of memory. Andrew Van der Vlies (2017) positions self-reflexivity in Vladislavić's

works through the uncertainties and disappointments with historical transitions. He links memory, monuments, and nostalgia to conclude that images identified as significant and nostalgic at a certain time may turn out to be ridiculous in the course of history.

Reflecting on the primacy of the author's experience in Niq Mhlongo's writings, Olivier Moreillon & Lindy Stiebel (2015) observe that Mhlongo fuses his personal experiences with the experiences of the characters in his fiction. Writing from a personal perspective regarding the contradictions in the racial and economic relations, Mhlongo (2008) recounts his experience (with fellow writer, Zukiswa Wanner) during a robbery incident in which the robbers returned their valuables on realising that they/ the writers were not white. Mhlongo's reflective engagement with the ghosts of the apartheid past is imprinted in the extensive use of the first-person perspective in most of his writings. This is significant for this study, as it envisages how the fusion of the fictive self with the personal/autobiographical voice destabilises and inverts the position of the author in the narrative. By positioning the self within the matrix of race and economic relations, Mhlongo manages to offer a closer engagement with the ethical anxieties facing contemporary South Africa.

Mhlongo shares a similar thematic focus with other post-apartheid writers such as Thando Mgqolozana and Kgebetli Moele. Their works are positioned within a post-apartheid ideology that recognises the expectation of a collective multicultural rainbow, while showing a dispirited frustration with the fruits of the Rainbow. Their works at once imagine the ambiguities and the uncertainties of the historical transition in South Africa. Niq Mhlongo's *After Tears* and *Dog Eat Dog*, and Thando Mgqolozana's *Unimportance* represent personal anxieties related to the failure of the Rainbow dream, particularly on the economic front, and the ensuing ethical dilemmas occasioned by living at the fringes of the post-apartheid dream. The environment from which these scholars are writing is already uncertain.

According to S.S. Ibinga (2010), Moele's *Room 207* visualises multivocal and varied reactions from individuals and communities towards the social, economic, and political contradictions of post-apartheid South Africa. Characters in Moele's (2006) novel, and by extension, Mhlongo's (2004, 2007) novels, desire to escape from entrapment caused by painful memories. These memories reflect a perversely fractured society affected by a sectarian racial ideology. The characters realise that it is not easy to live through the legacies of apartheid, which stage their unsettlement and the accompanying anger and rage. Mgqolozana's (2014) novel reveals the crisis and the ethical ambiguities of a largely youthful South African population struggling against social and economic disadvantage and unmet expectations. To stage their ambiguous relationship with the past, the characters in the novels

fuse their personal selves with their suffering, alienation and confusion.

### **1.9 Theoretical Framework**

The study was guided in the first place by aspects of narrative theory. Jonathan Culler (1997: 83) defines narrative theory as a theory that “relies on theories of narrative structure: on notions of plot, of different kinds of narrators, or narrative techniques.” The theory allows for the study of the narrative, and is central in the analysis of “the interrelations of the several parties to the narrative transaction, the meaning of point of view and its relation to voice, and the nature of acts of speech and thought” (Chatman, 1978: 147). The theory is used to analyse different elements that constitute narrative discourse. This study has used propositions advanced by Gerard Genette in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980). Genette is credited for theorizing on aspects of voice, point of view and focalization (Fludernik, 2005: 39). Genette (1980) interprets literature as a “narrative text” (26) in which the analysis of narrative discourse involves the investigation of “the relationship between narrative and story, between narrative and narrating, and ... between story and narrating” (29). Genette (1980) designates point of view as a category of the narrative that is analysed from “the speech of characters, and the modes of explicit or implicit presence in the narrative of the narrator and the reader” (30). To Genette (1980: 32), voice “designates the connections between both narrating and narrative and narrating and story.” The concept of focalization in the narrative is drawn from Genette’s theory of the narrative. Genette (1980) is credited with his binary discussions of focalization in the narrative, in which he identifies types of narratives through focalization by locating the binaries between nonfocalized and focalised narratives (189). He also devised paradigms upon which the status of characters could be assessed, which primarily draw from the perspective of narration (Genette, 1980: 248). Genette’s theorisation has provided frames for the analysis of the types of narration and the position of the narrators in the selected narratives. The study has magnified Genette’s insights on the relationships between point of view and focalisation, and between voice as the “narrating instance” and point of view, which is the voice’s point of enunciation. Furthermore, this study has benefited from Genette’s perspective that focalization exhibits multiple realities in instances where the point of view changes or where there are multiple narrators.

Monika Fludernik (2005) argues that in narrative theory, a number of theorists have reflected on existing theoretical positions, reconceiving, modifying, or clarifying existing theoretical positions. As a theory that has projected itself as a “constellation” of intellectual trajectories, it is possible to establish “special synergy of the discourses and traditions” to

achieve a fuller understanding of concepts and positions within the theory (Herman, 2005:22). For a fuller analysis and exposition of elements of narrator, voice and point of view, this study has taken recourse to theorists who follow alternative trajectories on the key elements of narrative discourse under study. In reflection of this view, this study has enunciated positions held by Wayne Booth (1983) (on reliable and unreliable narration), James Phelan (1996) (on narrative conventions), Roland Barthes (1973) (on narrative structure and equivocation), David Lodge (1992) (on narrative structure and authorial intrusion), Susan Sniader Lanser (1992) and Monika Fludernik (2005, 2017) on the element of voice and point of view, among other theoretical perspectives.

Signified in a range of discursive formations, narrative theory has found wide applications in many intellectual fields. As a theory that has had “many turnings”, the crux of narrative theory is identified with the term “narrative turn” which encompasses many interpretive frames (Phelan & Rabinowitz, 2005: 2). The theory “has become increasingly concerned with historical, political and ethical questions”, with its application being registered in many fields, including in media, law and medicine (Phelan & Rabinowitz, 2005: 2). Fludernik (2005: 43) points out that “[t]he extension of narratological analysis to historiography and generally to nonfictional narrative occurred in the wake of the ‘narrative turn’ in historical studies”, especially as reflected in the works of Hayden White. Fludernik contextualises White’s theoretical position within narrative theory as demonstrating “the presence of literary generic frames in the narrative writing of history” (2005: 43). This study has appropriated White’s (1987) theory of emplotment of the narrative in historical fiction, especially in the manner in which literature challenges or reinforces authentic representations of history. In the same vein, this study has used Paul Ricoeur’s (2004) theoretical positions to underscore the relationships between history and memory in the context of South Africa’s memorial reorganisation.

A different set of theoretical insights has focused on the “ethical turn” of the narrative. Theorists such as Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) and James Phelan (1996), among others, have magnified the “ethical valence of literature” by establishing connections between “truth, thematic structure and uses of language” (Eskin, 2004b: 576). Such insights have often been subsumed broadly to project an understanding of ethics in narrative “on the one hand, as attributing to narrative discourse some kind of ethical status, and on the other, as referring to the way ethical discourse often depends on narrative structures” (Newton, 1995: 8). Such discourses have laid premium on such terms as “authorial responsibility”, “moral imagination” of characters, and have paid attention to “narrative form” as “a vehicle for

substantive ethical ‘content’” in the narrative (Newton, 1995: 9). This study has drawn critical insights from these positions to build on the experience of reading the ethical in the narrative. The turn to the ethical in the narrative has signalled an interest in the “disclosure of the text’s secret motivations” that underlie the “ideological” orientation and framing around different theoretical perspectives (Fludernik, 2005: 45). Writing about the widespread “appropriation of narratorial frameworks” (Fludernik, 2005: 46) in many fields of discourse, Fludernik explains that narrative theory has “absorbed insights from critical theory, molded itself into feminist, psychoanalytic, and postcolonial shapes, and has adopted text linguistic, cognitivist, constructivist, and empirical models for its various frameworks” (Fludernik, 2005: 50). Following on this trajectory, this study drew on a number of theorists including, Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), Tzvetan Todorov (2010), Hannah Arendt (1963), Frantz Fanon (1963), Steve Biko (1978b), and Achille Mbembe (2016a) to contextualise ethical issues as they manifest in the narrative, and as they are imagined through the first-person point of view.

Bakhtin’s perspective on the duality of the “I” voice as represented in the multiple self was significant to the study in a number of ways. Bakhtin’s (1981) concern with dialogism emphasises the centrality of linguistic devices in the creation of meaning through speech acts in discourse. Bakhtin’s dialogic imagination is central to narrative ethics, particularly in the way the continuous interplay of dialogue manifests duality of meaning through multiplicity. This multiplicity arises out of different voices that frame the narrative, giving way to multiple narrative identities. Bakhtin (1984) provided a useful frame of reference in the analysis of plural individual consciousness in the construction of the narrative, providing a greater understanding of the role of the first-person point of view and narrative strategies in envisioning ethical questions.

Todorov is considered to be one of the leading proponents of narrative theory (Herman, 2005: 19). Signifying a keen interest in ethical values in narratives, Todorov’s (2002, 2010) theoretical postulations on memory and on the binary nature of evil informed the analysis of post-apartheid South Africa as a post-traumatic society. Arendt’s (1963, 1994) theoretical thought illustrates the ambiguities of historical transitions with respect to the manifestation of guilt and complicity over past misdeeds, as well as on individual freedom and responsibility. Arendt places the individual at the centre of the negotiation of ethical questions. This study has read Arendt’s and Todorov’s studies to reach a fuller engagement with the ethical positions of individuals in post-traumatic contexts, including South Africa, and as they manifest in the narrative. This study has also picked perspectives from critical

race theory, in particular, from Frantz Fanon (1967), Steve Biko (1978a, 1978b) and Achille Mbembe (2016a; 2016b). Their perspectives have been used to augment the position of narrators and characters with respect to ethical issues canvassed in post-apartheid literature. Their social, economic, and political philosophy finds fitting resonances in the critique of the South African structural situation, providing grounding for the analysis of the intersubjective nature of the South African self in the aftermath of the trauma and violence of the past. The concerns of the scholars contextually explain the dilemmas of the individual within collective fracture occasioned by the continued legacies of colonialism and apartheid. Their philosophies bring to light the critical ethical concerns related to communal solidarity and the ensuing conflict with individual pursuits. These theoretical positions have provided critical perspectives on the understanding of the interlinks between narrative and the evaluation of ethical questions. By interacting with other critical theories, this study has resolved a potential weakness of narrative theory as advanced by Fludernik, that “narratorial analyses do not in themselves ... produce entirely new readings of a text; they frequently highlight *how* the text manages to have certain effects and explain *why* they occur, thus providing arguments for existing interpretations of the text” (2005: 39, emphasis in the original). By combining different theoretical approaches, this study has demonstrated that the first-person point of view, in its construction, moves beyond the analysis of elements of narrative discourse for their own sake, to magnify ethical concerns in literature

## **1.10 Methodology**

This section introduces and explores the research paradigm, the research design, the data, and the method of analysis and interpretation used in the study.

### **1.10.1 Introduction**

The focus of the study is on the investigation of the strategies by which narratives construct human experience. The study seeks to interpret the construction of ethical concerns by focusing on personal experiences of characters as constructed through first-person narrative accounts. This study envisages that human actions can be deciphered through the investigation of meaning as contained in the narrative, as narratives are social constructs of experience. It assumes that the world of narrative experience as constructed by South African literature produces multiple narrative experiences that guide the study of ethical issues in a detailed manner.

### **1.10.2 Research Design**

This study adopted the constructivist research paradigm and designed the study interpretively. Constructivism shaped the analysis of the ways in which the self is positioned

with respect to narrative voice, authorship, contexts, and the narrative experience (Lincoln, 1997). This approach is relevant in the investigation of ethical issues by focusing on personal experiences of characters as constructed through the first-person narrative point of view. Envisaging multivocal modes of experience arising from an investigation of the first-person narrative perspective, constructivist methods guided the analysis of personal stories, intersubjective and self-reflexive selves as represented through first-person narratives (Riessman, 2015; Schwandt, 1994). Constructivist methods guided the interpretation of meaning as constructed in the creative works by attending to how language produces multiple and multivocal meanings.

### **1.10.3 Data**

The research focuses on ten narratives: Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*, Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, four short stories from Ivan Vladislavić's *Missing Persons* and *Propaganda by Monuments and Other Stories*, Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207*, Niq Mhlongo's *After Tears* and *Dog Eat Dog*, and Thando Mgqolozana's *Unimportance*. The relevant data sets include point of view and character, voice, figures of speech, tropes, motifs, symbolic images, quotations, and passages. Secondary data was drawn from critical and historical, cultural, philosophical scholarly works on the construction of the subjectivity of the self, and on intersections of memory, history, and ethics.

### **1.10.4 Analysis and Interpretation**

The study focused on perspectives of the self in individual stories from first-person narratives. To frame the interpretation of point of view in relation to ethical questions, this study employed strategies of textual analysis to map textual elements in the selected works. Issues of narrative point of view were collated and patterned along conceptual philosophical concerns with regard to the representation of the self. Analysis of point of view provided a broader context for the analysis of characters' individual stories in the narratives. The individual stories were analysed to the extent to which they reveal ethical concerns. Individual experiences from these narratives were aggregated to provide insights into the construction of the South African self. The study envisaged two major levels of structuring meaning from the selected works. The creative works were considered both as separate and as composite, in the structuring of meaning and in interpretation. Particular text(s) introduced key philosophical terms, and the terms were collated and contextualised within a broader context with reference to other creative works. A close reading was used in the process of the construction of meaning, and in the evaluation and interpretation of emerging narrative patterns. Disparate contexts were collated to create coherence in narrative by relating the

multivocal perspectives to ethical and critical theory, particularly with respect to fragmented narratives of self. Conclusions were drawn by use of philosophical and narrative/linguistic perspectives.

### **1.11 Outline of Chapters**

Chapter One, the present chapter, has contextualised the issues under study. It has set out the objectives of this study and has framed the review of literature on South Africa's significant aspects of memorialisation. It has also taken a keen look at the place of the South African self in the collective. The review also focused on the aspects of the self and the ways in which the self, manifested through the first-person point of view, magnifies ethical ambiguities.

Chapter Two ("Competing Narrative Voices in Post-Apartheid South African Literature") evaluates significant voices as represented in the selected fiction, paying particular attention to narrative as a form. My engagement with voices in this chapter is predicated on the leading argument in this thesis that first-person voices, in terms of narrative positioning and orientation, magnify ethical issues. By closely interrogating the perspective that ethical issues are magnified by narrative re/tellings of the past, particularly in the ways in which such narratives employ first-person narrative strategies, this chapter adopts three broad categories of first-person voices as estranged, entangled, and self-reflexive. The objective of this chapter is to identify first-person narrative strategies that have been employed in the selected texts and to contextualise how the strategies magnify ethical ambiguities. Drawing closely on narrative as a method and as a process of reading and interpretation, this chapter not only points out the voices as imagined through ethical uncertainties but also introduces key terms and narrative strategies that find greater expression and elucidation in the subsequent chapters. These voices, the study contends, are not only inclined thematically towards describing the realities of history and historical circumstances in South Africa, but also intimate in their (ethical) orientation in terms of narrative style and envoicing strategies in the narratives.

Following closely on the multiplicity of voices established in Chapter Two, Chapter Three ("Ethical Ambiguities in the Search for Truth in *Country of My Skull* and *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*") turns to the notion of truth as a significant element of this thesis. Focusing on the two texts, the main argument of the chapter is that Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* and Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* address the perspective that the search for truth in South Africa marks the first step towards closure. The specific interest on truth, this chapter contends, is predicated on a significant assumption that in post-traumatic

contexts the search for truth is the first step towards the moral and ethical regeneration of a nation, as evinced in Chapter One in respect of studies by Arendt (1994), Todorov (2003) and Caruth (1996). Reading outward from the historical significance of the TRC as a historical record, to the mediated “truths” in the narratives, this chapter is closely interested in how the texts under consideration evaluate the South African version/s of truth and the apprehensions from these versions that define ambiguities of an ethical nature. In this engagement, this chapter delineates the role of personal memories and mediated first-person accounts in the investigation of the truth emanating from the trauma of the past.

One fundamental “truth” regarding post-traumatic histories is that the search for closure is open to endless interpretations and multiple meanings. Building from the ambiguities of truth as advanced in the previous chapter, Chapter Four (“Ethical Ambiguities of Authenticity and Visibility in Ivan Vladislavić’s Fiction”) uses selected stories from Ivan Vladislavić’s *Missing Persons* and from *Propaganda by Monuments and Other Stories* to underscore that there are two sides to the interpretation of history, memory, and ethics in Vladislavić’s fiction. The chapter highlights how monuments, narratives of victims and perpetrators, and other historically-affiliated artefacts create meanings that are inclined towards ethical responses from individuals. In the pursuit of this ethical angle, this chapter teases out the ways in which Vladislavić engages with the contestations between authenticity and inauthenticity, and between visibility and invisibility – terms, which, the study posits, provide integral perspectives upon which narrators and characters envisioned in Vladislavić’s prose relate with memorial architectures from ethically ambiguous angles.

Picking cue from the previous chapter regarding the ambiguous interrelationship between history and memory, and of the ethical ambiguities that individuals face in fitting into the present, Chapter Five (“Ethical Ambiguities of the Self in the Collective”) is specifically interested in how South African individuals determine and choose how to negotiate through seemingly ambiguous ethical choices. This chapter proceeds from the premise that the texts selected make use of unreliable narration as a narrative strategy to communicate the tension between the self and the community. Using four texts under examination in the study (Niq Mhlongo’s *After Tears*, Thando Mgqolozana’s *Unimportance*, Moele Kgebetli’s *Room 207*, and Mhlongo’s *Dog Eat Dog*) to evaluate the ambiguous position of the self in greater detail, the chapter underscores that the anxieties of the past prove to be a burden on individuals and communities. The chapter has reflected on the uneasy relationships framed around perceived notions of communal solidarity. Framing unreliability of first-person characters as emanating from the divided loyalties between the self and the

community, this chapter contextualises ethical ambiguities of divided selves. It shows how individuals disengage from following specific ethical ideals such as obligation to duty, to the good, and to the virtuous, and instead embrace vices such as crime, criminality, and moral perversity. In this engagement, the chapter not only traces the instances of escapism by characters in the texts, but also signifies the kind of abjection that is arguably the pinnacle of ethical ambiguities as represented in post-apartheid South African literature.

Chapter Six (“Conclusion and Recommendations”) affirms that the texts under consideration in the study reveal the ethical ambiguities of the self as magnified by the strategies of the first-person point of view. Demonstrating the difficulty South Africa has faced in the attempts to create an ethical future beyond apartheid, the chapter has concluded that bad memories interpellate on the self, creating fractures in the identity of the self that finds itself increasingly disenfranchised from a broader communal ideal. It has equally contextualised the place of the narrative in the representation of the multiplicities of truth in the South African context, signifying, principally, how narrative texts narrated in the first-person point of view project ethical ambiguities.

## CHAPTER TWO

### COMPETING NARRATIVE VOICES IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Introduction

Since the official dismantling of apartheid in South Africa, the literature of that country has devoted significant attention to the representation of ethical ambiguities that have arisen in the society due to the enduring memory of a problematic past and the sense of the continuities of that past into the present. These ethical ambiguities are constituted by a lack of clarity or oscillation on the part of individuals as they try to determine what is the ethical choice to make in the adoption of guiding principles of behaviour or in undertaking concrete actions in daily life. The past is at the root of this difficulty because it was grossly unfair and brutal to the majority black population, making it carry a lasting trauma, while it gave consistent undue privilege to the white minority, calling for uneasy reckoning in the present. Preoccupied as it has been with this subject matter, post-apartheid South African literature has been equally concerned with adopting a formal approach that is most appropriate to handling it. One cannot fail to notice that the outcome of this search has been the choice by many post-apartheid writers of fiction to use the first-person point of view as a narrative form. This particular narrative form makes it possible for the “I” voice to express various, including contradictory, perspectives on issues of an ethical nature or with ethical implications, thus revealing the ethical ambiguities the “I” is enmeshed in.

As such, the main goal of this chapter is to identify the first-person narrative strategies used in the texts selected for study and to map their representation in terms of the different voices in which they manifest themselves. These strategies are narrative orientation, narrative position/ing and focalisation. The chapter identifies the narrative orientation of the selected texts in terms of three broad voices – estranged voices, entangled voices, and self-reflexive voices – and contextualises the multiple ways in which these voices overlap. Within each of these voices, the chapter considers the different narrative positions, such as the position of reliable and unreliable narrators, intrusive narrators, authorial narration, direct and implied narrators, closely paying attention to how these positions have been focalised to amplify ethical ambiguities.

The chapter engages theoretical readings and is informed by insights emanating from other post-traumatic and post-conflict zones, steeped in ethical ambiguities. It also thinks through the theoretical leanings of narrative theory regarding first-person narrative strategies as argued by Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), James Phelan (1996), Gerard Genette (1980), Dan

Zahavi (2005), among other scholars, to make connections between narrative voices and ethical ambiguities.

## **2.2 Estranged Voices: Revisiting the Past as a Historical Misadventure**

How to situate oneself in relation to the “evil” one has experienced is a question that typically arises for individuals who have gone through situations of collective violence, mass crime, and conflict generally, with one common reaction being that of “estrangement” (Poulin et al., 2007). Such turning of one’s back on a traumatic past applies to South Africa, too. Rosemary Jolly (1996: 6), reflecting on the representation of atrocity in white South African writing, argues that South African literature tends to foreclose the brutal injustices of apartheid. The overarching aspiration of individuals on whom these injustices have been inflicted has been to forget in order to detach themselves from that past. South African literature reflects that reality, as seen in the estranged voices it accommodates. Estranged voices envisage forgetting traumatic histories and their damaging legacies by standing in a detached position. Scholars such as Phelan (1996) and Roberto Beneduce (2007) observe that estrangement, as implied through the narrative voice of a character, serves to delimit a character’s associations with particular historical realities. Narratives that deploy estranged voices to communicate detachment by characters from particular historical circumstances are considered to have “estrangement” as a thematic orientation. Such an orientation would encompass diverse thematic concerns. I appropriate Beneduce’s (2007: 58) contention that estrangement is deduced from an author’s representation of “cultural strategies, moral questions, ways in which memories are constructed, narrative landscapes and particular ways in which communities define their relationship to the past”. Remembering the past is a critical aspect of the human self. In the process of remembering, individuals often succumb to unwelcome memories from the past, especially where trauma is involved. Estrangement constitutes one of the ways in which the self manages to deal with the unwelcome memories of the past.

In figuring out the significance of the estrangement of characters from the apartheid past, I evaluate first-person voices in the selected texts that negotiate the dichotomy concerning the obligation to remember the past versus the necessity to forget instances of that past in order to achieve closure. In these texts, and for the characters envisioned in the texts, history is a site of contention. Voices that attempt to remember the past are faced with the dilemmas that remembering presents. Scholars, including Tzvetan Todorov (2010) and Hannah Arendt (1994), impute that individuals revisit the past in search of closure over past violations. Suzanne Keen (2006) argues that revisiting the past often leads individuals to feel

and empathise with particular historical situations. Keen (2006) and David Lodge (1992) agree that the first-person point of view is authentic in the representation of historical connections between the self and consciousness. Authenticity is the quality of the self that is evaluated through the analysis of the factual validity of narrated events, if such events are “believable and possible” (Ellis, 1997: 133). I follow Lodge’s (1992) and Carolyn Ellis’s (1997) supposition regarding the affective reality of the first-person point of view when used to review issues revolving around the past and the present, and the ambiguities that surround them. Furthermore, scholars such as Genette (1980) and Jacob L. Mey (1999) argue that narratives use estrangement (or detachment) to denote a certain response to historical situations. Following Genette (1980), estrangement (detachment) denotes a character’s feeling of disengagement from his or her past.

In looking at the significance of the past for the present in this section, I introduce three authors and their texts – Antjie Krog’s *Country of My Skull* (1998), Njabulo Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (2003), and selected stories from Ivan Vladislavić’s collection of short stories, *Missing Persons* (1989) and *Propaganda by Monuments* (1996). These texts arguably portray the ambivalent ways in which characters respond to particular historical realities. By evaluating the nature of estranged voices in the first person in the selected texts, I propose to show how Krog, Ndebele, and Vladislavić represent the vexations of remembering the past.

In *Country of My Skull*, Krog uses the experiences of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa as a backbone to a story that is fleshed with her own personal narrative about her South African society at the time apartheid formally ended. (The TRC was established in 1995 to facilitate reconciliation and forgiveness among perpetrators and victims of apartheid through truth-telling.) Told through a variety of narrative perspectives, *Country of My Skull* is a seminal text that assembles significant South African voices seeking closure over the ravages of the apartheid past. As a memoir in the first instance, *Country of My Skull* uses the first-person point of view, but the author also uses other strategies, such as maintaining authorial distance and, sometimes, rendering witness statements in the third-person point of view. The text features multiple voices, from the voices of the commissioners of the TRC to those of the victims and of the perpetrators. In some instances, the author makes academic treatises concerning ethical and moral issues surrounding the TRC. Fiona Ross (2003: 79) argues that Krog’s primary motive in revising the past, is to achieve some sort of closure regarding past violations. Writing from her first-hand experience with the TRC at the time of its sittings as she reported the events as a

journalist, Krog layers first-person accounts of the testimonies of witnesses and perpetrators, and offers her own insights regarding the events that unfolded at the TRC, while annotating major historical incidents with a narrative flavour of her own. As a mediated narrative, both in terms of form and content, *Country of My Skull* appears as a montage that puts together a tapestry of voices, all hungering for attention. This aspect of the memoir is explicated in detail in Chapter Three of this study.

As other scholars have also observed, *Country of My Skull* is a work of mediation (Effe, 2020; Sanders, 2000, 2007; Van Niekerk, 2016). Krog's text has also been characterised differently as non-fiction (Van Niekerk, 2016) and as a "literary testimony" (Effe, 2020: 101). According to Alexandra Effe (2020: 98), *Country of My Skull* is a "hybrid work of literary testimony". In the memoir, Krog also layers multiple experiences drawn from other post-conflict zones that function to create a montage of voices. In the memoir, she privileges her position as a South African writer bearing witness to the unfolding events at the TRC. In effect, the work forms part of a significant archive that draws from the experience of the TRC but is rendered through a fictional lens in certain instances, and is one of the "literary and quasi-literary works" that conflate history with law and ethics (Sanders, 2000: 42). What makes this text important for this study is its narrative mode. The text makes use of a variety of narrative devices, such as authorial intervention, rhetorical questions, and elliptical references to mediate the TRC as a historical record.

Writing regarding Krog's representation of the suffering of victims, Meira Cook (2001: 78) argues that Krog includes stories of victims, but "from which she cannot detach herself". Cook's (2001) assessment is a pointer towards Krog's competing levels of narrative identification in which she wavers between attachment and detachment. In many instances, Krog's narrative shifts in terms of focalisation, often interchangeably mixing the voices of witnesses, victims, and perpetrators. Annel Pieterse (2007: 168, 177) observes that Krog occupies the ambiguous position of being a "poet/reporter-narrator" in her work, signifying the complexity of her authorial position/ing, in which she plays as author, narrator, and protagonist interchangeably. The text also straddles different narrative positions, which are undercut along "ideological, racial, gendered, ethical" lines (Pieterse, 2007: 177). In expanding Effe's (2020: 103) and Pieterse's (2007:177) arguments regarding the text's orientation and positioning, I argue that the memoir's orientation towards speaking for diverse communities of South Africa, in the process of creating empathy, ends up distorting the author's intended empathetic feeling for others. Krog's attempts to privilege her "ethical" loyalty towards specific groups, while in/advertently manifesting her divided loyalties

towards other social groups and individuals is an instance of narrative disruption. The author generates ambiguous loyalties through manifestly contradictory levels of narrative identification with specific loyalties.

*Country of My Skull* opens with a statement of estrangement: “They never wept, the men of my race” (*Country*, 1). The text makes an “early disclosure” by revealing the author’s intentions and allegiances to a specific community from the beginning (Pacious, 2016). This disclosure focalises Krog’s position in the narrative in relation to the dominant motif in the text – that of estranging herself from her white community. By adopting an estranged perspective from the onset, Krog manages to foreground what Suzanne Keen (2006: 216) identifies as “character identification” in the narrative, in which “naming, description, indirect implication of traits, reliance on types, relative flatness or roundness, depicted actions, roles in plot trajectories, quality of attributed speech, and mode of representation of consciousness” contribute to construct empathetic situations. Krog appropriates her own ethical space by detaching her self from the condemned male architects of apartheid. As we will see subsequently, this inward orientation of the author’s own self in the narrative allows Krog to define her own orientation and position with respect to the overriding message in the narrative – that of feeling empathetic to the victims of past atrocities, in this particular case, the blacks of South Africa, while at the same time allocating responsibility and guilt to the white male. In this particular instance, Krog manages to appropriate what Kathleen Pacious (2016), writing in a similar context, terms the “double communication of implied author – authorial audience and narrator” (336). I take “implied authorship” in Krog’s memoir to reflect the “dual” authorship manifested in Krog’s personal voice as the author who is enmeshed with the independent voices of other narrators in the text who are given speaking turns.

The foregrounded inversion in the statement, “They never wept, the men of my race” (*Country*, 1) singularly signifies the impudence of the Afrikaner over the wrongs of apartheid. The author privileges the absence of empathy, but by identifying herself with their race, Krog intimates the ambiguity in her narrative position in the text. The author makes it clear from the beginning that she is detached from the activities of the Afrikaner men, whom she blames for the immorality of apartheid. In foregrounding her estrangement, Krog manages to not only amplify the complexity of the white Afrikaner men, but also, in a discourse that she is entangled with in terms of race and racial belonging, she must wiggle out of, by standing in an estranged position from the Afrikaner men. Lodge (1992: 10) defines a narrator who impinges on the narrative points of view of other characters as an

intrusive narrator, and adds that intrusive narrators use “ironic self-consciousness” to privilege their own narrative point of view over those of others in the text. As an intrusive narrator/author, Krog makes use of an ironic tone to not only project her own interests in the thematic import of the text but also wade into the controversy regarding white (male) guilt regarding the atrocities focalised in the memoir. This latter observation is significant in uncovering the author’s projection of empathy and ethical responsibility in the text.

In another authorial intrusion in the text, Krog is able to make interruptions in the order of the narrative so as to justify a specific point, which is usually of a significant ethical nature. Krog’s constant use of metaphor (the figuration of a skull in the title, “Country of My Skull”, for example) and poetic inversions (“They never wept, the men of my race”, as an example) serve to elevate the narrative into the candour and receptivity of poetry. However, Krog’s poetic enunciation is tempered by her references to the “lack of words” to describe what is traumatic. By effusing and standing away from the (poetic) renditions of the graphic portrayal of the suffering of victims as rendered “bare” before the TRC, Krog estranges herself from her own narrative, while at the same time, vouching for the authenticity of her professed narrative “truth” and ethical pleadings. Krog’s constant use of specific rhetorical strategies, such as authorial intervention and rhetorical questions, amplifies her empathetic orientation towards black victims who testified to the TRC. These strategies also help to amplify her calls for responsibility over past wrongs, especially by the white population – Afrikaner men, in particular. However, Krog’s text does not maintain a consistent narrative voice but keeps shifting, from the author’s own to those of the characters in her exposition. Moreover, as we shall see subsequently, in Chapter Three, she sometimes exhibits misplaced empathy towards specific individuals, while obligating others to greater demands for responsibility over past wrongs.

Carli Coetzee (2001) argues that Krog’s text is layered by two kinds of intended audiences. On the one hand, Krog is addressing her Afrikaner people. On the other hand, Krog is writing to a new audience, which she passionately seeks and to which she pleads for attention. Consequently, such deliberate infusions of diverse audiences as well as points of view and narrative strategies produce a complex text that encompasses multivocal identities and voices. As observed before, Krog manages to distance herself from the men of her race as a matter of convenience, since the latter, she advances, were responsible for the evil of apartheid. By distancing herself, she manages to absolve herself of the guilt of the white male perpetrators. In many ways in the memoir, racial issues are focalised as contributing to the attempts to disengage from complicity with the wrongs of apartheid. According to Linda

Alcoff (2015), race occupies the ambivalent position between identification by members of a community and disengagement by those who are traumatised by association. Because of its demands for rationalisation as well as its figuration with privilege and racialized economic differences, race affects the ways individuals deploy their empathetic feelings and obligations to responsibility over past wrongs (Alcoff, 2015). In a scenario as this, black and white voices manifest estrangement when they are plotted against the axis of the historical aftermath of apartheid.

Krog's memoir interrogates the notions of victims and perpetrators from a racialized perspective, but she does so by shifting between her allegiance to self and to the South African community as a whole. One instance in which Krog wades through the ambiguities of racial identification, for example, is when she sympathises with P.W. Botha, one of the white men and an architect of apartheid's pronounced separatist laws, when he appeared to testify before the TRC. Krog feels that Winnie Mandela carried a heavier burden of blame on account of being a black woman, but feels empathetic towards the old Botha, despite the latter having been mentioned adversely in victims' testimonies before the TRC. Krog's representation of Winnie Mandela contrasts sharply with the focalisation of the voice of the same character in Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*.

*The Cry of Winnie Mandela* re-stories the life of Winnie Mandela, the anti-apartheid activist, as re/told by other significant fictional women, and as re-imagined by herself (the fictional self). In the quasi-historical novel, Ndebele envisages competing female voices that are estranged at the personal and at the national/historical level. By adopting the use of a first-person external/IMPLIED narrator and four other female narrators who are given speaking turns, Ndebele's novel takes advantage of the spontaneity of the narrative, particularly as it is rendered through an oral perspective in an unconventional storytelling structural mode, in a communion called an *Ibandla*. This *Ibandla* exists as "a dialogue for the women to re-acquaint themselves with their true selves and to probe the internal conflicts raging within them with regard to self, society, morality and sexuality" (Van Dyk, 2004: 91). The *Ibandla* functions as a memory trigger for characters as they share their stories of intimacy in the sense of closeness. Each character's interior monologue contributes to the dialogue in the narrative, as some characters pick up conversational cues from other characters, which happen to jolt their memories and allow them to process their own individual life stories.

Ndebele's text anchors the reflective stories of the women of the *Ibandla* around reconciliation, empathy, and responsibility. In this *Ibandla*, narratives as stories shared by the women are highly fluid, without any definite theme, and often rendered through a process of

narrative prompts, which are occasioned by memories evoked in the processes of storytelling. In this particular instance, the stories are bound by memory and history. The implied narrator uses a narrative prompt, “Let’s begin” (*The Cry*, 1), establishes the authority of the narrator, on the one hand, and negotiates the oral medium, on the other hand. In the process of the telling, the authority of the narrator implicates the memory of the perceived audience by another prompt, “do you remember?”, and then cites the story of Penelope as a significant narrative strand that connects the central experiences of the women in the novel: “Let’s consider the imaginary life of four of Penelope’s millions of descendants” (*The Cry*, 1). This aspect of narrative positioning not only implicates the authority of the implied narrator in the telling of the story, but also sets the perceived audiences and readers to the imagination of a fictive/mythical and historical story. By using an oral medium of storytelling and an external/implied narrator to introduce the story from a detached position, independent first-person narrators take precedence in telling the main story. Unlike the case of Krog’s intrusion in the narrative as a narrator, Ndebele’s text delimits the role of the author from the onset, which consequently frees him from the demands of responsibility. By adopting independent narrators, the author detaches himself from the narrative. An implied narrator takes precedence in introducing the characters and provides narrative zoning, which defines the detached position of the author. By adopting different characters in the telling, the novel achieves what Bakhtin (1984) terms plurality, as each of the independent voices functions to structure a definite thematic aspect of the narrative. By representing the women characters as Penelope’s “descendants”, the narrative initiates the private narratives of the women into the collective (and the mythical) realm, creating further nodes of narrative representation, hence, appropriating Bakhtin’s polyphonic voices (Bakhtin, 1981: 50, 81). Ndebele’s novel encapsulates the plurality of the self through what Bakhtin (1984) calls inter-textuality, as the experiences of the women are subsumed in the experiences of Winnie, of Penelope, of Sara Baartman, and of other South African women in general.

The intertextual reference to Baartman, a documented victim of colonial South Africa, establishes the genealogy of victimhood in South Africa and serves to process our empathetic feeling for the generations of women who follow her. Writing about slave memories in South Africa, Pumla Dineo Gqola (2010) traces historical memories from the colonial period through apartheid to the present period. What emerges from her analysis is that South Africa has been bogged down by “too much memory”, reflecting, in similar ways, the experiences of post-war Europe, as captured by Tony Judt (2000). In reflecting over the past, Gqola’s (2010) study repositions and re/situates specific narratives into the body politic of the formation of

the South African nation. One such narrative is that of Baartman, a South African Khoi woman who became a victim of colonial exploitation and horrific voyeurism. Gqola (2010: 65) argues that Baartman is a symbolic picture who represents the ravages of Europe, and whose story, as retold now, is a story that magnifies restorative action and empathy. Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* casts female historical figures, including that of Baartman, into the narrative in a bid to create multiple truths. I would argue, following Judt (2000) and Gqola (2010), that Ndebele's constant references to multiple memories of historical women open an arena in which divergent "moral vocabularies" are conflated by memories of different pasts. To appropriate Judt's (2000: 307) view, South Africa has "too much memory, too many pasts", all of which are open to multiple interpretations in the narrative.

In *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, Ndebele re-orientates what we can call the "merging of the voices of the narrator and the characters" (Nielsen, 2004: 136); in this particular instance, the voices of different victims. This novel also negotiates what Phelan (2001) refers to as "redundant telling", as seen in its attempt to run similar storylines of victims and follow the different levels in which these stories are intertwined. The women so actively represented and those implied are victims in the historical and mythical past, but their stories are collated through competing perspectives. The different voices compete for attention to portray specific aspects, which are often unique to particular characters, as other characters bring their unique experiences to bear in the rich tapestry of woven dialogue and personal communion. Ndebele extensively uses dialogue as a strategy for polyvalence, justifying what Colin Davis (2018) defines as the propensity of narratives to be limited in reflection of experience, and so, each narrative brings vitality and freshness to the overall tale, even when incidents and experiences are repeated. There is a sense in which each of the women's stories reverberates into the stories of others, thereby signalling that experiences embody individual traits, while at the same time envisaging commonality of experience.

Ndebele focalises on the private and public life of Winnie, the estranged wife of Nelson Mandela, the first President of democratic South Africa and an anti-apartheid leader, who spent a long term in prison. In order to reconstruct her identity, the novel uses competing narratives of other significant voices of women. These voices are not just a reflection of individual psyches and motivations; they carry specific elements of Winnie's character and disposition. These women maintain conversations that eventually lead to the narrative unburdening of private and collective guilt by Winnie, particularly as it relates to her role during her fight against apartheid and its aberrations. The respective women in *The Cry of*

*Winnie Mandela* exhibit certain roles that manifest their motivations in the narrative. The different women play different roles in the re-enactment of certain aspects of Winnie's past life. This is the main reason why the four fictional women speak first in the narrative before Winnie. Winnie's narrative comes last for probable reasons: she will have to benefit from the self-narratives of the women who speak before her to allow her to make a reasoned, self-reflective judgement regarding her past and present. Mark Freeman (1993) reminds us that people who understand and can narrate our lives better are our acquaintances and those who identify with our life histories. It must be noted at this point that Ndebele's Winnie makes confessions beyond the actual confessions she/ the "real" Winnie, publicly gave before the TRC, and privately as documented anywhere else, as far as we know.

So while Krog appropriates the "real" Winnie's experiences as were "truthfully" projected in the TRC (together with her narratorial mis/adventures), Ndebele's Winnie speaks to the personal "truths" which are not only probable, but also corresponding to instances of narrative confessions and inherent duplicity in the narratives of other women. The aspect of plural experiences in the novel, and as propounded by Bakhtin (1984), makes the case of Winnie more believable, and whatever she did not acknowledge to the TRC (because of her impudence or otherwise) can be inferred from the commonality of experience of the rest of the women in the *Ibandla*. All the same, the fact that Winnie Mandela graced Ndebele's book launch can also be read as a strategy that, even in its remotest probability, gives credibility and authenticity to the fictional Winnie Mandela as represented in Ndebele's novel (Isaacson, 2003). Krog also focalises on the character and disposition of Winnie, which adds another significant voice to the voices of the women in Ndebele's novel. Winnie's portrayal in the two texts, in their extreme manifestation, is contradictory. Krog focalises on Winnie as a voice of a perpetrator, while Ndebele recovers her lost, silenced voice through the voices of the women in the *Ibandla*. Krog adopts a critical, authorial voice to evaluate Winnie's character, while Ndebele adopts an empathetic voice in the narrative to mediate the women's contradictory positions as contrasted with Winnie's (personal and historical) voice.

Winnie's voice is significant because of its ambiguity. On the one hand, she is a victim, as a black woman in apartheid South Africa, and more so, as a direct victim of family dislocation. On the other hand, she is regarded as a perpetrator, particularly in the allegations of murder and of infidelity, which would form the subject of her divorce proceedings. These ambiguities of self are a matter of narrative attention in Krog's *Country of My Skull*, as well as in Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*. In the former, Winnie's narrative is objectified and marginal, but in the latter, Winnie is the focalised subject. Even though both texts attempt

to reflect the historical by placing the mis/adventures of the Mandela family against broader national and communal aspirations, they do so in an environment of competing interests. This dual vision and its ethical import in terms of empathy, shame, and responsibility form part of the primary focus of the next chapter.

One focal narrative strategy in Krog's memoir that functions to negotiate ambiguities related to empathy and responsibility is the portrayal of the estranged position of victims and perpetrators. Davis (2018: 28) argues that in the process of representing the voices of the victims, the danger is that one might derive "unmerited" profits from amplifying their experiences. This danger is reflected in the positions the authors take in relation to the representation of victims and perpetrators. Krog and Ndebele, in the pursuit of controversial subjects and related "inconvenient" truths related to victims and perpetrators, must maintain what Davis (2018: 28) terms "respectful distance" between them and their subject matter. This, perhaps, would account for the deployment of estranged voices to negotiate their concerns with empathetic feeling and responsibility.

Ivan Vladislavić, like Krog and Ndebele, uses estrangement as a narrative strategy by re/presenting first-person narrators attempting to move out of the memories of apartheid and its legacies. However, Vladislavić's fiction orients towards the representation of the physical landscape, especially in so far as it undercuts issues of memory. Critical acclaim of his work has often centred on the analysis of the location and translocation of visual architectures, especially in the light of (apartheid) history (Marais, 2011; Murray, 2008; Poyner, 2017). Beyond the concern with the visual, Vladislavić ties individual memories to visual architectures of memorialisation. Sally-Ann Murray (2008) advances that Vladislavić's narratives are ambiguous because the author deliberately shifts focalization between past and present. The scholar further contends that the physical architecture and their memories are re/imagined, reworked, consigned to invisibility, or pushed out of consciousness. I pick from this cue to imagine how the attempt to re-vision memories bears an ethical slant as characters either choose to deploy their empathy or responsibility towards visual architectures as imagined by Vladislavić, or deny and disavow their significance.

Writing regarding the upsurge of violence against white memorials in South Africa in the recent past, Achille Mbembe (2016a) argues for the need to "demythologise" whiteness, and by extension, images of white superiority, by bringing these images forth into a fixed gaze so that they can be questioned, and consequently rendered powerless. I argue that this attempt to render images of apartheid invisible in the present rests in the assumption that getting closure over past memories of trauma is an obligation towards responsibility. In

demythologising the memories of the past, Vladislavić annexes the past and interpolates it into the present, while at the same time attempting to efface the significance of the past for the present. According to Felicity Wood (2001: 21), Vladislavić represents a “shadowy, distorted mirror” of the past, which I read as revealing the ambiguity residing in historical memories. Vladislavić’s characters perform, at once, the twin functions of “recalling” the past in the words of Mbembe (2016a) and burying that past by indicating how its re-narrativisation permits and gives way to new interpretations and contradictions. Reflecting a certain ethical imperative, the memories that no longer hold for the future can only be consigned to the annals of history, by first demythologising them through the narrative, and second, curating them in museums where their potency and charm can no longer hold sway on the present (Mbembe, 2016a). Vladislavić’s narrative vision presents these memories in their contradictions and inherent ambiguities.

In reading Vladislavić’s writing that is “embodied in satire, word play and form” featuring “brief sentences pared to the bone” (Gaylard, 2011: 4, 8), my critical stance is to decipher the author’s representation of duality in characters experiencing fluid memories and living in ambiguous historical situations. This study selects stories from Vladislavić’s collections of stories, *Missing Persons and Other Stories*, and *Propaganda by Monuments and Other Stories*.

Vladislavić’s *Missing Persons and Other Stories* has widely been acclaimed as an anthology that carries the vexations of individuals disoriented by apartheid. Sue Marais (2011: 37) summarises the structuring thematic orientation *Missing Persons*, thus:

The interlocking allusions to monuments, statues, walls, bricks and stone – the literal and the foundations of apartheid ... point to a nation’s preoccupation with the records of its achievements ... However, the dislocated and alienated experiences of the characters of the stories – the ‘missing persons’ of the title – each of whom is ... dispossessed and faceless, negate any sense of a shared community, history and destiny, and expose the fractured reality constructed by the architects of apartheid.

Marais’s (2011) assertions point towards two central issues of concern with Vladislavić’s fiction in this study. Firstly, I located the place of monuments in structuring memories about the past and the attendant disengagement with the memories in the present. Secondly, I analysed the instances of dislocation of the characters in his fiction. The assumption is that this dislocation is explained through the characters’ ambivalent responses

to changing historical circumstances. I chose two stories from *Missing Persons and Other Stories*, namely, “The Prime Minister is Dead” and “Tsafendas’s Diary”.

In “The Prime Minister is Dead” and in “Tsafendas’s Diary,” Vladislavić uses first-person child narrators who are emotionally attached to the events narrated. “The Prime Minister is Dead” is a fictional representation of the killing of Wilhelm Verwoerd, one of apartheid South Africa’s Prime Ministers, who was stabbed to death in parliament by a man called Demitrious Tsafendas (Thurman, 2011). “Tsafendas’s Diary” is an imaginative rendition of the motive of Tsafendas in the killing of Verwoerd. The two stories are not only entangled in terms of the narrative envisaged (that of the killing of Verwoerd) but also by a uniquely similar narrative point of view, as both are told through first-person child narrators (Marais, 2011: 30). They are also narratives with similar storylines. These stories also make a similar attempt to “balance” between the stories of the victims and those of the perpetrators. In “The Prime Minister is Dead”, the narrator is attached to the events of the story (“we waged war against the garden... I can now see that the death of the prime minister has many consequences”, 2). In “Tsafendas’s Diary”, the narrator is emotionally involved in the search for the diary of Tsafendas. In searching for the missing document, the narrator attempts to find closure to a haunting past for him and for his community (for which he processes through his first-person memories in the other story).

To fully explicate questions of authenticity/ visibility with respect to memories, Vladislavić’s narrative perspective and positioning of ethical issues of empathy and responsibility, two stories from Vladislavić’s *Propaganda by Monuments and Other Stories*, “The WHITES ONLY Bench” and “Propaganda by Monuments”, are also considered. “The WHITES ONLY Bench” is a story about a decommissioned insignia of apartheid – a bench that was in Queen Victoria Street outside a building where South Africans used to go to “authenticate” their belonging to the racial profiles that existed at the time. The Bench, a metaphor of separateness during apartheid, and a marker of white space, resurfaces in Vladislavić’s short story as captured at a time the wife of the American Civil Rights movement leader, Martin Luther King, visited South Africa. Elaine Young (2011: 114) argues that the story is about “the role of photographs and monuments (in this case, museum relic) in negotiating the divisions of the past in terms of the [current] discourse on national unity”. Young’s (2011) assessment signifies Vladislavić’s orientation towards representing pressing national questions in post-apartheid South Africa. Told from an estranged first-person voice, “The WHITES ONLY Bench” emphasises the observer’s/narrator’s outsidership, which is established from the initial opening sentence: “Yesterday our visitors’

book, which Portia has covered in zebra-skin wrapping paper and shiny plastic, recorded the name of yet another important person, Coretta King” (51). The first-person’s outsidership is justified by his narrative position as an observer speaking from his marginal position, as he reports of Coretta King as she takes a photograph at the Bench (“I happened to be watching from the workshop window, and I had a feeling the photographs would be exceptional”, 51). On the one hand, the narrator effaces his position in the telling by signifying his invisibility away from the Bench and the event in question. He is also estranged physically, as he stands as a distant observer as the event unfolds. This signifies his lack of responsibility at the event in question, as implied by his position as an outsider. On the other hand, there is a sense of attachment to the materiality of the event, i.e., the de/commissioning of significant items of historical value in the memory of South Africa. However, the attention to “the Bench” detaches and deflects attention from the rest of the monuments, rendering the whole incident “exceptional” in the eyes of the detached narrator. As will be seen in greater detail in Chapter Four, this incident ends up as the most singular and contentious part of memorialisation, which not only confuses the curators, but also the narrator.

“Propaganda by Monuments” features two individuals, Boniface Khumalo, a black South African who wants to refurbish his Tavern with a “suitable” monument in post-apartheid South Africa, and Pavel Grekov, a Russian junior translator in a government ministry in post-communist Russia. It details a conversation, in the form of letters, in which the former requires a figurine of Lenin to be shipped from Russia to South Africa in a bid to replace the statue of J.G. Strydom in his garden, which he no longer needs. Ironically, Grekov’s country is disposing of the assortment in his request. Monica Popescu (2011) argues that the story is about the difficulties of translating historical contexts and cultural differences. The relationship between Grekov and Khumalo is mediated through letters (with their “first-person” leanings). These letters establish the self-ironic dispositions of the two characters, who are potentially communicating at cross-purposes over monuments and historical meanings of memorial architectures in their two countries, Russia and South Africa, respectively. Khumalo’s ambiguous letter is significant in effacing his historical consciousness (“I am greeting you in the name of struggling masses of South Africa... My particular personality is illustrious”, 23) to which Grekov replies: “I pen this missive, reactionary to yours” (29). This element of speaking at cross-purposes establishes the lack of historical and cultural understanding of the concerned regarding the country of the other. Both men have low English proficiencies, but they attempt to muzzle and over-use English vocabulary in wrong contexts. They use an alienating language that easily finds itself under

wrong translations and inappropriate usage, which accentuates feelings of detachment and disenchantment with the historical situation that they are attempting to mediate. In troping ethical ambiguities in this story, I am inclined to see that by creating characters who speak at cross-purposes, Vladislavić's story leads us to conclude that it is difficult to affirm sympathetic feeling or obligation of responsibility towards certain memorial architectures.

Grekov and Khumalo cannot easily address each other with empathy because they come from different historical and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, they lack "experiential" reality because their relationship is coordinated through letters across continents. This sense of social, racial, political, and narrative distance or detachment makes it hard for each of them to understand what the other needs, with respect to the monument that the latter has requested from the former. Their individual thoughts, as they try to imagine the other's contexts, are disengaged from the actual realities on the ground. Grekov and Khumalo become "anonymous" to each other. Consequently, it is difficult for either of them to construct the individuality of the other. The two cannot negotiate what Zahavi (2014) terms "true sympathy" for each other, since their cultures are different. Furthermore, they remain as anonymous subjects towards each other. As "anonymous" narrators, both Grekov and Khumalo mediate their indirect voices through zones of visibility and invisibility, and through the problematic tensions between authenticity and inauthenticity.

### **2.3 Entangled Voices: Ambiguities of Effacing the Past in the Present**

In this section, I read the concept of entanglement as the orientation of narratives from post-conflict zones to exhibit the tension that exists in the self between forgetting the past and succumbing to unwelcome memories from it. My interest in appropriating entanglement in the post-apartheid context is grounded on the experiences of individuals and societies in socio-political contexts similar to South Africa's, in which the desire to move forward beyond the trauma is constantly subverted by past memories. Signifying "tangled origins" of African-American fiction of the 1970s and 1980s, Stephanie Athey (1999: 170) argues that authors of the period reflected the social fragmentation of racialized subjects affected by past historical experiences. Athey (1999: 171, 172) contends that the existence of "psychic fragmentation and social decentering of the contemporary racialized subject" in the present is explained by lingering hangovers of the past. South African literature also exhibits a similar orientation towards fragmentation of the self in reflection of past racial disagreements.

Writers such as Niq Mhlongo (2004; 2007), Kgebetli Moele (2006), Thando Mgqolozana (2014), and Zukiswa Wanner (2010) reflect on the aspirations of South Africans beyond apartheid (Dlamini, 2015; Murray, 2011; Rafapa, 2018a; Samuelson, 2007). Apart

from reflecting on the gritty realities of a nation emerging out of the scars of apartheid, these writers portray the constant social and cultural reverberations and the shock waves of the past that overcome the present. These texts embody multiple voices that are torn and divided between past historical allegiances and present contradictions. I consider these four writers of the new dispensation because, apart from portraying a similar thematic orientation, their texts use similar textual strategies, including the use of the first-person point of view. They also envision experiences of entangled subjects in the new dispensation.

I pursue this aspect of entanglement with the past by investigating how characters in the selected texts attempt to efface particular historical circumstances by trying to make them less potent in the present. In thinking of effacement of historical circumstances, I borrow Fiona Ross's (2003: 74, 75) assertion that effacement includes the tendency to reject and downplay the material significance of past events in the present. Ross (2003), writing out of the experiences of women victims who participated in the TRC hearings, argues that women's experiences were elided out of the TRC narrative, rendering their stories marginal at the time the national narrative was being archived and re/constructed. Picking from this argument, I extend the question of effacement to denote some of the strategies in which certain past events are made less important, or de-centred in the narratives in the pursuit of particular ethical imperatives. This latter argument is premised on the assumption that the desire to move away from the trauma signifies the search for an ethical post-traumatic sensibility.

Writing regarding the crisis in historical representation, Hayden White (1987: 39) argues that the reason why history is often effaced in the present is that such an effacement allows man to be free from the demands of responsibility towards the past. In negotiating voices entangled with the histories of the past, my interest in this section is to examine how characters/narrators such as Dingz in Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* (2004), Bafana in Mhlongo's *After Tears* (2007), Noko, the narrator, and other characters in Moele's *Room 207* (2006), and Zizi in Mqgolozana's *Unimportance* (2014), in the process of mediating historical realities, find themselves unable to move forward in a segmented society that regularly demands for rationalisation, particularly of past experiences. I pursue narrative experiences of these characters more broadly in Chapter Five, as I reflect on Frederick Ruf's (1997), Michele Grossman's (2013), and Patrick Hogan's (2013) views that entangled voices ensue from troubled, unsettled circumstances of colonised countries. In reflecting a new society where the distant past is no longer a force but only appears as a fleeting shadow in the

consciousness of the present, I pursue the concern with entanglement as a product of an attempt to fit into the present, along with its inconsistencies.

According to Ruf (1997: 59), first-person narration envisages multiplicity of meanings, as we can witness the tensions relating to incoherence in a character's thoughts and the accompanying notions of disunity and chaos. Bafana, Dingz, Zizi, as well as the direct and implied narrators in *Room 207*, principally exhibit fragmented selves. The characters live in a chaotic world, and their fragmentation is reflected in the instances of dislocation in their thoughts. Again, in the attempt to find coherence in their lives, they find themselves entangled with social, historical, economic, and political circumstances that they cannot easily extricate themselves from. In pursuing these characters and their first-person voices, I am persuaded by Phelan (1996: 45) who argues that multiple voices ensue from the ambiguous positions of narrators in narratives. These narrators share one fundamental trait: they are ambivalent and unreliable both in their voices and in their orientation in the narratives. I pursue the concept of unreliability as an aspect of the first-person point of view that is exhibited by estranged voices in the selected narratives. My concern with these voices has to do with whether they are reliable or not, and how instances of un/reliability (and in/authenticity) are connected to ethical concerns of empathy and responsibility. I am guided by scholars such as Greta Olson (2003) and Marshall W. Gregory (2004), who argue that un/reliability and in/authenticity are connected to issues of trust, conscience, empathy, and responsibility.

My concern with the first-person narrators is predicated on their orientation as unreliable narrators. According to Olson (2003: 94), unreliable narrators are "those narrators who articulate values and perceptions that differ from those of the implied author". Unreliability in this particular aspect demonstrates an acute loss of trust in the narrators, and consequently, in the narrative positions that they represent. With such unreliable characters, their misconduct is a product of their untrustworthiness, which emerges out of their own disposition and/or "self-interest" (Olson, 2003: 102). In the texts, I pursue the instances of inconsistency and self-contradiction to argue that their empathetic feeling, or the lack of it, as well as their obligation to responsibility, or the absence of it, define the ethical sensibilities of the texts.

Moele's *Room 207* grapples with the harsh realities of urban life in post-apartheid South Africa. *Room 207* features the lives of six young men who are living together in a rented room with the inscription "207" as the door number. The figuration of "Room 207" as a relic of apartheid establishes its genetic links to past traumatic memories. This room is

focalised from the beginning: “It used to be a hotel in the days of ... you know, those days which the rulers of this land don’t want you to forget” (13). The narrator’s focalisation in this instance identifies with Murray’s (2013: 18) claim that: “a commemorative site represents a kind of performative re-creation – of an event, a person, or a deed – that seeks to bind future generations to a moral lesson, if not to an actual truth”. Room 207 is a reminder of apartheid.

The unnamed days, in reference to apartheid, are commemorated by the generation that did not experience apartheid first-hand. This room prefigures apartheid, and as they stay in it, they are cognisant of the privileges they enjoy at present. Furthermore, as they live as a group in the same room, this room signifies “collective cultural identity” (Rafapa, 2014: 68). Being in the city, and in this room, now turned a residential area, constitutes part of what Melissa Myambo (2010) considers as black strategies of the reclamation of city spaces. The change of usage of this room from being a hotel during apartheid to its present residential status echoes spatial demographic shifts in the urban landscape in South Africa.

The events in *Room 207* are told through the voice of an intrusive narrator who adopts an oral, conversational style. This narrator manages to question and reveal multiple realities of characters. This aspect of character narration is a product of narrative focalisation, as the main character becomes the central figure upon whom events and narrations revolve (Phelan, 1996). Genette (1980: 189, 190) defines focalisation as the orientation of the narrator to privilege certain narrative events. The scholar further identifies a “focal character” as that character from whom other characters embed their different voices (Genette, 1980: 192). Moele’s intrusive narrator can thus be regarded as a focal character, from whom other multiple focalisations, in this particular case, the voices of the other characters in the novel, are embedded within his own. *Room 207* features what Genette (1980: 190) and Hogan (2013: 29) view as internal focalisation in which the consciousness of a single narrator implicates the subject positions and the subject matter in the narratives. This narrator introduces us to their “home” by first acknowledging the primacy of his narrative position before that of others: “I stay there in Room 207. We stay there.” The question of belonging is at once ambivalent – the personal and the collective are acknowledged independently. The narrator invites us/ the implied audience, to the room and introduces us/ the audience to the owners of the “home”. We are then initiated into the private lives of the six different owners of “Room 207”, who are S’busiso (whom we are initiated to call “Zulu-boy”), Molamo, D’nice, Modishi, Matome, and the narrator himself. The narrator invites the audience to get into the room (“come in, come in”), approximating an oral tale, and welcomes the audience to the home, which is their community of habitation (“This is our home, as you can see for

yourself”, 15). The narrator, and by extension, the narrative, entangles us and the perceived audience in the realities conceived in the novel.

Mgqolozana’s *Unimportance* is a racy semi-epistolary novel that features the life of a campus student called Zizi in his quest to be elected as the president of the Students’ Representative Council (SRC), a students’ leadership body on campus. This position reflects the protagonist’s larger dream to follow in the footsteps of Steve Biko, who was a firebrand anti-apartheid activist and a student leader of the SRC in earlier days (Biko, 1978a). Zizi, the first-person narrator of *Unimportance*, is a highly self-conscious individual. The narrator entertains a hassle-free social life, but he is in a university environment where his personal struggles are thrust into the limelight. He entertains imaginary thoughts of relating with a girl who is “prettier, sharper, [more] respectful, with a less complicated background”, and who has read “a little bit of Biko” (Mgqolozana, 2004: 4). However, he has a girl, at present, called Pamodi, who does not match those expectations. He also has a low regard for Pamodi on account of her social upbringing. He feels sorry for himself, and despite constant thoughts of leaving her for someone else, he finds himself moving on with her.

A novel like *Unimportance*, by taking a semi-epistolary mode, in which the narrative experiences of the protagonist are intertwined with a narrative mode that shifts focus between past and present while allowing the narrator to focalise on particular personal experiences, reflects Genette’s (1980) view concerning narrative entanglement. Genette (1980; 115, 190) argues that narratives that evoke the same event multiple times and are constructed around a single hero who is also the narrator are epistolary in nature. *Unimportance* uses a narrator who addresses himself to the events encased in the text, and then presents his own experiences as it were in a journal and letter. By virtue of what he does in the novel, Zizi retains the ambiguity of being both a protagonist, in the pursuit of an objective end, and an antagonist, on account of his character flaws and propensity to wrongs. This particular posture leads us to question his responsibility, not just to/wards himself, but also towards the entire university community, to whom he is obligated as an aspiring student leader. The entire novel is largely a rendition of the last few hours into the launching of his manifesto at a scheduled university debate for all the aspirants, but this is overshadowed by his personal life, that puts into question his ethical stance, especially on students’ morality and responsibility. The text takes the immediate present as the point of the narration, giving it a rich and immediate urgency. This sense of immediacy registers the personal and emotional divisions of the protagonist.

On the one hand, Zizi is fighting for a political position that requires not only his visibility on campus but also expects him to be a morally gratuitous individual. On the other hand, Zizi aspires to be anonymous, revealing a fractious identity of self that goes against public expectations. His divided self reflects R.D. Laing's (1960) exposition on the insecurities of the ontological self whose identity is under threat. Zizi's struggle to be invisible is perhaps informed by the view that he is historically, politically, and emotionally connected to the deep historical and cultural problems explored in the novel. Zizi wants to be invisible to the public by claiming that it is befitting for him to remain unimportant on campus. Zizi's effacement of his public image is an attempt to be inconspicuous so that his life is not subjected to intense public scrutiny. He understands the moral significance of the responsibility expected of his position as a student leader, and he seems, on account of his personal weaknesses, which he acknowledges, first to himself, and later to the public by way of a political manifesto, to be fully conscious of his own divided self. Zizi understands and recognises the ambiguity of his position: "Everything you do, no matter how small or private, is illuminated. Your actions and non-actions are put on a pedestal. For you, there is only one context – importance – and everything has to fit into that equation" (*Unimportance*, 125).

Zizi's realisation of public expectation of a *responsible* leader leads him to undertake a forensic examination of his divided self. He makes a passionate plea in the thinking that he should be believed, and in so doing, he positions himself as the focal narrator whose interests must come before those of others. Zizi envisages an aspect of contradiction in his behaviour in ways that are quite similar to the narrator in *Room 207*. In *Room 207*, for example, the narrator hates Matome's shoplifting ways, only for him to identify wholesomely with his stealing as a means of survival, and to even seem to think that Matome was always right, and to take him later as a role model. Their behaviour can be read using Bakhtin's (1984) view that textual multivoicedness results from the ambiguous position of the narrator and the voice on account of inconsistency in character. In such voices, we find extreme persuasions that lie between opposing ends, and which strive for coherence through a maze of historical and social situations (Ruf, 1997). In some ways, such voices can also be regarded as resistant voices in the manner in which they tend to deploy violence and bad language. In gesturing towards the unreliable, the characters benefit from instances of self-deception and self-condemnation and the ambiguities that arise out of them. Narrative unreliability, as Phelan (1989: 18) contends, functions to negotiate multiple realities in texts featuring inauthentic characters. Although these characters understand the appropriate mode of conduct acceptable in their situations, they choose to be inconsistent and unreliable. Their ethical choices,

therefore, remain ambiguous. Zizi's unreliability stems from the contradictions in his inner self. The questions that dog his private life are directed at his inner self, and revolve around the tensions between his past and his present.

If Zizi's unreliability stems from entanglements with his inner self, Bafana's unreliability is a product of the confrontation between his underachieving self against an over-obligating community. Bafana, the protagonist in *After Tears*, plays up to the historical gallery by adopting a pretentious personality. Bafana is the first-person narrator in Niq Mhlongo's novel who is guided by illusions regarding the limits of his educational and financial aspirations (Tsehloane, 2010: 81). In the novel, the narrator records, in a journalistic form, his experiences between "November 22, 1999" to "Tuesday, May 9, 2000". The recorded period marks the narrator's intense moments of personal confusion, between the time he heads out of the University of Cape Town after his dismal failure as a student of Law, back to his home in Soweto, and the time he leaves Soweto after practising as a lawyer (with fake certificates), and his ultimate escape to a squatter camp far away from home. This short period is a racy moment of self-reflection and personal confusion of the narrator. His sense of unreliability stems principally from the ambiguity of his stand within his family and community, which demands more from him than what he can practically give.

Quite interestingly, Dingamanzi Makhedama Njomane, popularly known as Dingz, the first-person narrator in Mhlongo's novel *Dog Eat Dog*, effaces both the inner self and the community by projecting a situation where his own self-interest comes to bear. Mhlongo's novel represents a society of contrasting social values that are made prominent by the ever-changing social and economic boundaries between the city and the township (Tsehloane, 2010: 81). In the attempt to fit into this society, Dingz has to abdicate his communal obligations and become a street-wise individual in order to survive (Rafapa, 2014: 60, 61). I consider Dingz's unreliability through the lens of Phelan's (1989) theory that some unreliable voices maintain subservience to inauthenticity in the pursuit of a subjective, non-empathetic, selfish end. Dingz's unreliability stems from his desire to misrepresent his own situations and circumstances in order to wilfully benefit at a personal level. Dingz is a university student facing a tough time trying to get a bursary, and in the process, through his own first-person admission, makes ethically problematic choices. Dingz is also a character who experiences intense pangs of personal uncertainty. We observe instances of escapism in Dingz's behaviour. The principal source of estrangement in Dingz's life is his penchant for perversion in an immoral universe. The novel is told from his subjective first-person point of view. He emerges as an unreliable narrator whose speech, actions and mannerisms communicate a

significant degree of unreliability. This aspect of unreliability is explored in greater detail in Chapter Five of this thesis.

#### **2.4 Self-reflexive Voices: Quest for Redeeming Empathy**

In post-conflict societies, after the dust of the past has settled, individuals and communities typically introspectively search for closure. In such contexts, individuals process redemption from past experiences through embracing empathy and consideration for others (Zahavi, 2014). According to Zahavi (2014), questions of empathy are communal, and they manifest when individuals and communities recognise the social hierarchies that exist among them. Empathy, following Zahavi (2014), can best be exercised at the level of the first-person perspective. For Zahavi (2014: 19), the first-person point of view connects us to the inner self, which envisages instances of deep self-reflexivity. I call attention to this aspect of the first-person point of view in recognising the significance of self-reflexive voices in envisaging an empathetic and responsible South African future. My primary objective in this section is to evaluate some of the ways in which the texts under consideration, through first-person narrative strategies, imagine an empathetic future through self-reflexivity. Ellis (1997: 129), writing on the nature of truth in narrative voices, argues:

Narrative truth seeks to keep the past alive in the present; through narrative, we learn to understand the meanings and significance of the past as incomplete, tentative, and revisable according to the contingencies of present life circumstances and our projection of our lives into the future.

Ellis (1997) draws our attention to the role of self-reflexivity in thinking through estrangement from, and entanglement with, the past. Ellis (1997) emphasises identity reconstruction as grounded on the desire of individuals to compare themselves with other selves, even as they imagine and construct their separate worlds. I draw from this position to argue how the authors considered, and their characters, tell their stories intersubjectively to reconstruct their identities, even as they place themselves within certain frames of emotional and ethical understanding.

Some of the prominent intersubjective stories to have come out of South Africa at the end of apartheid are the stories of victims of apartheid. Krog's *Country of My Skull*, for example, graphically delineates the scope of testimonies as laid out before the TRC and privileges stories of pain and suffering during apartheid. Shane Graham (2003:11) argues that the TRC hearings offered a "safe space" for many victims, through closure, and perpetrators, through amnesties. In commenting on the evocative nature of Krog's memoir, Graham (2009: 5) identifies the role that textual strategies play in evoking complex moral issues. Reading

through Ellis (1997: 126), I argue that Krog attempts to situate empathy through a nuanced, “therapeutic and evocative” narrative strategy by revisiting the lived experiences of trauma victims. By using narrative strategies such as character silences, ellipses, and authorial commentaries, the memoir manages to invite our attention to the suffering of victims during apartheid, and decidedly attempts to evoke our sympathies in that regard. Krog privileges the cries of pain and loss by one witness, Nomonde Calata, who testified in East London regarding the killing of her son, Fort Calata. Krog is personally attached to Calata’s narrative because she/Nomonde speaks to her as a South African and as a journalist. She is also traumatically affected by her cries of pain and loss as she memorises, and she thinks that her crying was “the beginning” of the TRC (*Country*, 42). The figuration of Mrs Calata’s loss and its constituting expressions of pain and loss seem to inform Krog’s empathy towards the black victims who appeared before the TRC, and whose voices are focalised in the memoir.

Another narrative that establishes empathy as a product of narrative orientation is Mqgolozana’s *Unimportance*. In this novel, the protagonist, Zizi, in contesting between individual freedoms and communal expectations, finds himself thrust into the public sphere where his ethical obligations are put into question. I argue that Zizi’s first-person voice can be interpreted through the lens of what Zahavi (2014: 91) terms narrative attachment, as the narrator positions himself at a point where his empathetic feelings can be measured. In a critical moment when he blames his visibility or importance on campus for the magnified ways in which students judged his actions, Zizi wishes for unimportance as a strategy in which he can bring himself at the level of the majority of the students, and therefore be able to speak to and for them in equal terms. This gesture of unimportance can also be read as his strategy to be at the same level as the people he represents so that he can evoke empathy for their situation. In many ways, Zizi tries to be at the level of the university students whom he represents.

A similar orientation of the narrative can be surmised in Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*. In choosing to represent four fictional “private” women, Ndebele’s novel puts forth competing voices of different South African women whose narratives are historical in character. The women in the *Ibandla* entertain the thought of reflecting on the past, now, as a crucial moment. It is the year 2002, long after their waiting, and they are “dealing with the consequences of the return of their husbands” (*The Cry*, 45). The reflection of the ramifications of apartheid in the present reads well into Arendt’s (1994: 745) thesis that individuals and communities can only appraise the past when the violence is over, and when communities can sit and review past obligations, omissions and commissions with respect to

the violence of the past. In reflection of Arendt's view, these women are processing their ethical positions in an attempt to find closure. They frame their conversation around the concept of intimacy, signalling the primacy of the personal narrative, and emphasising the role of empathy and responsibility in the quest for order in their personal lives. Cynthia Ward (1994: 938) argues that "projective empathy" signals a situation in which an "I" projects the "self" in their own circumstances. I consider that these women project their own empathetic situations, first as individuals, and later, to the South African community as a whole. Ward's (1994) view is reflected in the manner in which the women memorise history through the personal and the intimate; through a game of narrative retelling of their personal intimacies as pre-figured around the life and times of Winnie Mandela in contradistinction to their own (*The Cry*, 46). The game in the *Ibandla* means that each woman will have a private conversation with Winnie, including asking her questions, or re/telling stories of their intimate lives. In this engagement, their narratives advance empathetic understanding as they, to borrow from Andreea Ritivoi (2016: 70), "promote an understanding of experiences that are not [their] own." Their empathetic feelings, therefore, are related to the aspiration to care and to be responsible towards one of their own, and to themselves as individuals. In a gesture of self-understanding, they agree to invite Winnie into their fold ("Let's invite Winnie into our membership and make her the fifth woman-in-waiting in this room", *The Cry*, 46). To the women, Winnie's life is both subjective and intersubjective. These women recreate their identities in what Zahavi (2014: 100) identifies as a narrative understanding of other selves, and therefore position themselves in situations where empathy can be projected on the other. Peter Goldie (2000: 195) emphasises that for empathy to occur, the subjects, in this case, the women, have to recognise the presence of Winnie as the other in the narrative in order to register their empathetic responses. By posturing to/towards the subjective, they will criticise Winnie's failures in the attempt to understand their own. And secondly, they will attempt to speak to her, and for her, before Winnie speaks for herself.

Picking reflections from Ward (1994: 938), I would argue that the primary role of the women in the novel rests in their capacity to project the "conversion of the empathizer's self-interest into the interest of another." They are in the *Ibandla* primarily to offer "fellow feeling" to the woman whose life is symbolic of their lives as black South African women (Truscott, 2017). As will be advanced in greater detail in Chapter Three, empathy becomes one obligation from the individual to the community in the sense that extending empathy to others, in this particular case, to Winnie Mandela, amounts to creating an empathetic feeling towards oneself, and this is the testimony as felt and as narrated by the women. The

orientation of Ndebele's novel can be surmised through what Ward (1994: 938, 944) characterises as "projective empathy," in which one's "intelligence, self-esteem and courage, as well as ... gender, race, and socio-economic background" bear in the development of empathetic feeling in the novel.

As observed earlier, Ndebele's deployment of the slave narrative can be read as a strategy that reorients the past to fit in the present. I believe Ndebele's appropriation of past histories is an attempt to effect what Agnes Heller (1990) regards as the capacity of the narrative to reflect moral issues necessary for the creation of a responsible future. For me, Ndebele seems to reflect Heller's (1990) assertion that values espoused in the past may become contingent in the present. The reflective statements by the five women in the *Ibandla* collectively agree that the past can be forgotten; stories as shared are simply to make sense of the present now, and that is, perhaps, why Ndebele's text seems to have a different aesthetic and moral vision from Krog's memoir, as seen before.

As noted earlier, the four fictional women are making "responses" that bear on the construction of post-apartheid South Africa's nationhood (Driver, 2009). Delisiwe Dulcie S'Khosana, who has made sacrifices for her family for fourteen years, but is finally divorced, uses the weight of her personal experience to evaluate the allegations about Winnie's sexual promiscuity. She focuses on Winnie's letter that supposedly speaks about her promiscuity during the long wait for the return of Nelson Mandela from prison. She is critical of what she terms as betrayal of the trust that millions of South Africans bestowed on her as "Mother of the nation" (51). This reference achieves a discomfiting irony on the character and disposition of Winnie, seen through the lens of motherhood and marriage (Van Rooyen 2007: 99). It also stages the ambiguity between her role as a spiritual caregiver to millions of black South Africans and her accusation of complicity in criminal misconduct and infidelity (Penxa-Matholeni, 2022).

Marara Joyce Baloyi, the woman who blanked the memory of her unfaithful husband out of her consciousness, looks for a "point of entry" in/to the narrative (*The Cry*, 80). This point of entry emanates from her own embodied self as a woman who suffered infidelity. From this experience, she aligns her narrative with Winnie's. She criticises Winnie for what she thinks of as her lack of intimacy towards her husband upon getting out of prison ("I am looking for a point of entry to express my problem to you. You see, I'm tortured by my compulsion to paint a picture of family bliss in my home despite my awareness of my profound unhappiness at that home", *The Cry*, 80). Marara's narrative underscores the concept of home as "displacement" (Flockemann, 2017). Recognising the limits of her own

experience, and bringing it to bear from the first instance, Marara looks through Winnie's failure to reunite with her husband and uses that opportunity to look inward into her life. By speaking from her own experience outwardly into Winnie's, she underscores the emptiness of reunions. She blames the men who never cared for their women. As will be explicated further in Chapter Three, Marara's narrative foregrounds the delusions and divided empathies on account of family disruptions, prison, and exile in post/apartheid South Africa that generate divisions in the South African community.

Mannette Mofolo, a woman whose husband left her for the mines and never to return, represents the countless South African women whose partners were swallowed by apartheid's mine dumps. Mannette's husband, Lejone Mofolo stood on the opposite side of the heroic figure of Nelson Mandela, in Winnie's case. However, as compared to Winnie, Mannette speaks of her fidelity in all the years of her husband's absence. Mannette's role in the novel, thus, appears to create a narratorial distance from Winnie in order to explain the context of her responsibility and fidelity. When she criticises Winnie's failure to show Nelson Mandela a "map" upon his return, she opens the lid to Winnie's confession in the novel.

Winnie's entry into the narrative is a performative event. Winnie benefits from what Zahavi (2005) observes as the relevance of other embodied selves. In this case, she can process her own intersubjective identity by listening to others. Zahavi (2005: 161) identifies the ambiguity of a disembodied self, thus: "I am always already a stranger to myself, and therefore, open to others." By partaking in the communion, in which the other women process their intersubjective, corporeal experiences, Winnie is able to process her own self-reflexive self by referring to the embodied experiences of the other women. Therefore, women's conversations in the *Ibandla* function to transform Winnie out of her own limited personal and cultural environment to a platform where she can experience herself to eventually make a confession, and perhaps, benefit from the sympathy and empathy from the community of women, and outwardly, from the readers, and the intended primary audience, the South African public. Winnie's voice gives force and potency to the experiences of the women in the *Ibandla*. Winnie is tortured by the traumatic memory of the past: "How can they understand when I say memories carry me backwards on journeys of disintegration?" (173). This journey, to argue using Todorov (1995: 66), is a spiritual journey. It is a journey back into shame, especially at the point of confession.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has offered an in-depth exposition of the narrative and voicing strategies employed in several post-apartheid South African texts chosen for study. It has paid attention

to specific elements of the narrative that reflect first-person experiences of the characters and narrators in these texts. These experiences, this chapter contends, are illuminated by the position and orientation of the author and narrators/ characters in the specific literary works. The chapter has proceeded from the premise that the first-person point of view amplifies the orientation and position of narrators and of characters, and to a significant degree, of authors, and this disposition foregrounds voices as critical in the imagination of social and ethical concerns.

In particular, this chapter has argued that Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*, Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, and the selected stories in Ivan Vladislavić's *Missing Persons and Other Stories* and *Propaganda by Monuments and Other Stories* represent voices of the past largely through estrangement. This estrangement is manifest variously in Krog's narrative voice as an author, the voice of the indirect narrator and the voices of the female characters in Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, the indirect (and mediated) narrative voices in Vladislavić's "Propaganda by Monuments", the direct first-person narrative voice in "The WHITES ONLY Bench", and the first-person narrator(s) in "The Prime Minister is Dead" and "Tsafendas's Diary". These texts, by virtue of their obligation to historical realities, employ voices that signify detachment from the painful realities of the past.

Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog*, and *After Tears*, Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207*, and Thando Mgqolozana's *Unimportance* are arguably examples of texts that represent a sense of ambivalence with respect to the post-apartheid dispensation. Mhlongo's first-person narrators, Dingz and Bafana, in *Dog Eat Dog* and *After Tears*, respectively, the narrators in Moele's novel, as well as Zizi in *Unimportance*, exhibit personal disorientation and fracture in their voices. Their first-person voices disavow the past and hunger for forgetting the trauma of the past. However, these narrators find it difficult to survive through memories that seem difficult to rationalise or forget. The narrators position themselves as inauthentic and unreliable in their posture to survive through present contradictions.

Self-reflexive voices, the chapter surmises, position first-person narrators along the plane of empathy and responsibility as ethical pursuits. Krog's *Country of My Skull*, Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, and Mgqolozana's *Unimportance* exhibit a narrative orientation towards self-reflexivity. These texts signify their orientation towards multiple, competing, and at times contradictory perspectives. These self-reflexive voices privilege empathy and consideration as redeeming to the individual, especially in the pursuit of closure over the historical burden of the past. The next chapter, Chapter Three, considers estranged

voices in two selected works that are seen as narratives that mediate the historical reality of apartheid.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ETHICAL AMBIGUITIES IN THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH IN *COUNTRY OF MY SKULL* AND *THE CRY OF WINNIE MANDELA*

#### 3.1 Introduction

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa was formed in 1995 to harness together a record of injustices committed during apartheid in the pursuit of reconciliation and forgiveness between perpetrators and victims. The TRC marked a critical turning point that signalled an ultimate closure of a notorious past by privileging a discourse on the search for truth as a necessary step towards building a new ethics for the country. Post-apartheid South African literature has, therefore, taken a keen interest in the TRC and has endeavoured to probe the depths of its work in terms of its ethical implications. This literature has also, more broadly, taken an overall ethical turn. In the previous chapter, I evaluated three different competing first-person narrative voices that structure the orientation of particular narratives that manifest ethical concerns. In this chapter, I evaluate narrative strategies of the first-person point of view in Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* and in Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, two texts of the post-apartheid dispensation that mediate the TRC and its multiple aspects of truth-telling. It pays specific attention to memory as baggage from the past to illustrate how individual memories shape testimony, and how testimony, as mediated through narrative strategies of the first person, implicates ethical ambiguities. In the first section, the chapter investigates the different ways in which Krog's authorial voice is implicated in the search for truth. Focusing on the structure of the memoir and on authorial intervention strategies, the section reflects on the TRC's practices and the ambiguities of truth-telling from that context. In the second section, the focus is on Ndebele's choice of form, reflected in the use of an implied narrator as merged with a set of female voices that inform the novel's polyphonic status. By being particular on the text's writing outward from fictional poetics to the lived historical realities of the post-apartheid society, the section focalizes on the experiences of women inscribing their selves in narratives in the shadows of the TRC as a metaphor for telling the truth.

The chapter draws theoretical insights from Paul Ricoeur (2004), Roland Barthes (1973), Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), and Tzvetan Todorov (2010) to reflect on the multiple truths emanating from South Africa's symbolic histories that render ethical pursuits ambiguous, as "truth", "good", "evil", remain contested. It also relies on studies on truth commissions from a number of post-conflict contexts, gender studies, and memory studies to contextualize the debate.

### **3.2 Mediated Truths: Ethics and Narrative Intrusion in *Country of My Skull***

In many post-traumatic contexts, truth commissions have acted as instruments for commissioning a decided break from the past. Truth commissions act as metaphors upon which individuals and communities negotiate closure following an estranging past. Writing out of her personal experiences with a number of truth commissions around the world, Priscilla Hayner (2001: 4) points out the importance of seeking closure for individuals and communities in order to move forward:

While individual survivors struggle to rebuild shattered lives, to ease the burning memory of torture suffered or massacres witnessed, society as a whole must find a way to move on, to recreate a livable space of national peace, build some form of reconciliation between former enemies, and secure these events in the past.

Securing the past in the present requires honest reckoning with the actual truth of the past. Reflecting on truth commissions, Teresa Godwin Phelps (2004: 65) argues that truth commissions do not envisage the whole truth. Because a truth commission is a product of past misunderstandings and disagreements, its inception is performative in that it begins from a premise of competing alternative viewpoints. Its institution serves to provide a context for the transmutation of the different voices of the past in the attempt to produce a coherent, unified voice for all. Phelps (2004: 90) asserts that the mass of evidence before truth commissions offers a sufficient store of narrative experiences to mediate between the “former” country and the “new” imagined country. In such contexts, personal stories rendered to truth commissions are used to construct larger, symbolic patterns, which ultimately work to construct the truth about the past in order to read the future (Phelps, 2004: 80). Tristram Hunt (2004: 198) advises us that truth commissions “are perhaps best approached not as an archive, but as element”; they are not in themselves conclusive, but reflective, and even though they open aetiologies of truth and insights into the understanding of a nation’s transition from the past to the present, they are in themselves inadequate in capturing the entire essence of a disoriented past.

To deal with the complexity of truth, South Africa had identified four typologies of truth, namely, the “factual or forensic truth; personal or narrative truth; social or ‘dialogue’ truth and healing and restorative truth” (TRC, Vol 1, 1998: 2-3). Mark Sanders (2007: 150-152) argues that the different perspectives of truth, from forensic truth, with its element of historical verifiability, to personal truths as reflected in individual testimonies, to social, and to restorative truths, which would anchor such pursuits as forgiveness and reconciliation, envisioned the totality of the mandate of the TRC in terms of its practice of truth-telling. In

the ideological framing of the TRC, particularly in terms of dealing with witness testimonies, *Ubuntu* functioned to direct conversations surrounding responsibility, reciprocity and forgiveness (Sanders, 2007: 25). However, scholars such as Carl Stauffer (2015) maintains that the TRC dwelt expansively on the circumstances of victims and perpetrators, while such concerns as justice, responsibility, and restitution, were not emphasised.

Reflecting on South Africa's TRC, Hayner (2001: 76, 84) surmises that the TRC did not uncover all possible "truths", conceding that it was impossible to identify "official truth" in circumstances with competing truths. South Africa's past history is replete with contested accounts. In the preface to the fifth edition of *South Africa: A Modern History* (2000: xxiv), T.R.H. Davenport and Christopher Saunders acknowledge the limitations of historical knowledge in South Africa. Rewriting some chapters in entirety in the new edition, Davenport and Saunders (2000: xxvi) acknowledge that the South African past "continues to 'change', and South Africa will need to be kept in touch with the continuing debate about what happened, lest myth-makers take over again". The historians' apprehensions are perhaps informed by the existence of many narratives that continue to redefine and shape the contested past.

One such narrative that continues to receive wide evaluation on its historical relevance to South Africa is that of the TRC. The actual happenings at the TRC represented one version of truth that was officially acknowledged as providing ground and reason for breaking away from the past (Van Vuuren, 2009). The post-apartheid/ post-TRC period has witnessed a growing body of literature that mediates the experiences of the TRC. Desmond Tutu, who served as the chairperson of the Commission, layers his experiences and insights in *No Future without Forgiveness* (1999) – a personal narrative that espouses his belief in forgiveness in the light of *Ubuntu*, an African ideological ethical precept that emphasizes on commonality and collective responsibility. Alex Boraine, who served as his deputy, records his reflections in *A Country Unmasked: Inside South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (2000). Other scholars, such as Richard Wilson (2001), Fiona Ross (2003), Mark Sanders (2000), Paul Gready (2011), and Antjie Krog (1998) have reflected incisively on the mandate, procedure, and witnessing practices of the TRC. Reflecting on some of the limitations of the TRC, Wilson (2001: 227) argues that truth was not clearly defined and contextualized in the TRC mandate. Gready (2011: 45) avers that the lack of an official history meant that the TRC would provide a "state sanctioned history", which would then be used as a basis for nation building. The TRC then functioned, in some way, to document some aspects of South Africa's historical truth. Davenport and Saunders (2000: 690) consider

the TRC as one of the milestones in the country's history. A text that has had the greatest critical acclaim with regard to how it has reflected on the TRC narrative is Krog's *Country of My Skull*, as the author was part of the TRC's witnessing substructure, and also with a deep inflection on the author's personal experience.

*Country of My Skull* is Krog's memoir that details her personal reflection of the testimonies and confessions as submitted by witnesses before the TRC. In the mediated memoir, Krog intersperses her own personal experiences as a journalist mandated to report on events of the TRC with the actual reports of the victims, the perpetrators, and the work of the commissioners (Garman, 2007). Krog draws her authority as a South African intellectual to mediate critical images of the past in the attempt to lay a foundation for a different post-apartheid future beyond the scars of apartheid. Krog writes from a privileged position as an intellectual and as a journalist who participated actively during the proceedings of the TRC. Addressing Krog's position as a public intellectual with immense symbolic capital, Anthea Garman (2009) argues that Krog negotiates cross-cutting responsibilities in the public sphere through her creative capabilities as a poet, translator, and journalist. As a mediated text, Krog recasts and reworks witness statements and contexts of the testimonies, and offers her intellectual and philosophical insights on events surrounding the TRC. In consequence, Krog extensively makes use of this multivoicedness of mediated truths by interpellating national issues with personal and communal stories. Krog's mediated narrative truths demonstrate the inclination of the narrative to multiple and alternative views, without infringing on different and competing points of view. Krog's own stylistic acuity through her own work as a journalist involved in the reportage of the TRC hearings gave her the leverage to use authorial interventions to mediate through other media, such as interviews, personal streams of consciousness, letters, personal communications, and intimate reflections during her radio shows.

A key feature of her writing strategies is her deep insight into the thematic issues that prevail around race and gender politics in South Africa. Andreas Visagie (2007: 1) locates Krog's "profile as a writer and public figure" as conditioned by "a poetics of dissidence, even when it concerns the minutiae of stylistic choices in poetry but more often when gender and racial politics are in the scope of her critique." Krog arguably deploys this identity forcefully in *Country of My Skull*, as she navigates between her intellectual and authorial capabilities on the one hand, and her commitment as a media personality and public figure towards representing a vexatious moment in her country as it detached itself from its nefarious past, on the other hand. Derek Attridge (1999) contends that a writer's obligation is determined

through the ways in which he/she engages with the representation of the other, chiefly in terms of responsibility. Writing regarding the creation of obligation, responsibility, fidelity, and ethics in texts, Attridge argues that “responsibility is an ethical term; it implies an ought – to be responsible for the yet non-existent other is to be under obligation; to respond responsibly to the otherness of a literary work is to do justice to it” (1999: 28). Attridge’s observations intimate the symbiotic relationship between textual creation and appreciation. Texts implicate not only authors but also an engagement with readers.

In the memoir, Krog mixes genres, from factual presentations of the events as they unfolded in the TRC, to fictional accounts and personal anecdotes; from the use of creative/poetic expressions layered with a critical self-conscious choice of language, to academic treatises that offer reflections on contending issues. The work is a parchment; a collage of different mediated texts and points of view (Rostan, 2007). The central feature of Krog’s text is the drawing together of diverse witness accounts, stories of victims, and witness statements of perpetrators as rendered to the TRC. These accounts are merged with historical accounts of past truth commissions, which offer a context for the TRC and frame its thematic structuration. In many instances, the author orders, matches, and appropriates different contexts, texts, and authorities to the South African context. Krog’s inter-textual references to Germany and Auschwitz, to Chile and its truth commission, to Bulgaria, as well as to scholars from those particular contexts, provide a frame for the appropriation of the experiences from those similar post-traumatic situations (*Country*, 14, 24, 238). By providing case studies which are in support her own authorial position, Krog justifies and places her text within a schema of textual authorities that continue to define ongoing engagement with history, memory, and ethics in post-traumatic contexts. In all this, the author’s voice manifests through a mediating first-person point of view, whereby her direct participation in the TRC framed her as a direct and secondary witness, as reflected in the witnessing practices of the TRC. Yvette Hutchison (2013: 36) observes that the TRC relied on two types of audiences: those who were physically present during the acts of witnessing before the commissioners, and those who would listen to the mediated versions through the media. Having been a journalist who was not only present during the witnessing, but also involved in the transcriptions and transmissions of the testimonies, Krog’s voice estimates these audiences. Following on the experiences of Holocaust survivors, D. G. Myers (1999: 276) argues that the act of bearing witness constitutes one aspect of proffering responsibility in a collective context. Krog’s witnessing and reflections/ mediations in the first person of the major experiences of the TRC can be thought of in a similar light – that of exacting

responsibility by embracing a collective estrangement from the violence of the past. Krog's point of view in this text is therefore important. Susan Sniader Lanser (1981) argues that point of view in literary texts functions as a mediating strategy that can be used to amplify the thematic concerns. Signifying the position of the author in the telling, Lanser points out that the "authorial voice is an *extrafictional* entity whose presence accounts, for example, for organising, titling, and introducing the fictional work. This extrafictional voice, the most direct textual counterpart for the historical author, carries all the *diegetic* authority of its (publicly authorised) creator and has the ontological status of historical truth" (122). Krog's authorial voice carries the authority of the narrative truth of the TRC in many significant ways.

Krog's narrative does not reflect on the experiences of the TRC in totality. Instead, the author selects and orders certain specific experiences to suit her aesthetic and moral vision. Through the structuring device of authorial intrusion, Krog interchanges between testimonies. The author intrudes into the textual structure of the witnessing, while attempting to mediate the factual witness testimonies. David Lodge (1992: 10) defines intrusive authorship as a strategy that not only calls "attention to the act of narrating" but also "claims a kind of authority" on the telling. An intrusive authorial voice contains "a certain ironic self-consciousness" that directs the author's perspective on the narrative (Lodge, 1992: 10). Krog interrupts the sequence of the TRC narrative as an author in a bid to reflect on a certain thematic orientation, which is to reflect on the TRC as a metaphor in the construction of a post-apartheid moral sensibility. Jacob Mey (1999: 221) defines authorial intrusion as "the author's extending a helping hand to the character", which presupposes a kind of mediation to achieve the author's intended objective. Intrusion then performs the role of effecting a certain ethical imperative.

Paul Dawson (2016: 150) defines authorial intrusion as "any type of narratorial statement that foregrounds the storyteller and appears supplementary to the report of the story." These statements include direct authorial statements, gnomic statements and metafictional commentaries. They also include external focalisations on actions of characters as well as authorial commentaries on "the narrative act" (Dawson, 2016: 150). Authorial intrusions, as argued by Dawson (2016), manifest different ways in which an author provides supplementary and personalised commentaries and observations on issues canvassed in texts. Dawson goes on to argue that authorial intrusions function in interrupting the narrative, both in terms of time, and in terms of plot sequencing. *Country of My Skull* makes extensive use of

authorial intrusions. I argue that these authorial intrusions function in mediating specific ethical realities in the work.

Krog's authorial intrusion from the onset can be regarded as the owner's negotiation and delimitation of the mandate of the TRC. By using a strategy of narrative equivocation, Krog exhibits an ambiguity that reveals the prevarication around the formation of the TRC. Roland Barthes (1973) argues that "equivocation" constitutes a wavering between a strand of truth and a snare ("as a kind of deliberate evasion of truth", 75). Barthes (1973: 145) defines equivocation as existing within contradictory meanings:

[The] braid of two understandings creates an equivocation. And in fact the equivocation results from two voices, received on an equal basis: there is an interference of two lines of destination. Put another way, the *double understanding*, the basis for a play on words ... if the play on words seems to be addressed to one person only (for example the reader), this person must be imagined as being divided into two subjects, two cultures, two languages, two zones of listening.

Looked at from Barthes's (1973) perspective, equivocation results in the multiplicity of voices. Equivocation enables the author to entertain ambiguity by creating two or more levels of understanding. At the beginning of the memoir, Krog's equivocal voice is consistent with the false starts of the TRC. Krog's equivocal tone also manifests when she tries to negotiate the place and position of the South African intellectual in the re/definition of the reporting of the TRC. In her attempt to make the South African story as rendered through the TRC to cohere with the aims and mandate of the TRC, she uses her voice to protect and dissuade alternative, potentially factually incoherent voices from taking hold and sway of the country's historical moment. She constantly uses authorial equivocation to generate an ambiguity. On the one hand, Krog uses her intellectual capital to evaluate the singularity of apartheid to South Africans, seen, for example when she delimits by casting aspersions on the active role of "German, Dutch and Chilean" journalists, when she believes they are totally out of touch with the South African reality (*Country*, 14). On the other hand, she borrows extensively from the traumatic experiences from Germany and Chile, where the journalists come from, in order to buttress the South African TRC (*Country*, 14, 23, 237). By privileging her narrative and her authorial voice, Krog effectively positions herself as a reliable narrator, or at least one who could be believed, and who has the authority to report on the TRC.

Krog's mediated testimonies of the TRC inflect on the ambiguities of truth. Ricoeur (2004: 166) argues that an "archive of testimony" is a narrative that "gives a narrative follow-

up to declarative memory”. Krog’s text can be regarded as an archive of testimony that follows up on memories as declared officially in the chambers of the TRC. Part of Krog’s authorial intention is to attempt to present actual testimonies as given before the TRC. However, in re-presenting the testimonies, Krog heavily layers different zones of meaning by use of a highly intrusive voice, which acts as a shadow in the retelling of the actual testimonies. J U Jacobs (2000: 40) argues that the text “reflects on its own processes of narration and on the nature of narrative.” It is a text that not only draws our attention to its intertextuality but also to its fictionality, especially as it continually attempts to provide alternative suppositions to testimonies as rendered. It then positions itself within narrative truth, which “was defined by the Commission [as] not necessarily synonymous with veracity.” Krog confines her orientation in the narrative to the private/ personal re-tellings of the testimonies, preferring to transfer interpretive authority to the listener(s)/ teller(s): “... every listener decodes the story in terms of truth. Telling is therefore never neutral, and the selection and ordering try to determine the interpretation” (*Country*, 85). Sanders (2007: 141) captures Krog’s ethical dilemma in the writing of her memoir, when he avers that: “The more intensively the writer-intellectual assumes responsibility, seeking to make good, the more the wrong and its consequences for the wrong doer are magnified”. Sanders’s statement, in reference to Krog’s re/presentation of perpetrators in the text, equally applies to Krog’s ambiguous narrative position. Krog inter-textually avers, while recounting experiences around Desmond Tutu, the TRC chairperson, and Joe Mamasela, a black police informant connected to a number of murders, that hers is “a new story that I constructed from all the other information I picked up over the month about people’s reactions... I am not reporting or keeping minutes. I’m telling” (*The Cry*, 170). Krog’s epistemic definition of her authorial role in this instance, and indeed in *Country of My Skull* as a whole, is a strategy that focalises on the writer’s metafictional commentary that conflates the ambiguity of her writing strategies. Phelps (2004: 61-65), reflecting on writing on truth commissions, argues that appropriating traumatic experiences renders the experiences of primary victims secondary. Appropriation equates to benefitting from the experience of another. Krog’s self-reflective authorial voice then emerges as making an impassioned plea to look at her telling as being separate from the actual experiences of the primary participants. Krog projects that she mediates the first layer of the testimonies in order to make up the second layer, which contains her version of truth. Krog (1998: 170-171) avers:

I am busy with the truth... my truth ... Of course it is quilted together from hundreds of stories that we’ve experienced or heard about in the past two

years. Seen from my perspective, shaped by my state of mind at the time and now also by the audience I'm telling the story to.

Krog's narrative quilts witness testimonies of victims. The author foregrounds the first narrative of the TRC as that of the victims. She prefigures the historical significance of the Eastern Cape, as a place that is largely symbolic of "the moral struggles around colonialism, expansionism, race and freedom" (*The Cry*, 33). This place marks a defining moment for the TRC, especially in the context of symbolising the start of the voices of women victims. Krog uses gnomic statements to express her shock regarding the significance of the Eastern Cape as "this scalp of green silence", that "turns us inside out, that renders us bare lips" (*The Cry*, 33). The Eastern Cape is represented as a place of historical violence, which is manifest in Krog's use of metaphors of suffering, of scalps and skulls (*The Cry*, 33-34). Krog's extensive use of graphic images pervades the testimonies, capturing the gory mood of the Eastern Cape. The images also reflect on the author's linguistic strategies. In one instance, with respect to witness testimonies of police brutality, Krog proffers witness statements that are not connected to a single victim, but to different unidentified victims (*The Cry*, 27). In other instances, witness statements are provided in the frame of an interlocution, such as is seen in the dialogue between Gobodo-Madikizela and a witness, Lucas Baba Sikwepere, in which the former mediates the testimony of the latter – a man who had lost his sight on account of a violation (*The Cry*, 30-31). Other witnesses are identified by name, especially those whose stories are historically magnified, such as those killed in Cradock, and more particularly, those who meet Krog's aesthetic and moral vision (*The Cry*, 32).

A prominent witness, Thomzama Maliti, testifying on the killing of Nombulelo Delato by members of her own community on account of the latter having been rumoured to have been an "impimpi" (spy) for the apartheid police, advances her testimony, thus: "IT WAS THE END of October – 10<sup>th</sup> October 1985 ... She was on her way to work, two young men approached her. Now they were five..." (*The Cry*, 34). This testimony is significant as it lacks verifiability and chronological consistency. It also appears to heavily depend on the witness's (limited) recollections at the time, which may have been affected by the intensity of the traumatic experience. In negotiating the significance of witness testimonies and their engagement with truth, Ricoeur (2004: 161) imagines the problems with testimony:

Memory [through testimony] ... resists not only explication and representation, but even its being placed into some archival reserve, to the point of maintaining itself at the margins of historiography and of throwing doubt on its intention to be truthful.

Ricoeur's views capture the instability of testimonies in so far as truth-telling is concerned. Mrs Maliti's testimony, at face value, appears discordant. Though Mrs Maliti's witness statement is inconsistent, it does not foreclose the actual truth that Delato was indeed killed, and in the circumstances canvassed in her testimony. In the question of personal testimony, it emerges that truth, or the lack of it, emanates from the subjectivity and the indefinable nature of the testimony itself. For example, it is difficult to ascertain the actual time when Delato was killed, owing to inconsistencies in Mrs Maliti's testimony. The lack of chronology in time casts doubts on the accuracy and verifiability of her testimony, yet it must be acknowledged that is her truth, framed by her, and as refracted through her memory. It is difficult to ascertain where the truth lies, or where lies the truth; It is difficult to ascertain truth in circumstances where testimonies are heavily reliant on language, including on its limits, and expressiveness (Ricoeur, 2004: 162). Furthermore, non-verbal expressions of the witnesses, such as "the cries, sighs, gestures and silences" and their implication on the witness's emotional intensity and truth-telling, are often difficult to decipher, or consider, and which, in the particular case of the TRC, "were not included in the transcripts or reports" (Hutchison, 2013: 31, 32).

Ricoeur (2004: 164) argues that witness testimonies are unstable and fluid. Because testimonies carry individual and collective voices, and because they are bound by the boundaries of language and authorial narrative devices, the investigation of the truth in narrative is wading through uncertainty. Giorgio Agamben (1999) argues that witness statements never actually capture the actual truth, because they are often mediated. For example, survivors who provide statements regarding the deaths of their loved ones are limited experientially; they can never fully capture the essence and extent of the suffering of the deceased. Agamben (1999) observes:

The witness usually testifies in the name of justice and truth and as such his or her speech draws consistency and fullness. Yet here the value of testimony lies essentially in what it lacks; at its center it contains something that cannot be borne witness to and that discharges the survivors of authority. (*The Cry*, 34)

The authority in the narrative is a matter of credibility and believability. The survivors (and I would add, authors who mediate traumatic histories through narrative) can never speak authoritatively about the veracity of submitted statements. This dilemma pervades consistently in Krog's memoir.

One problematic testimony as recorded by Krog for the purposes of this argument is that of Nomonde Calata who gave her testimony with regard to the death of her husband, Fort

Calata, who was a member of the Cradock Four. The Cradock Four is a figuration of four anti-apartheid activists who were murdered by the police in 1985 at a place called Cradock. Her testimony is central on two accounts. Firstly, Calata's testimony is represented as a figuration of the TRC in terms of witnessing and truth-telling practices. Krog herself emotively and evocatively says that Calata's testimony, in its language, nuances, her cries of pain and loss as she memorised, was "the beginning" of the TRC (*The Cry*, 42). Secondly, the testimony itself reveals the glaring challenge of inscribing the authenticity of witness statements to the actual circumstances of victims. Synthesising the "truth" from her testimony with her black colleague/ journalist, Krog mediates her recorded testimony by choosing to play over the cassette to listen to her voice rather than to check on their recorded notes. Yet even this search for authenticity is broken when each of these academic scholars disagrees with the other on the full import of her testimony with regard to the South African situation. As for Krog, Calata's story is about suffering under apartheid. But for Kondlo, her black counterpart, her narrative is more about urbanisation, migration, and forced removals (*The Cry*, 38). In Krog's and Kondlo's mediation of Calata's testimony, we see the subjective understanding of memory, which is conditioned by the two interpreters' different racial backgrounds, which magnified separate lived realities of the black and white communities of South Africa. Each of these intellectuals has processed different meanings out of Calata's testimony. Both Krog and Kondlo are replaying the cassette and filling Calata's testimony with their memory and their versions of truth. This is the context that is provided from history from outside of the TRC itself.

A significant observation one makes while reading through Krog's mediation of witness testimonies is her punctuation of these testimonies with an authorial intervention in between witness statements. Krog registers her presence "at the birth of this country's language", immediately after witness statements of police victims at the Queenstown Massacre, as observed earlier (*The Cry*, 29). Then, after Mr Sikwepere's testimony, Krog interrupts the narrative to introduce her transmission of the testimonies through the media by employing "the full spectrum of hard news technology *and where necessary develop and reform them according to our needs* (*The Cry*, 31, emphasis added). Listening through these testimonies, Krog avers that "Truth" makes her "uncomfortable", preferring the word "lie" as she believes the latter manifested truth at a deeper level (*The Cry*, 36). Krog's constant equivocation by punning on the words "truth" and "lie" draws her readers' attention to the delicate manoeuvre one undertakes while looking for truth from witness statements. In addition, Krog orders the specific incidences according to her needs, by juxtaposing the

experiences of different victims (and perpetrators, as we will observe, subsequently). The exposition of the traumatic experiences of black victims of police brutality (*The Cry*, 28-31) gives way to the narrative exposition of black-on-black violence, marked by the killing of police informers (*The Cry*, 34-36). The witness evidence of police brutalities in the Eastern Cape is “balanced” with the testimony of Calata, regarding necklacing (burning) of informers (*The Cry*, 36-45). The narrative then gives way to police protection of killer gangs along the banks of the Vaal River and in KwaZulu-Natal (*The Cry*, 45). There is also an attempt to balance between black victims (like Calata, *The Cry*, 33-45) and white victims killed by the ANC bombings (*The Cry*, 46-48) in successive plot lines. Krog also attempts to “balance” between black and white atrocities, as seen when Krog compares white and black guerrilla tactics, signifying them as using similar strategies of deploying violence: “The operational tactics of both the A-team and the Amabutho echo some of the Vlaakplas rituals described” (*The Cry*, 46). Krog also juxtaposes Desmond Tutu, the chairperson of the TRC, and a firm believer in reconciliation and forgiveness, with Joe Mamasela, a police informer who was an alleged accomplice in the killing of Robert Mutase (a black police officer) and his wife, and who refused to apply for amnesty (*The Cry*, 152). In Chapter 15 (“It gets to all of us – From Tutu to Mamasela”), Krog advances her sympathies towards Tutu while hospitalized, reflecting on her convictions regarding his theological practices and their implications on the TRC narrative. The chapter, which focalises on mortality in the shadow of the sick Tutu, gives way to Mamasela’s evil dispositions.

Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short (2007: 141-143) argue that the violation of “objective chronology” in a narrative through the adoption of a strategy of “presentational sequencing” is used to achieve contradictory and or parallel meanings. Krog’s representations of testimonies approximate what James Phelan (2001) refers to as “redundant telling,” in which storylines and incidents are repeated over and over. Krog’s memoir uses Leech’s and Short’s (2007) and Phelan’s (2001) strategies by rehashing certain events of the TRC to repeatedly invoke notions of victimhood, guilt, remorse, or indifference with respect to particular testimonies. Such a kind of conflation universalizes suffering, removing the individual significance of events into a metaphorical realm.

This attempt at narrative balancing is imbued with ethical uncertainties. Phelps (2004), writing regarding the work of a number of truth commissions, argues that the balancing of traumatic experiences, or the ordering of them in a specific way, generates ambiguities. By successively propagating experiences of white victims versus black victims, as well as between perpetrators and victims, the author breaks the distance

between them. Krog's balancing of the memoir's narrative structure by interchanging or sequencing black victims with white victims, as well as white perpetrators with black perpetrators, is an aspect of plot that generates, in this particular case, uncertainty in the narration. By putting black experiences and white experiences in successive chronologies, the juxtaposition and its ambiguities as a textual feature, Krog then clashes white and black voices, creating an impression that black and white communities suffered in equal terms. By balancing testimonies in the plot, Krog conflates and jumbles up emotional experiences of different communities, thereby not only lowering the traumatic intensity of respective testimonies but also making victimhood and complicity be appreciated in equal measure. In re-ordering testimonies, or selecting which specific memories and testimonies mattered in the TRC, Krog manages to privilege the experiences of actors that mattered to her, while foreclosing those of others.

One ethical controversy that results from changing authorial positions is that it renders the pursuit of justice and moral responsibility ambiguous. When faced with a situation where perpetrators have to justify their past deeds, they negotiate their personal responsibility by trying to absolve themselves from blame, while blaming a collective will. Reflecting on the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a man who was involved in facilitating the holocaust, Hannah Arendt (1963) magnifies the ambiguities of individual responsibility after horrendous evil. Arendt's (1963) exposition reveals individual uncertainties when perpetrators are confronted with the horror of their actions, where their vulnerability on trial reveal the banality of their actions. In reading Eichmann, Arendt (1971: 417, 418) established a "phenomenon of evil deeds" in which she noted a "total absence of thinking" in the individual as they faced the monstrosity of their evil deeds during the trial. Exploring Hannah Arendt's concept of banality of evil, Susan Neiman (2010) argues that perpetrators of heinous crimes are excused of criminal misconduct while the victims end up being blamed. Krog's changing narrative positions shuffle between blaming white Afrikaner men for sustaining apartheid, while in other instances, vouching for a dignified treatment of the same perpetrators. In other instances, Krog appropriates responsibility to individuals along different scales. Krog's linguistic and poetic acumen finds expression in two successive chapters in which she mediates the notions of guilt with respect to two "architects" of violence in South Africa. The tone and mood in Chapter 20, dedicated to Winnie Mandela ("Mother Faces the Nation"), is more virulent than Chapter 21 (sub-titled, "Beloved Country of Grief and Grace"), chiefly about Botha's involvement in the chaos of apartheid. The tone and mood in the two chapters is glaringly different. Phelan

(1996: 220) defines voice as “the synthesis of a speaker’s style, tone, and values.” Phelan (1996: 45) also contends that voice is mediated by stylistic conventions, as well as diction and syntax. The stylistic options adopted by the author(s) are consistent with the values espoused in the text(s). Molly Hite (2010) argues that an author’s tone functions to delineate his or her narrative position. An author’s change of tone when in reference to different audiences and thematic connotations contributes to double-voicing in a text. Reading through Phelan and Bakhtin, Hite (2010: 250) observes that tone “plays a vital role in the Bakhtinian strategy of double-voicing, where an apparently authorial narrator directs a discourse towards at least two different audiences, who receive it with different meanings, affective connotations, and thus values.”

Hite (2010) observes that tone and attitude constitute an author’s intervening strategies that help him/her generate multiple meanings in a text. Krog’s biting satire and ironic self-consciousness are reflected in her attitude towards the requests for amnesties by alleged perpetrators, capturing it as a “show”, without any probative value in the construction of post-apartheid morality (*Country*, 68). “Those who helped people to lie then, are helping them now to tell the truth” (*Country*, 68) is ascribed to the lawyers who imprinted the innocence of their clients during the Caprill court hearings, only for them to appear before the TRC with their clients in their pursuit of amnesty. Krog’s ironic tone indicts the perpetrators’ posturing for amnesty.

Krog’s authorial positioning of Winnie Mandela and P.W. Botha as symbolic perpetrators in successive chapters not only brings out juxtaposition but also invites us to compare and contrast their “values” and ethical connotations. Chapter 20 is introduced cryptically in an ironic tone in reference to Winnie Mandela as “Mother Faces the Nation” (*Country*, 263). In the course of her authorial focalization, Krog figures Winnie through an image of a woman with a “miasma of scandal, arrogance, ambition, lies, and unbridled gangsterism”, stamping her as complicit in violence during apartheid (*Country*, 258). Krog looks at her as a reflection of “the character of Lady Macbeth” who conjures up evil in her family. Krog assesses perceptions of Winnie, thus:

...perhaps the character of Lady Macbeth encapsulates the diverse elements of Winnie’s personality most aptly – vaulting ambition, a capacity for ruthless conspiracy, abuse of devotion, the smell of blood ... the world is not here to admire a deficient, unrepentant black woman; the world has come to watch us burn a witch. (*Country*, 245)

In her portrayal of Winnie, Krog actively employs authorial distancing. The figuration of Winnie through the images of Lady Macbeth, and of a witch, heighten perceptions of guilt, and the imagery is directed at Western and African audiences respectively. In the context referred to above, Krog delineates six “perceptions” regarding the character and person of Winnie, employing a strategy in which the narrator’s voice is intertwined with an implied narrator to envision the different manifestations of Winnie.

In contrast, in Chapter 21, Krog employs a gentler, calmer imagery (“Beloved Country of Grief and Grace”). In this chapter, she avers that good and evil “are never absolute ... Every good is imperfect in its own way and every evil has an underlying potential to be good” (261). By equivocally presenting good and evil on the same axis, Krog provides a moral excuse for the imperfections in the leading historical figures in South Africa. By building on contradictory images, in particular, of grief/grace, of good/evil, of shame/guilt, Krog manages to layer out the ambiguous personalities of evil perpetrators. Krog invokes a similar (post) traumatic context in order to draw out parallels to her personal/historical/ancestral connections:

I suddenly remember the photograph of Hitler I once saw in a magazine. He is surrounded by children, and one girl is offering him a flower. The admiration on their fine, pure faces. And I remember sitting on my father’s shoulders next to the main road from Johannesburg, waiting to see Verwoerd passing by on his way to Cape Town. When he saw the cars outside Kroonstad, he stopped. I remember he touched my arm. (*Country*, 262).

Krog’s appropriation of Auschwitz into her own personal experience in this context achieves the effect of humanising the framers of Auschwitz and apartheid. This apparent juxtaposition of the encounter between the pure and the impure advances the author’s argument that the good and the evil exist on the same plane, along the same axis, on the same eclipse. Krog, in another instance, initially registers her repugnance of Joe Mamasela, a black police informant who is said to have taken part in killings in Port Elizabeth. However, upon meeting him, alongside her radio host, Sophie Mokoena – especially after sharing his story of growing up in the locations (apartheid reserves) and having listened to the alibi he gives as an apartheid mercenary (“I had to fight for my own survival ... I was a political hostage. I was a dog of war”, *Country*, 174) – Krog’s perception of him as an epitome of black evil changes (*Country*, 171, 175). Krog records of the interview:

The evening when I transcribe the interview, I hear my voice changes within the first few minutes, how even my most critical questions sound like I’m

sulking up. He says goodbye to Sophie and me on the pavement with a great bear-hug. ‘Only the best for SABC radio.’ (*Country*, 175)

Todorov, writing about representations of victims and perpetrators in *Memory as a Remedy for Evil* (2010), argues that one of the enduring uncertainties in France is “when Hitler is depicted in a movie, the question regularly arises of the risks of seeing him as a human being, as belonging to the same species as we do” (12). Lukas Allermann (2019: 69) also argues that where oppressors are humanised, the focus turns to considerations of the humanity of the oppressor. In consequence, we are led to entertain the possibility of extending empathy and kindness to them. The deployment of empathy on Mamasela happens at the context when Krog begins to see him through a human lens. In Chapter 21, Krog mediates Botha’s past (and future) thus: “Some feel: Leave him alone. The spectacle of a doddering old geriatric being hauled before the Truth Commission just a block away from parliament where he once ruled to roost, will do South Africa’s image of rainbows and ‘shosholozza’ no good” (267). She sympathises with the old Afrikaner even though she notes that it is during his time that “Apartheid rule acquired its coldest, its most brutal and murderous edge” marked by hit squads, vigilantes, raids, chemical warfare, and states of emergency (267).

It is also worth noting that Krog’s characterisation of the Afrikaner men as remorseless and guilty contradicts the other times when she seems to c/overtly excuse their complicity in past wrongs. Krog registers her apprehensions on interviews with respect to white police officers who worked under the Vlaakplas unit (an undercover police squad that was involved in a series of kidnappings and deaths), and who were allegedly involved in the killing of Robert Mutase and his wife, Irene Mutase (*Country*, 92-94). She wonders: “What should I do with this? They are as familiar as my brothers, cousins and school friends ... Between us all the distance is erased” (*Country*, 96). She then admits, “What I have in common with them is a culture... in a sense it is not these men but a culture that is asking for amnesty” (96). Krog processes her empathetic identification with these men based on shared cultural values. Krog then admits: “I am powerless to ignore what vibrates in me – I abhor and care for these five men... The question haunts me: why do I want to give evil a human face?” (*Country*, 97).

Time and again, Krog’s ancestry, as white, and as a woman, comes as a significant intrusion into the narrative. Krog, in instances of authorial intervention, broods over the meaning and significance of the “T” (“Truth”) in the TRC. She questions, “Is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission then the equivalent of the symbolic Ossewa Trek of 1938 – a tool

to create a particular nationalism rather than a South African identity?" (113). Krog constantly uses rhetorical questions to harness her own ambivalent feelings towards TRC's projection of a unified South African collective voice. Her authorial voice registers the doubts of white South Africans regarding the TRC as a project that was aimed at instituting a black nationalistic project set out to replace the earlier entrenched white Afrikaner nationalism. Krog also contrasts the reception of the TRC's truth as canvassed through witness testimonies in respect of the dominant black and white communities:

The black people in the audience are seldom upset. They have known the truth for years [the inhumanity of the police, as reflected in Nomonde Calata's story]. The whites are often disconcerted: they didn't realise the magnitude of the outrage, the 'depth of depravity' (*Country*, 45).

From the onset, Krog is emphatic about the primacy of experience for the different communities of South Africa. In attempting to racially profile the search for truth, *Country of My Skull* imagines the problems of representing historical realities in a country like South Africa with deep-seated, racially-motivated wounds, scars, and skulls being exhumed through re/tellings. In the narrative, the author connects national experiences and histories with her own personal self, family history, and the larger South African community (156, 165). In many instances, Krog inscribes the authority of her ancestry and race in the investigation of what she believes is the truth regarding her Afrikaner heritage (*Country*, 61, 90, 128, 239). Krog constantly returns to her ancestral roots when she is in doubt or when she wants to emphasise her own narrative position in respect to a contentious point of view, as seen, for example, in her equating the TRC with the Ossewa Trek of 1938, as discussed above (*Country*, 113).

According to Rebecca Davies (2009), Krog appropriates into her memoir a critical ambiguity in the life of the Afrikaners – whether to address the future away from the past, or hearken up to the past to locate their own place and position in the new South Africa. In many instances, Krog's authorial voice expresses doubts over her past, her family, and that of her community; whether truth has connections with identity, which she answers introspectively ("Is truth that closely related to identity? It must be. What you believe to be true depends on who you believe yourself to be", 98, 99). From the onset, Krog inscribes white patriarchy through violence in many instances, which allows her to enter into the narrative as a white marginal/ised woman. In effect, she downplays the significance of race and its divisive potency by transferring guilt to white men while absolving white women, although this, as intimated previously, is sometimes subverted by the author, to support a

certain point of view. This is seen, for example, in her deployment of empathy on the five white Vklakplas police officers, while exacting blame on Winnie Mandela.

Linda Alcoff (2015) argues that shame and guilt are troubling notions that plague white people and muzzle them when whiteness and white privilege are invoked, especially by black people. Krog is certainly aware of this racial controversy, which she has to manoeuvre through in the memoir. This ethical problem is reflected in Krog's *Country of My Skull*, in her exposition of white vulnerabilities as reflected through the TRC hearings. Invoking her own race and Afrikaner ancestry in the authorial interventions, Krog mediates between shame and guilt as lingering aspects of whiteness that define the place and position of the whites of South Africa, especially as they relate to redress of past wrongs in which their responsibility and complicity are put into question. Pointing out her preference for shame over guilt, Krog argues that shame, because it manifests itself at the collective level, is preferred by whites over guilt, as the latter seems to demand obligations for individual redress. Using authorial interventions and her intellectual authority, Krog intones: "the essence of shame is the honour of a group, the essence of guilt is a responsibility of the individual towards a specific morality" (*Country*, 262). By vouching for shame for the Afrikaners, she is advancing a morality in which whites identify with their failure in the commissioning and sustenance of apartheid. Such a morality would be specific to the violator, and not the victims, who would have demanded some kind of redress of the injustice, through restitution. By questioning her own Afrikaner identity and culture, Krog not only positions her narrative to contextualise instances of rootedness of the violence of apartheid within the Afrikaner patriarchal culture, but also to vouch for a collective morality in which shame, and not guilt, defines Afrikaner post-apartheid ethical sensibilities.

Giorgio Agamben (1999: 18), addressing the question of shame in post-traumatic narratives of Auschwitz, argues that it is not easy to inscribe justice out of testimonies. Agamben (1999: 22) further argues that guilt processed out of witness testimonies generates "insufficiency and opacity" when justice as a standard is used as a measure of responsibility. In such a context therefore, shame and empathy in effect of responsibility may be invoked, in place of justice and its restitutive properties. Krog seems to allay the demands for responsibility from the leading Afrikaner men by invoking her identity and personal experiences (towards the end of the memoir), citing the universality of human imperfections. This contrasts markedly with the authorial narrator's voice in the beginning, in which she blames the Afrikaner men for their impudence and lack of shame. By vouching for shame, Krog not only frees the Afrikaner men from "collective guilt", but also from any link to guilt

in whatever form. This happening towards the end of the memoir is a testament of Krog's changing ethical sensibilities and shifting empathetic understanding.

As intimated before, Krog writes her own gender into the narrative. Gunther Pakendorf (1999) argues that Krog's personal anxieties can be interpreted through the lens of "a woman in a patriarchal society, the other being a person of European origin in Africa." Krog's inscription of her narrative voice as that of a woman can be read alongside her attempts to negotiate that truth is to be found with the "woman". In her gendering of truth, Krog lays a lot of emphasis (and empathy) on women's victims' testimonies as first narratives staged at the stands of the TRC, as observed before. By "gendering", I am referring to the delimitation of the term even in the thinking of the TRC to highlight only women's experiences, even though, in truth, it should refer to both men and women. This, in effect, reiterates not just the subjective nature of the TRC with regard to the victims' testimonies, but also the narrative as an experience towards acts of truth-telling. Krog focalises Chapter 16 metaphorically as "Truth is Woman", in which she privileges the testimonies of women as those who bore the brunt of the violence of apartheid (178, 179). "Woman" retains a symbolic connotation as representative of truth. This contrasts markedly with her attempts to zone out Winnie Mandela from the same gendered identity, as observed earlier.

Krog disembodies Winnie's gender as a woman by representing her as a perpetrator, hitherto a preserve of the male gender, especially the white, more so, the old, as observed before. Krog genders issues such as reconciliation, contrition, and victimhood largely as a woman's burden in the context of apartheid, which requires empathy and consideration, the reason why guilt (and shame) becomes a male burden, particularly the Afrikaner burden. In this instance, Krog uses authorial intrusion to make assumed moral judgments on the character and disposition of Winnie. Writing regarding Winnie's guilt over the wrongs of apartheid, Krog is critical of her involvement in past atrocities. Through authorial intervention, Krog breaks the limits of her narrative to show her disgust over Winnie's alleged complicity in the wrongs of the past. In her personal evaluation of Winnie's position during the TRC hearings, Krog thinks that they/ the journalists should be "harder on Winnie than a Magnus Malan or P.W. Botha ... because she stood for more". Writing regarding Winnie's portrayal in the media as a flamboyant black woman against the dispossession and suffering of the women she purported to represent, Mehita Iqani (2015) observes how Winnie is represented as miles apart from the stories of victimhood of black women. This disavowal of Winnie as a woman on account of her complicity, and of her disembodied victimhood, writes her off as a black victim of apartheid.

In the above accounts, what appears significant is the fact that truth is subjective. In a way, Krog rejects the signification of the “T” in the TRC, preferring reconciliation (which she mediates from the onset, while recording victims’ testimonies from the Eastern Cape, as her daily bread: “piece by piece we die into reconciliation”, *Country*, 36). Chris Van der Merwe and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (2007) argue that Krog projects a South African public morality in which ambiguity is set aside in order to give room for a collective national ethos based on a plurality of cultures and shared prosperity. Krog intimates that it is not easy to navigate through multiple truths about the past. Moreover, the truths as recovered and exhumed make South Africans “uncomfortable” (*Country*, 36). She also concludes that the testimonies as rendered through the Commission showed that there was a thin line between “truth” and “lies”, casting doubts on their veracity and verifiability. Krog acknowledges that in her work, the word “lie” manifests truth at a deeper level. Reconciliation in the text is also prefigured in the person of Desmond Tutu, who appears as an image throughout the memoir as an insignia of reconciliation (and forgiveness). Krog multilayers the *Ubuntu* logic (the belief in community, and communal solidarity) with the theological suppositions of Desmond Tutu, whose clarion call for reconciliation through forgiveness is intervened by Krog’s narrative strategies. A noticeable posture in Krog’s interventions on victims’ testimonies, especially those from the Eastern Cape, is to mirror individual actions through communal aspirations, obligations, and anxieties. Krog, for example, imagines the dangers of communal solidarity in the stories of necklacing (burning using tires) in the Eastern Cape, graphically rendering the horrors through images of death, scalps and skulls, and bare lips. Beliefs in revenge and hate, for example, as practised by individuals, are often expressions of communal pasts, and this is the dominant frame of reference that structures Krog’s interventions on witness testimonies of black victims.

Because of the impossibility of finding objective truth regarding the past, Krog uses extensive rhetorical questions. Krog argues that it is the responsibility of individual South Africans to negotiate the truth that works best for individual selves, and this is served by her equivocal attitude: “And if you believe your own version, your own lie” (*Country*, 89). She then opens out to the “truth” in the Commission: “It is asking too much that *everyone* should believe the Truth Commission’s version of truth” (*Country*, 89; emphasis added), although her ironic voice negates total acceptance of the prescriptive, unitary truth of the TRC. She entertains possibilities of diverse individual truths based on the weight of individual experiences. She is emphatic that even the TRC did not capture the full extent of the South African truth as lived and as imagined. Towards the end of her memoir, Krog remembers the

uncomfortable truth that Steve Biko's narrative of victimhood was never actually acknowledged in the TRC hearings (*Country*, 277). The significant lack of testimony of a leading victim of apartheid in the TRC itself, and appearing late in her memoir as a vestige of a forgotten memory, is a perfect testimony not just to the indefensibility of truth (as well as the TRC), but also to the limits of memory in the process of historical reorganisation.

The inclusion of a professed, fictional infidelity in the memoir is an attempt to conflate the ambiguity of truth-telling. Kim Rostan (2007) suggests that Krog's inclusion of a fictionalised love affair constitutes one symbolic way of representing the atrocity of the past, suggesting that "a writer's infidelity, be it her infidelity to some historical truth or her infidelity in telling others' stories, signifies a betrayal" (144). I argue that Krog's authorial intervention strategies in the memoir constitute some kind of infidelity – an infidelity in which she has to engage with a betrayal in order to reflect on the ambiguous search for truth out of past violations. Krog's *Country of My Skull* opens ground to the subjectivity of the narrative (and testimony). It layers different perspectives to show how the pursuit of truth as an ethical precept in the TRC is fraught with uncertainties. These uncertainties are graphically enmeshed in the author's intrusions into the narrative. Effectively, mediated texts, such as her own memoir, as well as Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, investigate truth against a background of betrayal.

### **3.3 Truth of Fictions: Ethics of Appropriation in *The Cry of Winnie Mandela***

One of the central stories from the TRC narrative that encapsulates divergent notions of freedom and the ethical uncertainties that the search for truth brings is that of Winnie Mandela, so graphically encapsulated in Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, and in Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*, as observed earlier. Winnie was an icon of the anti-apartheid struggle, both as an individual woman who made decisions in the leadership of the ANC, and as a symbolic figure as the wife of Nelson Mandela, the anti-apartheid activist, prisoner, and later, president. Ndebele appropriates the notions of home and of family in *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* as a strand that is connected to the traumatic backgrounds of most families, chiefly mirrored through Nelson Mandela's. In apartheid South Africa, most black families were victims of apartheid and its violent aberrations. Consequently, the home became a marker of violation, and the individuals, the violated.

The most potent traumas for the black community in South Africa directly attributed to the past of apartheid is reflected in the sense of rootlessness, homelessness and separateness. Ndebele (1996) in "A Home for Intimacy" reflects on his sense of dislocation when, in 1991, he went back to what used to be home only to find the place demolished. His

novel patches up some of his misgivings about the apartheid past as a lived historical reality for most black people. In *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, Ndebele figures the family of Nelson Mandela, complete with cloned replicas of other South African families that appear as metaphors of the nation's difficult past, especially as it relates to women. Ralph Goodman (2006) argues that the evocation of a "cry" in the title points to the expression of a lament as re/told in a narrative structure of conventional storytelling. The novel effectively gives voices to female characters in a context where women and their stories have largely been rendered marginal.

Susan Sniader Lanser (1992) argues that women's narratives reflect prevailing power structures that condition the authority (or the lack of it) of women's voices (6). Lanser identifies two prevailing types of voices in women's writings of self, which are the "private voice (narration directed toward a narratee who is a fictional character) and public voice (narration directed toward a narratee "outside" the fiction who is analogous to the historical reader)" (15). The women in *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* alternate between the personal and the public in mediating between personal and public truths. Lanser (2001: 154, 155) also projects the term implied author as the existence of another voice in the frame of the narrative, which is the alternative of the author. Lanser (2001: 155) observes that an implied author expresses moral, social, aesthetic, and political values, and can be regarded as a voice that represents the authorial voice in a narrative where an author's voice is not directly implicated. It is the voice that carries the ideological leanings of the text. Lanser (2001: 155) further observes: "a text's implied author will be associated with the persona(e) occupying the text's highest level(s) of authority." Apart from the voices of four fictional women in the novel, there is also the voice of an implied narrator, whose primary role is to position the thematic and historical realities canvassed in the novel.

Paul Simpson (1993: 30) describes an implied author/ narrator as that voice that has an alternating focalisation – one that has the ability to traverse into the consciousness of other selves other than his/her own. Simpson (1993: 29) argues that there are two positions that an implied narrator takes in a narrative: "That where a narrator is *outside* the story and that where a narrator is a character *within* the story". In the construction of *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, Part One features an emotionally involved implied narrator who takes precedence in the introduction of the story. This authority, in *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, is vested in a narrator who introduces the narrative and structures the overarching thematic concerns. Ndebele's text makes use of two dominant narrative positions. The first narrative position is that of an implied author/narrator, who performs the act of introducing the motivations in the

text. The implied narrator principally carries the mythical and the historical of the novel. This implied author structures “Part One” of the novel. Dorothy Driver (2009: 13) argues that Part One reflects “an outsider’s view” which is told by a “self-conscious authorial narrator who stresses the fictional status of the characters.” The second narrative position, in Part Two, is that occupied by voices of a number of fictional selves who speak, in their own first-person voices, regarding their own life stories. Their perspectives are enriched by extensive dialogues and interior monologues, in addition to first-person witness accounts (Driver, 2009: 13).

The implied narrator and the fictionalised women reflect on the ethical ambiguities that revolve around women’s lives in the context of home and nation. The implied narrator mediates the experiences of the four historically representative women. *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* is founded on historical truth which forms a chapter of the struggle against apartheid, but this truth is stretched and harnessed into narrative by fictional accounts which are narrated to provide complementary, supplementary, and sometimes contradictory truths in addition to verifiable historical truths, reflected, for example, in the women’s mediation of Winnie Mandela’s TRC narrative, as observed earlier. Jerome Bruner (1991: 13) reminds us that historical truth is judged against available historical sources and evidence. It is verifiable. Historical truth, when mediated in the narrative, produces a different, unique representational world view – a narrative worldview. Bruner (1991: 13) adds that narrative truth is judged on the basis of its verisimilitude and plausibility, and not on its verifiability. By focusing on fictional representations of a historical symbolic figure, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* exhibits the tensions between the truth as rendered through testimony in narrative and historical and official documentation, as gleaned from the TRC and Winnie’s own confessions.

By focusing principally on fictional women in order to re/write the history of Winnie, and by extension, of South African women, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* relies on the authority of fiction, as implied by Lanser (1992), to produce an alternative vision to lived historical realities. The novel gives voices to married women, all of whom have been victims of individual and communal disintegration, which are reflective of the historical experiences in the country, especially as lived through the reality of apartheid, and by Winnie as the focalised character of the text. Ndebele’s historical consciousness is reflected in his sensitivity towards the social, ethical, and political South African environment (Medalie, 2006). Writing out of a divisive past, Ndebele’s novel represents stories of dismembered South African women in search of a voice, mediated through time and space by other women figures. The novel signifies the importance of recasting and recovering memories in the

context of re-membling the nation. Reflecting on the TRC, Ross (2003: 45) argues that women's testimonies were often contestations against marginality and silence. *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* gives voice to marginalised married women; it is a contestation against spousal silences, allowing them to speak out against patriarchal bondage. The novel focuses on the experiences of four fictional women who are discussing in a communion called an *Ibandla* about Winnie Mandela, a prominent South African anti-apartheid activist and a person of interest in the formation of the South African nation. The women, who speak in their own first-person voices, in addition to the back story offered by the implied narrator, undertake symbolic and spiritual journeys in order to self-reflexively understand the past.

Meg Samuelson (2007) argues that in the construction of South Africa's national memory through the TRC, women appeared as dismembered individuals, presented as silenced victims. Fiona Ross (2003: 48), in her exposition of witness testimonies of women who appeared before the TRC, notes concerning the voices of women:

Some women represented their experiences in narratives that appeared on the surface to mark silence and absence, but in their testimonies about others, women told of their own experiences. Their telling was couched in metaphor and allusion, and implied in the narrative structure of stories and their performance. Some women drew from oral tradition while others spoke in clipped speech. Some spoke using forms rounded with rhetoric and gesture, others in words bleached by pain.

Ross's (2003: 48) assertions summarise the multiple ways in which women's testimonies were rendered before the TRC. The assessment captures the particular ways in which women specially used narrative conventions to speak to and about apartheid's traumatic events and histories to the TRC. The four fictional women provide a counter-narrative to the narrative of women as collectively rendered to the TRC. Their thoughts and convictions are guided judiciously by the desire to rewrite particular "truths" that featured during the TRC hearings around and about Winnie Mandela as a family person, and as a politician, by reflecting outward from their own personal experiences. In re-instating Winnie's alleged silence over past atrocities, the women seated in the *Ibandla* also process another search for truth – to question Winnie's alleged complicities in the atrocities of the past. These women are her audiences, interlocutors, judges, and witnesses at the same time, capable of rehashing and re-casting her role in the anti-apartheid struggle. The different subjective positions of the women intimate the polyphonic structure of the narrative. As a structuring device, the *Ibandla* negotiates what Bakhtin (1981: 279) would call "internal dialogism", as it manifests different meanings: as a symbol of the South African community;

as a figuration of women contesting patriarchal bondage; as a figuration of the TRC and its strategies of truth-telling and presentation of testimonies; and as a mediation of past memories in the context of home. Carolyn Ellis (1997: 128) argues that stories of intimacy and emotional connection, when told by different voices, often envisage the search for truth regarding the materiality of the social environment in which individuals live. As such, elements such as fidelity and authenticity of narrated events require investigation. Where voices move “back and forth, first looking inward, then backward, and forward”, the resultant narrative is multiple and varied (Ellis, 1997: 132). This view reflects on the social and ideological organisation of the *Ibandla*.

The *Ibandla* is analogous to the TRC. The TRC in South Africa attempted to address personal testimonies of victims and perpetrators in the hope that a different future could be wrought out of the past of apartheid (Gready, 2011; Wilson, 2001). The *Ibandla* carries this vision in spirit and tempo. In the *Ibandla*, the women harness together narratives that are analogous, reflective, and parallel to the TRC hearings. This reflective engagement with the past establishes the *Ibandla* – considered here as a reflection of the TRC – as a post-mortem of the actual historical reality around witness testimonies proffered to the TRC by women. By choosing to represent the experiences of women, the text then limits itself to the TRC’s reflection of women’s experiences, and shows, in part, its subjective nature as a reflection of the TRC as collectively imagined and constituted.

Framed around the search for truth, this *Ibandla* mediates the personal narrative of the individual women. Their narratives are in reflection of Ross’s (2003: 48) women’s TRC narratives of “silence and absence.” Ross (2003: 17) argues that the testimonies of women that were presented to the TRC were often about their families – their husbands and their children. The women in the *Ibandla* also process their own family histories in a similar manner. The *Ibandla* also functions as a communion for the women. It gives them a safe haven to vent their personal and communal frustrations and anxieties of the past, as they remember. The dominant memories are stories of families, of communities, and of the nation, as they are told effortlessly and self-reflectively by the women. The whole *Ibandla* is marked by conversations, and they – Mamello Molete, Delisiwe Dulcie S’khosana, Marara Joyce Baloyi, and Mannette Mofolo – introduce themselves within the confines of storytelling, reflecting Ross’s (2003: 48) assertions regarding women’s use of storytelling as a form that was markedly used in the TRC testimonies. Using their personal voices to narrate to other fictional selves as intimated by Lanser (1992: 15), who defines a private voice in fictions as “narration directed toward a narratee who is a fictional character”, these women are engaged

in conversations surrounding memorable events in their lives. In this particular engagement, the family, the community, and the nation are their focal points of reference. The reason why their introductions are elaborate and broaden each of and out of the women's family experiences, lineages, and family trees, is that they understand that there is a connection between family and a "broader social history", which is chiefly mediated by the personal voice (*The Cry*, 43). The women's narratives in the *Ibandla* must begin with their origin, with their place and position within the family and the community. This voice initiates deep historical inflections and reads well into Lanser's (1992: 15) characterization of public voices as voices from narrations that turn outward into historical reflections.

While having a private conversation in their community of women in the *Ibandla*, Marara Joyce Baloyi reflects on the truth of the TRC. Marara believes that the TRC was not about the search for "truth" in the objective sense, but:

about the revelation of deliberately hidden facts so this revelation might lead to new interpretation of our social realities and new knowledge in the public domain ... It was about reconstituting the public domain through social insight. (*The Cry*, 86)

Marara, speaking from her own personal experience with the "truth" of apartheid as a black victim, acknowledges that the TRC functioned in bringing personal truths into the public domain. The truth, long held by the victims themselves, was given a safe haven by the TRC, allowing the women to process and mediate differently, in their own independent voices. This is the focal position intimated by Ross (2003: 48) when she avers that the women used different stylistic options such as metaphors, allusions, irony, and clipped speeches to manifest their pain and trauma to the TRC. In a similar vein, Ndebele's community of black women negotiate the search for truth in the *Ibandla* by reflecting from the personal through a variety of narrative strategies, outwards to the public or historical. As for Marara, even though she lived physically with her husband, he was unfaithful to the point that he had ceased to be in her memory. In the *Ibandla*, her truth primarily centres around reconstructing her own space in which her *physically* present husband ceased to be a memory in her life. From her position, she intersubjectively questions Winnie's inability to make amends with Nelson upon his physical return ("Just tell me one thing: Why did you fail to live up to the dream of his return?", *The Cry*, 79). She extensively uses rhetorical questions to reflect on the Mandelas' failure to reunite as a family, despite their physical availability, upon the release of Nelson Mandela from prison. She then stages a direct address to Winnie, thus:

I am looking for a point of entry to express my problem to you. You see, I am tortured by my compulsion to paint a picture of family bliss in my home despite my awareness

of my own profound unhappiness in that home ... My husband did not have a cause that took him away from me. I mean, he was there, but not there. I mean, I saw his body around the house, but my husband had left. (*The Cry*, 80, 81)

Speaking out of her position as a black woman with an erratic family life, she mediates truth regarding the rootlessness in the concept of home and community. The figuration of home and contestations around the ambiguous place of the individual place in the community structures her rhetorical narrations. She asks, for example, “What is it that one does within the privacy of one’s home that transforms the home into an eye of society looking at every turn in your life?” (*The Cry*, 80). It is within this inward gaze that she contends that “Home seems like a double deceit, the definition of an illusion in which I deceive society by deceiving myself” (*The Cry*, 80). Marara’s narrative contextualises the experience of family dislocation as a lived reality of apartheid. She mediates “the experience of millions of victims of forced removals ... Mass stories of people who built homes and communities and watched them demolished by apartheid’s bulldozers” (*The Cry*, 81-82). She attributes the “extremes of behaviour” exhibited by many South Africans as a reflection of the widespread dislocations and traumas, which form a lasting vestige of apartheid (82). Her constant figurations of binaries, between community and self, rooted and rootlessness, home and homelessness, is a narrative that communicates a fracture (*The Cry*, 83, 84, 85).

Delisiwe, on the other hand, mediates the limits of personal freedoms on public figures such as Winnie Mandela. Delisiwe suffers from family isolation and eventual divorce. Her husband leaves her in search of an education, but he fails to return on time, taking several years out of the country, and out of family reach, so that by the time he arrives, he has already lost his chance to make history as the first doctor from his community. Consequently, he comes home years later to find that his wife already has a child. He divorces her and marries someone else, before they settle among the whites. Speaking out of her personal disorientation as a woman marginalised and silenced, Delisiwe is particularly concerned with the mediation of personal freedom. Grace Musila (2020: 614) contends that Delisiwe reflects “the fragility of the Winnie Mandela character as an iconic figure whose experience illustrates the price women pay for their iconicity.” This price centres around the limitations imposed by society on personal freedoms. In her narrative strand, Delisiwe questions why private memories become a subject of public scrutiny. She is critical of the media and its tabloid leanings, especially in the ways they magnified Winnie’s alleged weaknesses (54). She also turns to criticise Winnie’s untempered personal freedoms: “What kind of pressures lead a famous, married woman to write to her lover a letter that ends in newspapers, turning

her private life into a public spectacle?" (*The Cry*, 49). She mediates Winnie's personality and sexual banalities, emphasising that Winnie's personal experiences and aspirations clashed with communal expectations. She is concerned about Winnie's responsibility as a historical figure and the expectations of the patriarchal society. She is critical of Winnie, thus:

While the men desiring you can be dismissed upon exposure as moral opportunists, you would become the betrayer of ideals: female fidelity; moral decency expected of public figures; the enormous symbolism of 'Mother of the Nation'. (51)

Delisiwe's assertions contextualise the debate around Winnie's responsibility. Shireen Hassim (2018) argues that Winnie Mandela receives a much greater condemnation because she is not just an "ordinary" woman, but a symbolic mother of the nation. Winnie's story is consistent with the nation's difficult path to freedom out of the violence and radicalism of apartheid, together with its attendant misadventures.

Mamello's family story is similar to the Mandelas' in significant ways. Mamello's family is affected by the historical burden of forced family separation. Her husband disappears without a trace. It is only after a year that he writes to her that he was in exile in Cuba, and when he returns after a ten-year absence, he is immediately arrested and sentenced to fifteen years on Robben Island. In all these long years, she has been unable to see him, except when she saw him while awaiting trial. It is from this position that Mamello negotiates Winnie's complicity in a more nuanced manner, addressing the specific questions raised in the TRC hearing regarding Winnie's guilt and complicity. The particular focus is on her involvement in politics, her guilt, responsibility, and, more importantly, her self-doubt regarding her political involvement during apartheid. To address Winnie's ambiguous position as "Mother of the Nation", she uses the weight of her own personal experience to project what she terms as Winnie's vulnerabilities that led her to harm the community that she loved (*The Cry*, 74). She frames her alleged activities of terror, kidnappings, and murders as the ultimate sacrifice she made for the man she loved – activities, were done "all in the name of your husband" (*The Cry*, 74). She also blames apartheid's stranglehold on fundamental freedoms that made her exercise her freedom through the authority of violence. In her measured ramblings, she blames apartheid for inducting Winnie into violence and terror. Mamello manages to get a convenient scapegoat for some of Winnie's vulnerabilities. Mamello questions Winnie's lack of responsibility during the TRC hearings, and in particular, Winnie's lack of a personal conviction in acquiescing publicly to her role in the atrocities of the past, simply following up on Tutu's prompting for the need for contrition (*The Cry*, 75), which signified her lack of genuine, heartfelt contrition. Indeed, Mamello's

allegation in this instance is corroborated by Tutu (1999) in his own words in his memoir, and by Krog in her memoir (1998), when they aver that Winnie did not expressly declare contrition concerning her role in the violence against apartheid. Mamello, too, is critical of Winnie Mandela's direct absence of responsibility and reconciliation. Mamello focuses specifically on the banalities of Winnie's actions and the consequent posturing before the TRC and her innocence. She avers:

Yes, yours was the victory of the kind of technicality that characterise courtroom procedure... Indeed, although you have not been found guilty of so much allegation, except for the kidnapping of the child Stompie Seipei, the cloud of moral doubt will hang over you without end... (*The Cry*, 75)

Mamello's voice contextualises Winnie's behaviour behind the realities of apartheid, and seems to justify, on the face of it, the practical social and material conditions that affected her in the course of her personal and political life. Mamello magnifies one of Winnie's moral defects: that of maintaining an image that was not only deceptive but also insincere and inauthentic. She believes that Winnie's "victory" at the TRC was "the victory of the kind of technicality that characterises courtroom procedure", signifying that Winnie was guilty from a moral perspective (*The Cry*, 75).

*The Cry of Winnie Mandela* employs a number of strategies to evaluate women's ambiguous positions during and after apartheid. One source of ethical ambiguity in the novel is the appropriation of the Penelope myth. The implied narrator uses the figure of the mythical and historical Penelope, the wife of Odysseus, whose purity and truthfulness were measured against ill-conceived public condemnation of her supposed infidelity, to introduce the novel. To contextualise the ethical ambiguity of (in)fidelity, Penelope's suitors anticipated that Penelope was to be loyal to each one, even when each of the suitors occupied the ambiguous position of attempting to wrestle her from the arms of another man. Her suitors invited her to be unfaithful to the other man in the process of envisaging her faithfulness, an ethical ambiguity the implied narrator captures thus: "The moral premise of her new marriage is the illusion of her past virtues" (*The Cry*, 3). Penelope's story, thus, uses in/fidelity to symbolise the intricacies and inconsistencies of truth, and truth-telling in many forms in the narrative, as narrated, or as historically and mythically imagined. As Rostan (2007) argues with respect to Krog's fictionalised infidelity, infidelity is assumed to constitute a betrayal.

Krog (2001: 56) questions the aptness of the appropriation of the Penelope myth into Winnie Mandela's story, especially as the former, famed for her purity, and cut off from

Winnie in terms of race, did not befit any kind of moral comparison with the former. Registering her own apprehension at the re/presentation of Winnie in Ndebele's novel, Krog (2001) argues that in her initial reading of Ndebele's manuscript, she was "interested in the kind of form that a writer/ philosopher like Ndebele would use with which to look ethically at Winnie" (56). Krog's apprehensions lay in the assumption that it would be difficult for any South African author, least of all Ndebele, to find an authorial voice to represent Winnie and her character flaws. In truth, however, Ndebele's text does not directly implicate the author. Instead, Ndebele employs a strategy of authorial distancing in the novel by staging his aesthetic and moral vision through an implied narrator. Through this strategy, the author cedes the authority of the narrative to the voices of the implied narrator, as well as those of the fictional women represented in the narrative. Ndebele therefore releases himself as an author from accusations of moral impropriety, allowing his characters to freely create an independent world of their own.

By appropriating the Penelope myth, the implied narrator frames the orientation of the narrative of South African women to their stories of betrayal. The implied narrator also translates the mythical to the historical. In the narrative, four South African descendants of Penelope are a product of "the inescapable condition of living in the zone of absence without duration," which defines their "special look" refracted through "the easy creases on the forehead, the self-assured reserve, the permanent *doek*, the pursed lips" (*The Cry*, 8, 9). This wording is at the heart of the implied narrator's description of the enduring character of the South African woman, even in the face of waiting, betrayal, and its attendant vulnerabilities. The implied narrator therefore begins to create the fictional world of the women, and performs a kind of narrative positioning of the narrative ("Let's consider the imaginary life of the four of Penelope's millions of descendants, 7; ... Our imaginary book ... Let's see how they waited, 9). The implied narrator effectively uses *aporia* to magnify the symbolism of the story of Penelope. Lodge (1992: 219-220) explains that "in fiction, especially in texts that are framed by a storytelling situation, *aporia* is a favourite device of narrators to arouse curiosity in their audience, or to emphasize the extraordinary nature of the story they are telling". The implied narrator's use of *aporia* frames the double/ duplicate structure of the novel. On the one hand, it is a story as told by the implied narrator. On the other hand, it is the story as re/imagined and retold by the women themselves, which becomes a metonym for women who have undergone the worst betrayal of their lives.

Another instance that manifests ethical ambiguities in the novel is the use of different voices of characters to offer reflection and to evaluate the same subject matter. The novel's

narrative structure of using multiple female characters to focalise on the same aspect of the narrative constitutes the polyphonic nature of the novel. According to Bakhtin (1984: 18), polyphonic texts allow for the interactions of several consciousnesses. Bakhtin (1984: 34) extends that polyphony “presumes a plurality of fully valid voices within the limits of a single work.” Through this insight, we can interpret the internal consciousness of each of the fictional women in the narrative as constitutive of a version of truth as contained in their self-consciousness, and as inflected by their historical circumstances. Bakhtin (1984) places emphasis on the interlocutory processes in the textual construction of polyphonic narratives. The truth so established is a product of the dialogic engagement with the consciousness of other first-person selves, with each independent self voicing an alternative point of view. Lodge (1992: 28) attests that polyphony is attested through “the alternation of the narrator’s voice with the voices of the characters, rendered in their own specific accents and idioms of class, religion, occupation, gender”. The fusion of the voice of the implied narrator with those of the women constitutes a polyphony.

The narrative structure, in the two parts, also informs the duplicities, ambiguities and inconsistencies in the narrative established between an implied narrator and the fictional voices. An implied narrator in Part One mediates the experiences of the mythical and historical figures, implicating the divide between myth and history, between fact and fiction. The second part envisages the tensions between the individual and the community, especially in the light of individual freedom and personal responsibility, as seen in the figuration of Winnie around these ethical values. Barthes (1973) argues that a “multivalent text can carry out its basic duplicity only if it subverts the opposition between true or false, if it fails to attribute quotations (even when seeking to discredit them) to explicit authorities, if it flouts all respect for origin, paternity, propriety, if it destroys the voice which could give the text its (‘organic’) unity” (44). The text rests on several unstable signifiers that define the active oppositions in the narrative. Such textual oppositions as waiting (and not waiting, because the wait is over), anonymity and privacy versus public and collective, between the real Winnie Mandela and her fictional clone, function to obfuscate the voices, blurring distinctive boundaries, and therefore mapping ethical ambiguities in the text.

The tension between the individual and the community is at the heart of communal uncertainty in the novel. Apartheid, as structured, worked against communal ideals. Black people, who were largely the victims of the colonial past, had to live through the burdens of colonialism, and later, suffering and violence under institutionalised apartheid. J. May (1990) delineates the systemic racial injustices in South Africa that fractured communities and

created disparate societies, especially as the strong left rural communities in search of work, usually in the mines. The destruction of Marara Mofolo's married life is a reality that can be blamed on the effects of migrant labour on black families. The dream and aspiration for an ordered family is destroyed when Lejone Mofolo disappears to Welkom mines, a critical figuration of migrant labour in South Africa. Lejone leaves the ordered life of the rural area and is thrust into an urban environment where communal networks of publicly enforced moral discipline and respect for good conduct and neighbourliness are erased. The carefree urban environment – a direct consequence of apartheid and colonial experience – destroys communal obligations. On her part, Mannette has to think of a life of her own, with him as a missing person, a figuration of individual and communal loss. In the height of her uncertainty, Mannette has “to decide whether to accept his physical absence, or to assume his moral presence through the bond of marriage” (15). Marara shares her experience of pain and loss in a conversation in a storytelling session in a hospitable environment of tea making and drinking. Driver (2009) argues that the text “evokes and redirects elements claimed to be traditionally African – women's endurance, fortitude and courage, their use of the *Ibandla* as psychological or spiritual resource and as the domain of Ubuntu, and the practice of hospitality, conventionally associated with Ubuntu” (11-12). The women's contestations of their social mores in an ideal African setting can be read as an earnest pitching of the values of forgiveness and reconciliation, love and compassion, and sympathy/empathy for Winnie. Driver (2005) argues that “*Ubuntu* was central to the TRC's attempt to counteract a residual sense of victimization and a thrust to revenge” (219). By its affiliation towards an African ethical precept, the women in the *Ibandla* would be kind to accord love, empathy, and a reconciling spirit to/wards Winnie, even in the face of past complicities. Driver (2009: 7) argues that the “model of behaviour that Winnie's life put in place is ultimately rejected in Ndebele's novel, but it remains nonetheless as a historical model to be confronted, sympathized with, and understood”. It remains that the judgment of Winnie's past complicities must be tempered with a genuine call for reconciliation. I am in agreement with Driver's (2009: 9) assessment that the women process a narrative of reconciliation for the family of Nelson Mandela, especially in a context where the TRC mooted reconciliation as necessary towards communal unity and integration. It is instructive to note that Krog's intrusive voice, as observed in the previous section, does not inflect on Winnie as a character worth reconciling with, even as she proffers reconciliation (and forgiveness) for the old Botha. Nevertheless, the women's voices seem to proffer the necessity of responsibility on

communal terms, echoing Zakes Mda's female character in *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002: 181), Popi, when she confronts Viliki, her brother:

Where is your spirit of reconciliation, Viliki? ... We forgave the Boers who oppressed and killed us for three hundred years. We are reconciling with them now. Why can't we reconcile with our own people too?

Popi's rhetorical strategies imagine the need for reconciliation within the black community.

To proffer a different image of Winnie in a gesture towards creating empathy for her in the novel, Ndebele creates two images of her – one fictive, cloned image of Winnie, which mediates the aspects of freedom and personal responsibility, and the second image of the historical Winnie Mandela. The narrated Winnie/ the fictional Winnie contrasts markedly with the picture of Winnie Mandela as recorded in the TRC narrative, and as observed in the previous section, in respect of Krog's memoir. The narrated Winnie does not approve of anyone "torturing" her "with questions about the men" in her life (*The Cry*, 125). Winnie confesses to the loss of personal connection with Nelson Mandela after his incarceration in prison. By creating a character double to inter-subjectively mediate Winnie's flaws, Ndebele recreates Winnie in terms of her responsibility towards herself and her country. The fictional Winnie rises above her silent and remorseless TRC self. Her "fictional testimony" at the *Ibandla* manifests that Winnie was faced by a situation of competing interests, between her own self (and family) in the sense of freedom, and the collective aspiration for black freedom and communal rights. In effect, she positions herself on a pedestal where empathy can be entertained. In the narrative, the fictional Winnie accepts dodging responsibility during the TRC hearings. She contends that it was not possible for her to accept responsibility "for events that arose out of multiple casualties", signifying, in this instance, the impossibility of assessing a true picture regarding criminal culpability (134-5). Although she acknowledges some of the events that happened, she postures, "I will neither accept responsibility for them, nor will I deny that responsibility" (135). This double affirmation defines the ambiguity of exacting responsibility on Winnie. Judging Winnie, it would seem, is left to the pragmatic rationalization by her own community (of women). It is within the collective ethos of *Ubuntu* that Winnie's disposition is assessed in the *Ibandla*.

Driver (2005) argues that the dominant pattern in which women fronted their testimonies before the TRC was "to bear witness to acts of brutality against members of their families, *rather than against themselves*" (220, emphasis added). The *Ibandla* inscribes the female self into the narrative, offering an alternative frame of witnessing that did not appear

before the TRC, as the women now speak about and against themselves. Furthermore, the *Ibandla* is duplicitous in the sense that it stages the private and the collective at the same time. By virtue of envisaging the experiences of the five women, on the one hand, their narratives are a reflection of communal experiences as lived and as imagined by the individuals. On the other hand, Winnie's "confession" is committed before a group of her friends, and it is the private context of that setting that makes this group of women private for Winnie. Taking the latter view, we can argue that Winnie's "confession" is made possible because she is submitting her past to a private audience, as opposed to the prying eyes of the community and the critical voices of the TRC.

*The Cry of Winnie Mandela* also introduces ambiguity regarding the true identities of the (fictional) women. Winnie's involvement in the *Ibandla* results from a shared agreement discussed through a narrative prompt by the five women. Mamello challenges the women to consider re/telling and mediating the story of Winnie Mandela. The narrative runs,

There was a pause. Then Mamello put out her challenge.

'Let's talk about Winnie'

'Winnie?'

'Yes, Winnie. Winifred Nomzamo Zanyiwe Mandela.'

Silence. In the silence, the stirring and the sipping of tea became rather pronounced, rightfully fulfilling their role as filling in silences in conversation. (*The Cry*, 44)

When this silence is finally broken, the women express their disaffection with the choice of Winnie as the subject of their discussion through consternation, giggles, and affected shock. Their initial rejection is ultimately tied to their estrangement from the public figure as framed and as acknowledged in their consciousness. When Marara finally recovers, she asks Mamello to justify their focus on Winnie, when indeed there were also other public women:

'OK, then, seriously, why Winnie? Why not Albertina Sisulu? Why not Urbania Mothopeng? Why not Veronica Sobukwe? Why not Ntsiki Biko?'" (*The Cry*, 44)

Later on, after inviting Winnie into the *Ibandla* to speak, Mamello chides Winnie for accepting to commune with anonymous women, rather than have a conversation with the likes of Albertina, Veronica, Urbania, or Ntsiki, "five women who have waited in public" (*The Cry*, 142). The fictional Winnie Mandela asserts that they, the women at the *Ibandla* "are Albertina, Veronica, Ntsiki, and Urbania ... You're even more. You are millions of

other women who are in this journey with you” (*The Cry*, 142). The fact that the anonymous women can still pass for the named public women generates an ambiguity that is connected to the author’s duplication of the symbolic nature of characters. The narrative transposes the fictionality of their identities to the factual and the historical. The text thus generates an ambiguity between fiction and fact.

By introducing the historical dimension of the four fictional women, Winnie’s statement achieves some kind of epiphany. Lodge (1992: 147) defines an epiphany as a “descriptive passage in which external reality is charged with a kind of transcendental significance”. The experiences of the four historical women, as public women, as wives of prominent anti-apartheid activists, Walter Sisulu, Zephania Mothopeng, Robert Sobukwe, and Steve Biko, elevate the fictional women, at least in symbol, to the historical realm. Winnie’s statement casts them as character doubles that represent both fiction and history. Barthes (1973: 41) argues that “the more indeterminate the origin of a statement, the more plural the text.” The deliberate, open-ended, indeterminate identification of the women effects a contradiction. The fictional women could indeed be historical women so stated with the weight and baggage of their husbands’ surnames and historical lives. Winnie’s statement on the identity of the fictional women performs the narrative role of effecting a disclosure of fact, happening towards the end of the narrative, in my view. This disclosure constitutes what Barthes (1973: 145) terms narrative equivocation that generates “double understanding” in the process of narrative interpretation.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has used Krog’s *Country of My Skull* and Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* to investigate the contention that the search for truth is fraught with ethical ambiguities. On the one hand, Krog’s *Country of My Skull* writes out of historical experiences. On the other hand, Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* approaches the historical from the fictive. While Ndebele uses the power and potency of fiction to illustrate the ambiguities of truth, Krog fixes her gaze on the historical project of the TRC. Both texts account for the practices of truth-telling and witness testimonies. In these two texts, history is a mediated experience.

Krog’s text shows that it is not only difficult to be faithful to historical realities, but also that truth is enamoured by competing narrative voices that make the conception of a single version of truth practically impossible. Her memoir manifests that an authorial voice, when inscribed into a text through intrusions and incisive commentaries, implicate ethical uncertainties. In all that, however, Krog’s narrative implicates all South Africans in her mediation of the second layer out of witness testimonies in the collective hope that they will

make themselves and their stories visible. However, in using her authorial voice as a signature to the testimonies – and indeed in the whole project of the TRC – Krog projects ethical uncertainties through different strategies of narrating the self.

Ndebele revisits personal stories and connects the stories of individuals waiting to the larger struggle in the attempt to re/tell specific lives of South African women during apartheid, and after, as a way of taking stock of and remembering the past in a largely reflective and retrospective manner. This chapter has paid attention to Ndebele's focus on form, where an implied narrator and independent voices of fictional women merge to manifest the multiple ways in which truth is envisaged in the novel. The chapter has situated ethical ambiguities as ingrained in the ambivalence and duplicity in the narrative structure, and in the multiple ways in which characters redefine their responses to the meaning of responsibility, empathy, and reconciliation in their lives. By reading outwardly from fiction to history, Ndebele's text shows the creative capabilities of fiction to create what Michael Eskin (2004: 564) celebrates as the "discursive capaciousness – the fact that it is capable of translating ethics into a 'more developed' text". This chapter has maintained that the search for truth is an uneasy one, as truth appears not to be straightforward but, in fact, encumbered by ambiguities, which are of an ethical nature. The next chapter interprets the ethical relationship between history and memory in Ivan Vladislavić's selected fiction through the lens of narrative authenticity and visibility.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**ETHICAL AMBIGUITIES OF AUTHENTICITY AND VISIBILITY IN IVAN**  
**VLADISLAVIĆ'S FICTION**

**4.1 Introduction**

An enduring obligation in most post-conflict societies is the search for truth about the past. Intellectual discourses have critically examined the credibility of historical representations, in particular, those that signify past oppression. As such, value judgements have often been proffered on the authenticity or otherwise of historical representations. As observed in Chapter One of this study with respect to national reconstruction after the Yugoslav wars, Dagana Obradović (2016) singles out the role that literature plays in questioning and reframing past memories. Post-apartheid South African literature has also taken a close look at the past, with questions surrounding the authenticity of historical artefacts and events framing everyday discourses around memory and ethics. In this chapter, I focus on four short stories by Ivan Vladislavić, namely, “The Prime Minister is Dead”, “Tsafendas’s Diary”, “Propaganda by Monuments”, and “The WHITES ONLY Bench” to illustrate the multiple perspectives from which characters reflect on historical representations. By building on reflective self-awareness of first-person narrators and characters as envisaged by Dan Zahavi (2005: 54) and Paul Ricoeur (2004), this chapter investigates how authenticity and visibility as perspectives of reflecting on history and historical representations frame ambiguity in the consciousness of characters. In the first section, I appropriate the concept of authenticity as one of the central motifs that structure the ways in which the first-person narrators and characters reflect on the past. The section also shows how, as characters reflect on the past with the assumption that the truth about the past is indisputable, they come across representations of that past that have questionable authenticity and that challenge their understanding of historical representation. Consequently, these narrators and characters respond in ethically ambiguous ways depending on their perspective and position in the narratives.

The second section evaluates visibility as another significant motif that defines one of the ways in which narrators and characters choose to look at history. What emerges from this motif is that history exudes contradictory ways to the seeing subject, who must process his or her own position in relation to the multiple, often contradictory meanings that history manifests. Visibility exists as a significant marker of memory, which, as observed in the previous chapter, is conditioned by remembering and forgetting. As such therefore, it is anticipated that whereas historical visibility imagines one of the ways in which some

characters respond to particular historical realities, invisibility signifies the alternative, often contradictory way in which other characters choose, consciously or unconsciously, and on the authority of memory, to see, or un-see, the significance of specific historical realities.

This chapter draws theoretical standpoints from the works of Hayden White (1987), James Phelan (1996), and Roland Barthes (1973) on narrative theory. To contextualise notions of self-awareness, consciousness, and reflexivity of the self, the chapter recurses to perspectives of Dan Zahavi (2005) and Paul Ricoeur (2004). It also borrows from Achille Mbembe's critical insights from memory studies in South Africa, while also relying on insights from history studies and museum studies.

#### **4.2 The Myth of Authenticity: Ethical Uncertainties in Vladislavić's Historical Fiction**

In post-apartheid South Africa, the historical past is steeped in contentious opinions regarding the meaning and function of memory and historical artefacts in the present. As established in Chapter One, South African literature has reflected on the country's continued engagement with the meanings attached to specific images, individuals, and communities. As such, the constant reframing and consistent questioning of commemorative sites can be thought of as a collective attempt to emphasise the significance of authenticity in fostering discourses in nation-building. According to Dimitrios Theodossopoulos (2013: 339, 340), authenticity can be ascribed to diverse notions of meaning, including truth, accuracy, originality, genuineness, and originality. Theodossopoulos (2013: 351) contends that the "conceptualizations of authenticity contested in the present often assert their authority with some reference to the past." The claim to authenticity of past experiences is therefore hinged on the pursuit of truth. Theodossopoulos (2013: 351) further observes that the "past, and a connection with it, is introduced to legitimize claims, establish relationships, and set the boundaries or origins of identities", which happens "often in politically charged processes", such as is witnessed in nations and communities redefining the past and searching for truth for closure regarding injustices. Literature, long held to reflect on the ambiguities of truth of the past, has also equally focused on the meaning of authenticity through the portrayal of fictional characters harnessing their fictional truths in respect of historical processes and changes. Linking the pursuit of truth and authenticity in narratives, Lubomír Doležel (1980) contends that "fictional truth is strictly 'truth in/of' the constructed narrative world and its criterion is agreement or disagreement with *authenticated* narrative facts" (15, emphasis in the original). These narrative facts carry "truth-values" which are magnified by what narrators and narrative agents say, which puts authentication in the narrative into context (Doležel, 1980: 14). In other words, narrators in fiction frame authenticity by attaching values

to represented human contexts. In a similar vein, Hayden White (1984: 23) contends that once history is recorded in the narrative, one is interested in how true/authentic such representations are. The pursuit of authenticity is at the core of the search for closure on certain aspects of history, particularly those that are traumatic in nature. White (1980, 1984) underscores the primary reason why individuals and communities appraise the past. The pursuit of authenticity for closure, White contends (1980: 24), is at the heart of “moral awareness” in the texts, which is usually inflected through the narrator’s/ character’s perspectives. White explains that “[t]he demand for closure in the historical story is a demand ... for moral meaning, a demand that sequences of real events be assessed as to their significance as elements of a moral drama” (1980: 27). In this context, this awareness is reproduced through interpreting “sequences of real events” and the meanings that these events evoke in the consciousness of individuals and communities.

White (1984: 22) addresses the notions of plausibility/ credibility/ authenticity of historical fiction. He argues:

The historical narrative does not, as narrative, dispel false beliefs about the past, human life, the nature of community ...; what it does is test the capacity of a culture’s fictions to endow real events with the kinds of meaning that literature displays to consciousness through its fashioning of patterns of ‘imaginary’ events.

In Vladislavić’s historical fiction, characters frame narrated events as either being authentic or inauthentic, while attaching “truth-values” that are ethical in nature to their perspectives. Vladislavić’s “The WHITES ONLY Bench” revisits the anxieties surrounding curation practices in post-apartheid South Africa, especially at the crucial moment when apartheid memorabilia were being consigned to museums. This story is told from the perspective of a first-person intrusive narrator who processes in fine detail the ambiguities of curation practices in a museum in which he is an employee. Wayne Booth (1952: 164) defines an intrusive narrator as one “who uses himself as the subject or hero of his own account.” The narrator sits at a vantage position (literally and figuratively) in his workshop, presenting himself as a focal character who is in good stead to record the historical shifts and complementary values espoused in transitions in the country as he sees them. As a first-person character, this narrator demonstrates what Zahavi (2005: 54) terms as “reflexive self-awareness” in reporting what he comes to terms with in his consciousness. By reporting on events as they unfold in the museum and as he reflects on them in his consciousness, the narrator frames himself as a historical witness on the one hand, and a preserver of history through his curation of memorabilia in his country, on the other. Zahavi (2005: 91) argues

that “when we reflect, we step back from our ongoing mental activities and . . . , this stepping back is a metaphor of distancing and separation, but also one of observation and confrontation.” Through the narrator’s frame of mind and his first-person consciousness surrounding curation practices in the museum, we can detect the narrator’s ethical engagement with history in the narrative.

One memorabilia that the museum is preparing to curate is ‘The WHITES ONLY Bench’, a bench that was a metaphor of white privilege, which was stationed in public spaces for whites to rest as they went about their businesses in the city. The bench was a metaphor of apartheid’s enforced racial separateness that represented the denial of fundamental rights to space for the blacks. “The WHITES ONLY Bench” revisits this significant bench in the period when apartheid was drawing to a close. In this critical period, the desire was to do an assemblage of significant memorabilia of apartheid and consign them to a space inside the museum. The story foregrounds the ideological differences between the directors of the museum, who are interested in looking for the actual/original apartheid artefacts to curate, on the one hand, and their junior museum workers, whose intentions are to source unoriginal, but instructively mediated objects, on the other. The new Director, Strickland, has to contend with her workers, whose fixation with mediated/ inauthentic artefacts for the museum, as she would gather with time, was the reason the former director, Charlie Sibeko, had “left in a huff after the fiasco with the wooden AK47s” (“The WHITES ONLY Bench”, 57). Sibeko’s exit and Strickland’s frustration with her museum workers are due to their opposition to inauthentic portrayals in the museum. To reflect on White’s (1980: 8) assertion, what Strickland aspires to get, on the one hand, is an original bench that speaks to the “true story” about the past. On the other hand, Charmaine and the other workers commissioned to work on the artefacts choose to recreate a bench that “faithfully” takes into consideration the lived realities of the original bench. While the directors choose authenticity as the only way to look at the history of the past in the present, the workers hold an alternative view that what matters is that they can dabble with inauthenticity to produce a bench that “coheres”, to use White’s (1980: 8) assertion, with narratives surrounding the totality of the bench’s history. Authenticity and inauthenticity constitute dual perspectives from which characters choose to relate to history in the present.

Charmaine’s attitude in the story is a reflection of the impossibility of finding a single perspective on history. The workers and their directors are working at odds: much of their time is spent at loggerheads on the authenticity or otherwise of the items earmarked for curation. Consequently, “[i]t wasn’t clear yet who was in charge, if anyone”, and this renders

their work to shift behind schedule (“The WHITES ONLY Bench”, 53). Strickland does not instantly recognise the bench that Charmaine is recreating by using paint to create an illusion of the real “whites only” bench. Unable to process through the “WHI” in the incomplete/d word, Strickland has to be jolted into memory: “You remember these benches. For whites only?” (“The WHITES ONLY Bench”, 54). Apartheid, as a lived reality, fails to register in Strickland’s memory. Paul Ricoeur (2004: 105) contends that “consciousness and memory are one and the same thing” as evoked in the process of remembering. The fact that the bench fails to register in her mind is a demonstration that her experiences of apartheid are limited and subjective. Her inability to read from the inauthentic to the authentic magnifies the complexity of enunciating meaning in her museum. It may also be a pointer towards her mind’s fixation on the originals, so that any reconstructed meanings do not register in her mind.

A fundamental question one asks in respect of the curation of memory in “The WHITES ONLY Bench” is the responsibility of curators to historical representations. The tension around remembering apartheid in the story is hinged around the ambiguous ways in which characters relate with the practices of curation, especially as the past earmarked for curation is heavily indentured by conflated, destroyed, disengaged, and unhinged histories. In such a context, therefore, the challenge lies in how the characters respond ethically to particular modes of truth about the contentious past. On the one hand, Strickland, interested in creating authentic memorabilia, insists that the curators and the workers of the workshop engage in finding the authentic bench. In her search for “the real thing”, Strickland aspires to be authentic to history. She understands that as curators for the museum, “[i]t is our historical duty to be authentic” (“The WHITES ONLY Bench”, 56), and she is outraged that the “workshop personnel are busily recreating beautiful replicas of apartheid memorabilia, when the ugly originals could be ours for the asking” (“The WHITES ONLY Bench”, 58-59). Strickland’s desire is to look at the past the way historians tend to do, simply, as White (1987: 174) argues, “to limit themselves to trying to see things from the position of past agents alone”. In sticking to the actual historical detail, Strickland’s authenticity does not take into consideration what White (1987: 174) observes as the “hindsight” that “narrative is necessary for the representation of ‘what actually happened’ in a given domain of historical occurrences”. Consequently, her authenticity fails to reflect on the changing political circumstances and lived realities.

The workers at the museum are more interested in “manufacturing” replicas instead of finding the original and authentic memorabilia. Charmaine claims that the real/ authentic

bench is difficult to find because “this kind of thing was frowned upon, you know, in the end. Discrimination I mean” (“The WHITES ONLY Bench”, 56). They also equally refuse to advertise for it because “it just causes more headache” (“The WHITES ONLY Bench”, 59). These workers engage in what Zahavi (2005: 91) identifies as “reflective distancing” which allows them to negotiate apartheid from an estranged position. Zahavi (2005: 91) argues that “reflective distancing is what allows us to relate critically to our mental states and put them into question; it ultimately forces us to act for reasons.” By making oblique references to apartheid, the workers position themselves to reject past signification in the museum. The irony in their pursuit, however, is that they are already conditioned to intentionally forget apartheid, even while they attempt to remember the same apartheid in the memories they intend to keep in the museum. In effect, these workers have already become complicit in the act of memorialisation.

In creating the inauthentic bench, Charmaine works with a photograph of a “genuine 1960s one” (“The WHITES ONLY Bench”, 56), which is then re-cast and remodelled around popular stories, drawn, as Charmaine claims, “from the Sharpeville Massacre to the Soweto Uprising, trying to get the details right” (“The WHITES ONLY Bench”, 56). Charmaine insists on sifting through multiple narratives in the search for authenticity, as opposed to acquiescing to the single interpretation of a real bench. To the workers, particularly Charmaine, what matters is their mediation of the lived realities of apartheid. Writing about the reorganisation of memory in Moscow museums, Anatoly Khazanov argues that museums are meant to create historical authenticity (2000: 37). Khazanov (2000: 35) contends that “Museum curators have to decide what is worth keeping, and especially of exhibiting, and what is not.” This is arguably a responsibility that the museum workers believe should pervade their assembly of memories in the museum. The fact that a previous museum director resigned and a new one is finding it difficult to fit in is a testament to the enduring tensions that magnify disagreements regarding the reorganisation of memories in post-traumatic contexts, as intimated in Chapter One of this study. As teams who are undoubtedly relying on the truth of history, their views are ideologically different, reflecting the tension as recorded by White (1987) that stages “a division between the historian who wishes primarily to ‘reconstruct’ or ‘explain’ the past and one who is interested either in ‘interpreting’ it or using its detritus as an occasion for his own speculations on the present (and future)” (188). Charmaine’s history is populated by lived circumstances, while Strickland’s is dry and unmediated. Charmaine particularly considers Strickland’s search for authenticity as a usurpation of her professional mandate, as manifest in her dismissive attitude as reported by the narrator: “this jenny-come-

lately (as Charmaine puts it) give[s] us a lecture about authenticity. What about our professional duty? (Charmaine again)” (“The WHITES ONLY Bench”, 56). In this particular context, the narrator takes an estranged position to communicate the workers’ collective disavowal of Strickland’s mode of operation. Phelan (2017: 94) argues that an estranging narration “increase[s] the interpretive, affective, ethical or other kinds of distance between authors and audiences, on the one hand, and character narrators, on the other.” We are not only drawn to the contentious debate surrounding the meaning and significance of authenticity, but also to the privileged and subjective position of the narrator, and by extension, of the museum workers who are inclined to follow their own self-interest in the curation process.

In many instances, the story deploys the concept of perspective, or the angle from which history can be read. When Strickland stubbornly insists on procuring the original bench, Reddy, another worker, upstages the Director by referring to Hector Peterson/Pieterse’s iconic photograph. Reddy’s reference to the photograph is a clever ploy to explain how it is almost impossible to find “objective truth” in the pursuit of authenticity regarding Hector Pieterse/ Peterson’s actual identity and the circumstances of his death. Barthes (1977: 21-23) argues that photographs effect paradoxes, as their “trick effects”, “pose”, and focalised “objects” all combine to produce a complex interplay between textual meaning and the image/s. Reddy’s reading of the photograph must therefore process the multiple significations of the many codes present in the photograph for him to arrive at the connoted meaning. Barthes (1977) contends that, “[t]o find this code of connotation would thus be to isolate, inventariate, and structure all the ‘historical’ elements of the photograph” as well as those within the “photographic surface” that “derive their very discontinuity from a certain knowledge” (28). Reddy imposes history and circumstances regarding the shooting of Peterson/ Pieterse by bringing the different significations in the photograph to bear on the construction of authenticity of/in the photograph.

Reddy explains that the victim’s original name was “Pieterse”, “but the newspapers called him Hector Petersen and it stuck. We struck out the “I”, we put it to rout in the alphabet of the oppressor” (“The WHITES ONLY Bench”, 61). Reddy then reminds her and the team about Hector’s historical detail:

According to the tombstone he was thirteen years old, but as you can see he looked more than half that age... or is it just the angle? If only we had some other pictures of the subject to compare this one with, we might feel able to speak with more authority (“The WHITES ONLY Bench”, 61).

Reddy's assessment points to the subjectivity of truth in respect of a lack of an alternative benchmark for claims to be rendered authentic. To Reddy, authenticity cannot be ascribed to a single perspective. In specific instances – as is demonstrated in the photograph – historical detail may lack verifiability, especially in circumstances as the Soweto Uprising of 16 June 1976, when black school children were shot and killed by the police, and from which this random photograph was taken. The authenticity of the supposed age in the tombstone is therefore questioned in the perceptions of the curators, echoing the instability of truth as argued in the previous chapter. (It is also worthy to note that the photograph retains true allegiance to the photographer, the time, and date the photograph was taken). Reddy's elaboration on the failure of history to provide full authenticity is a pointer (which he seems to project as motivating their pursuit of mediation) that certain memorials may require mediation in order to arrive at the actual truth. Full authenticity, therefore, requires mediation of the circumstances around the event or memory in question.

Reddy's perspective is that history and historical reorganisation must permit space for the narrative to redefine the actual truth. To Reddy, the pursuit of authenticity in the face of an unverifiable historical past is difficult, if not untenable. Khazanov (2000: 37) contends that "Soviet museums did not shun straightforward falsification. Historical mythology was often substituted for the documentation of events ... some events were illustrated not with genuine documents and photographs, but with forgeries". This pursuit of an angle or perspective in the Soviet museums was an attempt to be ingenious and creative in dealing with the past, such as by way of abrogation, which is, "the desire to forget or even falsify its most shameful moments" (Khazanov, 2000: 40). In such a context, therefore, inauthenticity functioned to frame an ethically ambiguous space in which truth is distorted. Furthermore, museums, as imagined, also function as tourist attraction sites, especially in spaces where such memorials have been abandoned as relics of the past. This may explain why Charmaine and her team add significant visual effects in order to recreate beauty in the mediated bench as opposed to the rustic "ugly originals", which, potentially, are immune to easy visibility, as will be observed in the next section. Indeed, Charmaine, and the narrator, devote significant attention to the mediated bench, with a singular belief in the exceptional historical response the inauthentic bench would exude in replicating past historical experiences in the present.

A decided ambiguity in this context is that the items lose their probative historical values as they are transmuted from their intrinsic positions as markers of authentic history, into a modern day, tourist attraction commodities. Writing regarding distortions of meaning in the making of histories in museums, Susan A. Crane (1997: 48) argues that in

circumstances where voices of curators overbear in the curation practices, there is a real possibility that distortions may be evoked by their mediation of their personal preferences in the construction of meanings. Crane (1997: 57) observes:

in the current politically charged arena of museums and memory is distortion: distortion of ‘the past,’ distortion of the museum experience, memory distortions, and the negative charge associated with ‘distortion’ in cultural discourse on memory and identity.

Crane is empathic that in order to be authentic to the historical experience represented by museum artefacts, those who primarily interacted with the said artefact should be actively involved in the re-creation of the artefact (1997: 60). Charmaine’s visual effects can be regarded as some kind of distortion. The artificial bench retains an aura of an idyllic beauty, far removed from the painful legacies of the past, and appearing, at face value, however, to represent the actualities of the past. From their present estimation, the narrator observes that “it was a beautiful bench – as a useful object, I mean, rather than a symbol of injustice” (“The WHITES ONLY Bench”, 54-55). The narrator’s ambivalence is discernible in his equivocal account of the changing relevance of the bench. Barthes (1973: 145) argues that narrative equivocation constitutes “double understanding”, which “makes communication obscure, fallacious, hazardous: uncertain.” The narrator’s eschewal of the past role of the bench as a “symbol of injustice” in favour of the commodified present is a mask on memory that distorts its actual function in the scheme of historical remembering. This is also reflected in Strickland’s assessment of the “beauty” of the inauthentic bench, as opposed to the “ugly” originals (“The WHITES ONLY Bench”, 59). The distorted vision in the bench generates a deception that exists in the ambiguous divide between appearance and reality:

The bench looked well used, which is often a sign that a thing had been loved. But when you looked closer, as Strickland was doing now, you saw that all these signs of wear and tear were no more than skin-deep. Charmaine had applied all of them in the workshop. The bruised hollows on the seat, where the surface had been abraded by decades of white thighs and buttocks, were really patches of brown and purple paint (“The WHITES ONLY Bench”, 55).

The perception regarding the historical “use” of this inauthentic bench is all a matter of creative distortion by Charmaine and her team of curators. Charmaine had simply applied paint and re-worked it to rival the authentic bench. Charmaine and her team create an illusion of reality which distorts the perception of the inauthentic bench. Barthes (1973: 9) argues that when hierarchies between denotative and connotative meanings are jumbled and conflated,

the result is some kind of illusion. This illusion functions in shaping contradictory meanings out of a narrative event. Charmaine's paint, which reflects her professed artistic capabilities, is taken to denote the popularity of the bench. Furthermore, the paint exaggerates its extent of use.

All in all, the inauthentic bench hordes its historical ambiguity. The narrator observes: "Charmaine's faithful copy reclines in the dapple below, and its ability to attract and repel our visitors never ceases to impress me" ("The WHITES ONLY Bench", 65). By constantly invoking the beauty and attractiveness of the inauthentic bench, the narrator draws our attention to his own bias, and we are therefore confronted with a situation in which inauthenticity is entertained. As a first-person narrator whose narrative authority is "the authority of the experiencer", to appropriate Doležel's (1980: 20) assertion, his own perspective functions to reframe and rewrite history according to his own account. Observing from his vantage position in the workshop, the narrator reports, for instance, sighting a nostalgic white man, probably on a school trip to the museum with his students, sitting in the bench and reliving the old days; on another day, the narrator would see a visibly resentful black woman registering her revulsion at the sight of the bench ("The WHITES ONLY Bench", 66). This particular narrator emerges as an omniscient narrator, who modulates memories of museum visitors based on his own understanding of the historical affect the bench has on them. All the same, it is ironic how the inauthentic bench continues to overwrite past historical permutations, while the actual bench, kept away from public anonymity, now prohibits all races from sitting on it. Elaine Young (2011: 114) observes that the "real" apartheid bench peters out into oblivion in the museum, while the fake, transposed in the actual place of apartheid, receives attention. To the narrator, this dialectic "seems unfair" in the sense that the inauthentic bench receives greater attention. But it is precisely in its mediated qualities and being in its "rightful" place that evokes a connection in memory to the past. The inauthentic bench defeats history, consigning its actualities into oblivion. Symbolically, the past, history, is itself victimised. Khazanov (2000: 40) argues that one of the ways of dealing with the past is through victimization, as in this instance, history and its bench has been defeated by being consigned to invisibility. In effect, the "real" bench enters into the museum as an "impostor", while the recreated one takes up all historical credits, at least in the present ("The WHITES ONLY Bench", 65). The authentic/ "impostor" bench can also figuratively represent the repression of history caused by the museum's "private" hold on historical artefacts, as opposed to being in the actual historical contexts that made them

meaningful. In the end, the narrator and Charmaine are satisfied by the myth of authenticity that is carried by Charmaine's "faithful copy" which finds meaning in the present.

In "The Prime Minister is Dead", Vladislavić also engages with ethical ambiguities generated by the pursuit of authenticity. The story parodies the authenticity of the Afrikaner legacy upon the death of Verwoerd, a prominent Afrikaner leader. The story explores the responses of an Afrikaner family consisting of the narrator, the narrator's Granny, and the narrator's father and mother, to the news of the killing of Verwoerd. Verwoerd was the Prime Minister of South Africa from 1958 to 1966. In 1966, Verwoerd was fatally stabbed multiple times in Parliament by Dimitri (Demitrius) Tsafendas, who was then working as a parliamentary messenger. The narrative also strikes a narrative balance between the narrator's grandfather and Verwoerd, especially in the context of the kind of legacy left behind by each one of them. When the narrator's grandfather died, all he bequeathed his extended family was a store of personal items, all collapsed into a single suitcase. He willed that an oversize suit and pruning shears would go to his son, the narrator's father, while the narrator's mother "got some newspaper clippings and some photographs", to keep him in their memories ("The Prime Minister is Dead", 2). The narrator retained "a pair of lucky nail-clippers given to my grandfather by an Italian prisoner of war", signifying, in part, the bequeathing of the bloodline of a military profile of their family to the subsequent generations ("The Prime Minister is Dead", 2). On the one hand, the grandfather's legacy shows the humility and lack of privilege in the status of the family as they tend their farm. On the other hand, what is primarily given for the keeps are memories and deep connections to Afrikaner culture and history, particularly to wars and conquests. It is an affirmation of the Afrikaner legacy that culminates in, and puts into perspective, the immediate killing of the Prime Minister. It therefore pins the historical reflection and ethical and ideological resonances behind the actions of the Afrikaners in memorising and mourning their fallen hero.

The deaths of the Prime Minister and of the grandfather in the story symbolise the collective and individual end of history of the Afrikaner. Upon the death of the grandfather, the family let the orchard grow wild and the fruits are left to rot in the ground, casting an image of indifferent Afrikaners magnifying their loss, anger and subjection at the turn of events. This marks one of the narrator's foreshadowing of the "many consequences" occasioned by the death of the Prime Minister ("The Prime Minister is Dead", 2). The attendant gloom is captured through the narrator's father's projection that "they" would still kill the new Prime Minister, which registers white apprehensions at the political turn of events. The death of the Prime Minister impinges on the consciousness of the narrator's

father, and his mood turns from anger to outright indignation and apprehension. Granny's loss is particularly evinced by her empathetic identification with the body of the fallen Prime Minister, as prefigured through her images of rot, meat, and decay: "Rotting in the soil. A piece of meat. Shame. He leaves a wife and six children" ("The Prime Minister", 4). Granny retains a deep family connection to the fallen hero.

The story forebodes the fears and vulnerabilities of the Afrikaners, whose cultural identity is subsumed under past memories of marginality against other "English-speaking whites", especially before apartheid (Vestergaard, 2001: 21). There is therefore an assumed link between the Afrikaners' early marginalised history with their later pursuits of power and dominance in South Africa. In the story, the legacy of participation in a war by the narrator's grandfather in the past is overwritten by extensive images that are collated to the representation of the landscape. Family life is expropriated through war symbols, seen in the representation of the veld through "platoon of trees". The narrator's father also waged "war against the garden" in clothes "left over from the war" ("The Prime Minister", 3). This war and violent imagery complete the general mood of the story. The vestiges of past fights for power are a memory that inflects on Drew Archibald's (1969: 416) evocation of Afrikaner powerlessness in the face of "military defeat and occupation, a long history of discrimination of many kinds" by fellow whites. The death of the Prime Minister, therefore, signifies a pricking injury on the collective hold on power by the Afrikaner. Sam Nolutshungu (1971: 25) argues that the "invocation of the Afrikaner past ... reflected a sense of Afrikaner solidarity, the roots of which reached back to the Anglo-Boer war, the Boer Republics and even the Great Trek". This is the same collective solidarity that the whites in the story have as they follow the funeral procession of their fallen leader, and as they magnify their loss through mourning. What registers in their faces are their apprehensions regarding the political future of the Afrikaner. Kate Manzo and Pat McGowan (1992) contend that Afrikaners were largely fearful of the changing political terrain and despaired over their fragility in the changing power structure. The narrator's father is apprehensive that the new Prime Minister may still be assassinated in similar circumstances, casting a gloomy picture of the Afrikaner future.

Newell Stultz (1969: 3) argues that a "'politics of security' characterised white South Africa from 1961 to at least the time of the death of the Prime Minister H.F. Verwoerd". Verwoerd, regarded as Granite in his magnification of white power, was canonised as a hero among the Afrikaners, particularly when he met a "distinctively Afrikaner nationalist objective" of marshalling South Africa to become a Republic in 1960 (Stultz, 1969: 9, 13). In

the same year, on April 9, 1960, Verwoerd received a threat on his life, “shot by a European (white) farmer, David Beresford Pratt, who was subsequently ruled of unsound mind and confined in an asylum” (American Jewish Committee, 1961: 366). Colin Legum (1960: 223, 242) observes that the (initial) attempt on Verwoerd’s life was already an indication of a looming catastrophe, which not only captured threats to white supremacy but also largely represented a wave of despondency and gloom in South Africa at the time. This is also a period that marked heightened massacres and wanton police killings, such as was witnessed during the Sharpeville Massacre (American Jewish Committee, 1961). Six years later, Verwoerd was stabbed to death by Tsafendas, who was subsequently declared to have been insane when he committed the deed. Katharina Jörder (2023: 150) records that at the time the Prime Minister was killed, the “apartheid regime had reached its zenith of power”. His death, therefore, signified, to a large extent, the loss of (Afrikaner) power.

The narrative maintains a duplicity in the identities of the grandfather and the Prime Minister. Both are towering figures in their own respective locales: The former as a patriarch bequeathing a “humble” legacy to his family, which is heavily patterned by past associations with war and lineages, the latter bequeathing his legacy, upon his death, in the form of a compost heap, which figures his historical legacy to the Afrikaners. Part of the ambiguity inherent in Vladislavić’s fiction is manifested in the narrative structure that uses narrative equivocation. To create two levels of understanding, Vladislavić projects a “snare” whose identity frames and defines the “revelation” of a duplicate identity, to appropriate Barthes’s duality of narrative identification (1973: 145). The narrator’s grandfather leaves behind his spouse, the granny who was “crocheting one of an endless pile of woollen squares” at the time she processes the shocking news of the death of the Prime Minister as broadcast over the radio: “The Prime Minister is dead! Some madman chopped him with a panga!” (“The Prime Minister is Dead”, 2). Verwoerd’s wife, Betsie Verwoerd, was also known to have had a pastime similar to the grandmother’s. Jörder (2023: 140) observes that Betsie Verwoerd’s pastime was knitting, who, at the time her husband was elected as Prime Minister in 1958, “had been quietly occupied all morning knitting a blue jersey” when she received the news.

According to Jörder (2023: 141), knitting was an expression of the domesticity of Afrikaner women that signified their devotion to home and family. The grandmother in the story then emerges as a duplicate character (of Betsie Verwoerd) as recorded in the amazing parallels in their actions when Verwoerd was making history. Betsie was knitting in 1958 when she received the news of her husband’s election to the highest authority in the land. The grandmother was knitting when the radio broke the news of the Prime Minister’s death. The

grandmother in the story effectively retains the identity of a snare, whose actions and mannerisms are replicated in the revelation of the history of the Verwoerd family. In the story, Vladislavić appropriates the knitting imagery and transforms the image of the domesticity of knitting to the symbolic knitting of the memories of the past, especially in the multiple ways in which patterns are wrought out of the violent intrusions of the crochet hook. The crochet hook and knitting become a means of deciphering the intricacies of intrusive violence, as when Tsafendas's knife violently intruded into Verwoerd's body multiple times in "Tsafendas's Diary", as we shall observe later.

The death of the Prime Minister is an affirmation of the loss of power of the Afrikaner. To the white South Africans, all they get is a "compost heap", with all its bloody putrefactions ("When the Prime Minister died he left us a compost heap", "The Prime Minister is Dead", 2). This compost heap becomes a recurrent metaphor of not just the lack of a solid historical legacy for the Afrikaner, but also an affirmation of a smelly rot signposted by white power and its gory and complicit manifestations. The imagery of the compost heap again manifests when, as the truck carrying the body of the Prime Minister breaks down, the narrator and his father load the box/coffin containing his body into their wheelbarrow and push it to the cemetery. Their new role in history, by taking up the last burial rites from the soldiers (who are directed to the parking lot), allows them to take charge of the solemn moment, and to partake in the burial of the Prime Minister. Rather than allow for the conducting of proper burial before lowering to the grave, the narrator's father heaves the body into the grave, as he would in a compost heap: "At the last moment, on the very lip of the grave, he dug the metal prow of the barrow into the earth and heaved" ("The Prime Minister is Dead", 9). This final act of defiance, by the man, who is also dressed in old army regalia, and accompanied by his son whom he identifies as "Private", is not only an indictment of the security apparatus and their failure to protect the Prime Minister (including in the most hallowed precincts of Parliament) but also effect a violent indignation of the Afrikaner at the impossibility of effecting a decent burial of the Prime Minister on account of the circumstances of his death. The grandmother's processing of shame, read together with her son's actions at the burial, conditions their attitude towards the death. Shame may also be symbolised by the family's wish to have him interred in the quickest time possible to release themselves from the obligating demands of memorialising the trauma.

The Prime Minister's death is also a harbinger of the uneasy integration of the Afrikaner into the changing political and ideological landscape. A recurrent image in the story is the figuration of home for the whites in South Africa. The narrator and his father

make concerted attempts to build a modest house for the family. The construction of the house is layered by a commitment to the land, and two central images – that of a wheelbarrow and a compost heap – complete the picture. Incidentally, this house is a house in transition, emblematic of the shift from apartheid to the “new” South Africa. The grandfather who stays in the “old house” before his death remains fixated in the past, as the narrator and the rest of the members of the family move into the “new home”. While the grandmother moves with them to the new house, she remains a powerful knitter of the memories of the past. In the story, the community of white people in South Africa has to process their “shame” (regarding the “shameful” killing of the Prime Minister) and the changing positions of honour and dishonour. Granny mediates the shame of white people occasioned by the death of the Prime Minister, because he leaves nothing behind, other than the disconsolate compost heap.

The funeral procession epitomises white victimhood. They process their mourning as a desolate people waving flags as they “stood as people do on the edge of a cliff”, metaphorically, here, as figured through the loss of Afrikaner power. The antithesis created by the parallel statements, “They killed the Prime Minister...” (“The Prime Minister is Dead”, 1), and, “We buried the Prime Minister” (3), establish the existing opposition between the perpetrators of the killing, on the one hand, and the victims, on the other hand, who process the act of mourning the deceased. Since Tsafendas is the only perpetrator captured as the killer of the Prime Minister, it is ironic for the family to imagine that there was a conspiracy in the killing. Zuleiga Adams (2014: 208) argues regarding the trial of Tsafendas, however, that the investigators prodded Tsafendas regarding possible complicity and machinations of others not brought before the court. This alternative view, perhaps, is what informs the family’s search for “truth” by entertaining possibilities of collective complicity in his killing.

James Young (1992: 269), writing regarding aspects of memorialisation in Germany, argues that remembering the past through monuments “remains a tortured, self-reflective, even paralysing preoccupation. Every monument, at every turn, is endlessly scrutinized, explicated, and debated. Artistic, ethical, and historical questions occupy design juries.” Vladislavić’s “Propaganda by Monuments” imagines a similar torture on the self, as the characters magnify particular questions that confront their being upon coming face to face with the monuments.

“Propaganda by Monuments” features characters who process uneasy memories with respect to the histories as exuded by monuments. The story details an attempt to transpose

monuments between two countries, Russia and South Africa. This story is told through the perspectives of two individuals, Pavel Grekov, a junior government translator in Moscow, in post-communist Russia, and Boniface Khumalo, a black South African in Pretoria, who is beginning to savour newfound political freedom in his country. The story is focalised around the experiences of these two men from a third-person stream of consciousness technique. However, what is critical is that their communication is rendered primarily through letters, with their first-person perspectives clearly marked out. In the letters, the characters retain their authority as narrators who function as witnesses and first-person experiencing selves to the actions rendered in the story. Furthermore, we experience their mental and internal states of consciousness that condition their emotional and social distance, and ethical values. Zahavi (2005: 94) argues that a reflective first-person consciousness “entail a self-apprehension from the perspective of the other.” These two characters are representatives of their respective countries, which, at present, are undergoing monumental changes. On the one hand, Grekov’s Russia is removing and dislocating monuments as an aspect of de-commemoration. On the other hand, South Africans, especially black South Africans, are reorganising memorial spaces – part of which includes the rejection of insignias of apartheid. Martin Murray (2013: 18) argues that a “commemorative site represents a kind of performative re-creation – of an event, a person, or a deed – that seeks to bind future generations to a moral lesson, if not an actual truth”. These commemorations are significant in that they indicate how characters at present respond to meanings enunciated by the monuments. Christian Naudè (2017: 61) asserts that “Propaganda by Monuments” “brings into dialogue two highly resonant spaces of transition, Moscow and Pretoria, through an exchange initiated between two individuals”. This story prophetically reflects the new South Africa’s de-memorisation practices, which happen/ed after apartheid formally ended. The two contexts are imbued in the discordant conversations between the two aforementioned characters from the two respective contexts in which the “truth” of history is mired, doubled, overwritten, and watermarked by different languages, translations, and personal perspectives.

Since his country is presently reorganising memories, casting away metaphors of the past, Khumalo wishes to be part of that memorialisation. Sabine Marschall (2009: 152) observes that there is an existing debate in South Africa regarding the attempts to “erase memories and sanitise the country’s painful history.” Khumalo’s wish may be read as a gesture in that regard. Khumalo’s excitement with the statue of Lenin seems motivated by Russia’s associations with the fight against apartheid. His conviction that the statue would fit in his context is, perhaps, drawn from the associated links between Russia and South Africa

at the time, especially as the former was home to ANC freedom fighters during the repression years of apartheid (Halsall & Wasserman, 2018).

Grekov and Khumalo, in attempting to imagine the different historical contexts, come face to face with cultural and historical dissonances. They exist as character doubles, as we read the character of one in the eyes of the other. Through this “double understanding”, we are drawn into an equivocal situation, which generates, to use Barthes’s (1973: 145) assertion, “two subjects, two cultures, two languages, two zones of listening.” Beyond Khumalo’s letter that portrays an idyllic pastoral landscape as well as a “portrait of a man – a politician, he assumed, or a king” (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 15) on the envelope, the South Africa that comes to Grekov’s imagination while “plotting his course to the [Lenin] monument” through the deserted streets of Moscow, is the picture of the Transvaal which he wonders if it is as cold as Moscow (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 16). South Africa, to him, however, is in the “unimaginable latitudes”, and his thoughts of the Transvaal as cold demonstrate geographical dissonance that lends credence to historical, cultural, and geographical differences (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 13). In this instance, it is impossible for Grekov to entertain any sort of intersubjective relation with Khumalo, or indeed South Africa. This is the main reason why Grekov’s reflections pander on the incompatibility of history, as he attempts to comprehend (and perhaps empathise with) the context in which he is planning to send the statue. The apparent dilemma that Grekov has in his translation of Khumalo’s letter stems, in part, from his little understanding of the South African context. He reads Khumalo’s letter against his own background. Grekov does not seem to make sense of significant aspects of the South African social environment as inflected in Khumalo’s letter. He does not understand what Khumalo means by “bourgeois countrymen”; he wonders if they are “business ‘contacts’? class alliances?” (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 23). He also annotates Khumalo’s non-standard statement, “I myself am very much struggle” as “struggling – infamous Apartheid”, re-inscribing a metaphor that Khumalo tries very hard to leave off at a tangent in his letter. Another uncertainty emerges from Grekov’s failure in the translation. His translation was a mix of rudimentary methods that yielded a highly mediated meaning that was liable to distortions. The letter, now twice-removed as a carbon copy of a handwritten copy that he made from the original, was also overwritten by parentheses and footnotes, “guesses at meanings, useful turns of phrase culled from memory and the dictionary” that gave way to misrepresentations, personal bias and inaccuracies (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 21). The translation challenges authenticity of the letters. The letter, is, in fact, from a certain Christov, but is translated and annotated by Grekov to the extent that the

original is hardly decipherable. Khumalo cannot make sense of the “real” author of the letter. To Khumalo, this letter was from Grekov: “He didn’t think of it as Christov’s letter, it had been so ruthlessly invaded and occupied by the translator” (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 37). Like Grekov, he fails to decipher the authenticity of the letter as well, and the meaning and intention in the letter escape him (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 37). Because it is impossible to develop intersubjective relations between the two characters and their respective nations, the pursuit of personal responsibility and empathetic consideration is rendered ambiguous.

Monica Popescu (2011: 129) reads Grekov’s failure to “translate” Khumalo’s black hair tucked in the letter in his search for the authenticity of the letter as “optical aberrations”, as he fails to see the hard piece of evidence that would have solved the puzzle in his mind over the letter’s origins. In effect, his “reflective self-awareness” (Zahavi, 2005: 54) fails him. Zahavi (2005) argues that “reflexive self-awareness involves a form of alienation ...characterised by a type of *self-fragmentation*” (91, emphasis in the original). Grekov’s consciousness demonstrates a self that is alienated from the concrete pursuit of meaning in the monument he plans to send to his anonymous friend. In the same way, Khumalo fails to acknowledge the real author in the letter, even though there were signs: “The fingerprint in ink from the typewriter ribbon, which was clearly visible in the top left-hand corner of the page, may have settled the question of authorship once and for all, had Khumalo been able to check it against flesh and blood” (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 37). Khumalo’s failure suggests a kind of fragmentation in the self as he is unable to fully decipher the authenticity of the letter. This failure to read authenticity points to a possible misunderstanding of context and intention.

The two major characters, Grekov and Khumalo, largely limited in their knowledge of the history of their respective countries, appear ridiculous as they attempt to approximate histories of the other’s context into their consciousness. The irony is that the projected acts of memorialisation are not only geographically worlds apart, but also representative of different futures, in spite of similar pasts. We detect an ironic playfulness in Khumalo’s attempt to get the Lenin statue from one context where it is historically being rendered obsolete and inaccurate to one that is completely out of tune with – unwarranted and unwanted, even. Khumalo gradually realises, upon visiting Strijdom’s monument, that he cannot replace the figurine of Strijdom with that of Lenin. The imagined displacement and replacement are discordant in the attempted actualisation, despite the intent:

Then he looked at the head [of the Strijdom statue]. His heart sank. According to his calculations, the head of V.I. Lenin promised to him in the letter from Grekov was at least three times larger than the head of J.G. Strijdom! (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 36-7)

Khumalo’s experience with the imagination of transposing Lenin’s statue to the South African context underlies the ambiguities of the historical transmutation of memories. The unusually large monument fails to fit into Khumalo’s space. It is also ambiguous that Khumalo is intent on transfixing a memory that is being rejected elsewhere, and imagining that it will naturally fit into his context. Aletta Catharina Swanepoel (2011) argues that Khumalo does not seem to have any ideological basis for requesting to have the statue. Khumalo’s attempts to redefine and reconsider what memories to remember in his country are a sign of a problematic ethical mis/adventure. Khumalo rhetorically rejects “the obvious political angle” of renaming the tavern after black political leaders of the freedom struggle like Nelson Mandela to reflect on new emergent memories, justifying: “in this capricious epoch how could you tell who would be popular in the new year?” (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 33) However, he goes ahead to consider a far more inappropriate political leader from a different context. He fails to decipher the political and satiric commentary regarding the disposal of the Lenin statue in the newspaper editorial that fed his fancy to consider transposing the statue of Lenin, and his entire pursuit of the Lenin memory borders principally on the theatre of the absurd (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 34). He seems fixated on memorising white iconic figures, which may be a pointer towards how systemic apartheid has induced a consciousness in his mind to accept white visibilities unquestioningly. It is ironic that Khumalo does not think of renaming his tavern after Nelson Mandela, given that on “the day Nelson Mandela walked from the shadows into the glare of daily news” is the day he felt his tavern needed a facelift through renaming (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 32-33). His affective responses to the materiality of his own situation are therefore suspect and uncertain.

#### **4.3 Ethical Ambiguities of the In/Visible: Seeing and Unseeing History**

One defining feature of monuments is that they are constructed to be espied. They are public artefacts that rely on visibility for effect. In the interrogation of “monumental” memorials, especially those with greater historical – and ethical – significance, the notion of their physical location and the kind of image that they exude on the public realm has been brought into constant interrogation. Dalia Gebrial (2018: 26), reflecting on Cecil Rhodes’s monument in Oxford, for example, observes that the statue “occupies a position of

simultaneous invisibility and hyper-visibility.” I draw from this assertion to reflect on the view that memorials are expressions of ambiguity in the sense that they are visible, from one perspective, while exuding invisibility, from another. This simultaneous traction is captured in the duality of the “in/visible” as imagined in this section. In order to analyse this assertion, I draw from the capacity of the self as a construct to reflect on memories and to inflect them in the present. Zahavi (2005) contends that “[t]o be conscious of oneself ... entails just being conscious of an experience in its first-personal mode of givenness; it is a question of having first-personal access to one’s own experiential life” (106). Monuments as historical insignias exude particular experiences on the sighting subject. At the core of this experience is the role of memory in fashioning particular modes of experience of the self. Ricoeur (2004: 58) contends that “with remembering, the emphasis is placed on the return of awakened consciousness of an event recognised as having occurred before the moment when consciousness declares having experienced, perceived, learned.” Ricoeur’s assertions frame the role that consciousness plays in the relationship between the sighting self and the monuments in question.

In his theorising regarding the moral significance of visible monuments in post-apartheid South Africa, Achille Mbembe (2016a) argues that past (racialized) monuments need to be demythologised by bringing them into a fixed gaze where they can be questioned, and ultimately rendered powerless. In Vladislavić’s fiction, monuments appear like ghosts, infringing on the consciousness of the living. The concern with questioning the visibility, and the (ultimate) invisibility of monuments, and therefore of the past, is a marked feature in Vladislavić’s fiction. Vladislavić’s short stories not only give memories a chance to be heard and to be fixed into a knowable historical gaze, but also go ahead to destabilise their very significance in history. In demythologising the memories of the past, Vladislavić annexes the past and interpolates it into the present, while at the same time attempting to efface the significance of the past for the present. Characters in Vladislavić’s fiction encapsulate ambiguous imprints on memorising both the past and the present. Vladislavić’s characters perform, at once, the twin functions of “recalling” the past in the words of Mbembe (2016a), and burying that past by indicating how its re-narrativisation in the present is encapsulated in ambiguity. Reflecting a certain ethical imperative, the memories that no longer hold for the future can only be consigned to the annals of history, by first demythologising them through the narrative, and second, curating them in museums where their potency and charm can no longer hold sway in the present.

Vladislavić engages with this critical question of demythologising whiteness, particularly by questioning and subverting the role that memorials play in the hearts and minds of South Africans, particularly the whites. Vladislavić epitomises what Linda Alcoff (2015) imagines as the awkwardness of race that underwrites the ambiguous ways in which shame, guilt, and complicity are re-imagined. Alcoff (2015) argues that communities choose to be either “visible” or “invisible”/ anonymous, and their ambiguous gestures define how or whether they can choose to speak or keep silent about the past. This may, essentially, define the ways in which they look at history in terms of presence (visibility) or absence (anonymity or invisibility). Characters in Vladislavić’s fiction choose visibility or invisibility when addressing critical historical issues facing them. This gesture to choose how to deal with the (post)apartheid condition is at the heart of negotiating morality as a product of history in Vladislavić’s fiction. According to Clea Schultz (2013), Vladislavić is devoted to the representation of “difficult” moral issues. Vladislavić endows characters with individual thoughts that put them into ambiguous situations. Characters feel inundated by ambiguous images and memories that constellate shifts in history, particularly in terms of their relevance to the present. Schultz (2013) observes that Vladislavić’s dexterity in language imagines the ambiguities of human transcendence by mirroring polar opposites at the level of character.

The quest for perspective in the telling of history is a significant point in Vladislavić’s fiction, which is mirrored in the author’s engagement with visibility and invisibility. On the one hand, visible memories that continue to signpost past trauma and suffering invite erasure and consigning into ultimate invisibility. On the other hand, certain seemingly invisible memories recur and reignite remembering in the consciousness of characters, and these memories refuse to be forgotten or rendered totally out of consciousness. In other words, in spite of their erasure from memory, these monuments and objects even speak through their invisibility. Vladislavić’s *Missing Persons* is a collection of eleven stories, all connected together by a similar orientation suggested in the title, “missing persons”. The title emerges as a figuration of all the stories in the collection. “Missing persons” is a metaphor in most (post)conflict societies that refers to individuals who are unaccounted for, usually after an upheaval. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for example, dedicated Volume 6 of its report to missing persons, as victims of enforced disappearances, abductions and killings, some of whom never became part of a record, thus prohibiting genuine closure (TRC, 1998). Their incomplete disappearance from collective memory prefigures the uncertainty of their fate, and they are therefore imagined as objects hovering between life and death, between remembering and forgetting, between visibility and invisibility. It therefore constitutes a

vexation in memory, and, in the pursuit of closure, it remains as an image that invites disorientation and uncertainty.

Sue Marais (2011: 37) argues that the stories in the collection feature “dislocated and alienated experiences of the characters” who are victims of the apartheid past. Each of these stories features some kind of a missing person, an unexplained death of an individual, or individuals trying to process closure regarding some “missing” memory or aspect of truth regarding some event. These characters are therefore in continual flux, unable to process closure. “Missing Persons” remains as an ambiguous metaphor that holds the vexation between remembering and forgetting; as a memory that not only resists complete erasure, but also one that requires the performance of extra rituals of mourning and metaphorical purgation in order to achieve full closure. These characters speak, even in their silence, as their memories linger on anxiously in the memories of the living. Nicky Rousseau et al. (2018: 17), in furthering the idea of missing persons as a reality of victimhood, argue:

For missing persons, the ontological question of whether they are alive or dead, and the multiple ontologies of being, is at the heart of the uncertainty that missingness and death itself produces.

Usefully, the scholars stretch the definition of missing persons to include “the skeletons of empire” as well as the “apartheid-era atrocities” tagged as “disappeared and missing” (17). Elizabeth Baumgartner and Lisa Ott (2017) hold the view that the determination of the status of a missing person is a step towards justice for the victim. However, the search for that past, on the circumstances of the victim, as traumatic as it is, yields horror and further trauma occasioned by remembering it in the present.

Katie Reid (2017: 22) observes that “Missing Persons” reflects “sinister state-instituted undertones, irresolvable secrecies indicating conspiracies and gaps at their centre – absent bodies, formalities,” all of which point to apartheid’s metaphors of silencing. Missing persons reflect the silenced voices of victims and the totalising power of the apartheid state. “The Prime Minister is Dead” and “Tsafendas’s Diary” are two stories from the anthology. The two stories are interrelated. Marais (2011) notes the presence of similar narrative conventions between “The Prime Minister is Dead” and “Tsafendas’s Diary.” “Tsafendas’s Diary” features Granny and the narrator in search of the motive of Tsafendas in the killing of the Prime Minister. Marais (2011: 31) contends that “Tsafendas’s Diary” is a story that envisages “multiple suggestions of complicity and of a claustrophobic society.” These two stories, however, do not explicitly mention the Prime Minister by name, although circumstantial evidence, and the reference to Tsafendas as the killer of the Prime Minister,

point to Verwoerd as the focalised subject. Vladislavić chooses silence and anonymity on the identity of the Prime Minister, preferring to represent his experience primarily through narrative truth and therefore avoiding the sinister and the uncanny of apartheid, including the possibilities of authorial suppression. Nevertheless, narrative truth imagines the unnamed prime minister as Verwoerd.

In writing out Tsafendas as a South African, Reid (2021: 268) observes that Tsafendas was regarded by apartheid South Africa as an “outsider” as a Mozambican of mixed parentage (a black mother and a white/Greek father), after the murder of the Prime Minister. The irony is that at the time he committed the murder, he was working as a “white” parliamentary messenger, with an official status as white, according to apartheid laws created by Verwoerd’s government. By failing to identify him as coloured and by allowing him to work within the reach of a man regarded as the father of apartheid, Verwoerd’s murder performed a mockery of apartheid’s policy of separation of races. During his trial, what stood out was that Tsafendas was “silenced in state-summoned myth-making”, as the apartheid state tried to erase his official identity as a white in South Africa (Reid, 2021: 269). Upon the death of the Prime Minister, the South African government was faced with an ideological dilemma: to accept that a white (sane) person had killed the Prime Minister, thereby portraying that the system had stabbed itself at the jugular, or to consign him – his identity and mental frame of mind – into invisibility. Apartheid chose the latter. The apartheid regime had to consign Tsafendas to the invisible as an insane patient after a spurious trial in order to protect the foundations of apartheid from criticism. Capturing the ambiguity, Hedley Twidle (2015: 380) observes:

The father of apartheid struck down at the height of his power by a ‘mad Greek,’ a schizophrenic drifter who believed his body to be parasitized and was (so the story goes) acting on instructions from a tapeworm inside his gut. It is one of the strangest facts in South African history. It is also, of course, a kind of fiction.

Leti Kleyn (2014) views Tsafendas’s silenced voice in mainstream white narrative, largely appearing as a footnote because of his alleged abnormality and the absence of an ideology in his mind in the murder of Verwoerd. By this stance, white South Africans did not want to view him as a perpetrator in the strict sense of the political context in South Africa. In the many years after his imprisonment at Pretoria Central Police on death row, and later on in a mental asylum at Sterkfontein Hospital, Tsafendas gradually ebbed out of South Africans’ memory. Twidle (2015) observes that “the name Tsafendas has fallen out of national memory. It barely appears in the indexes of standard historical works, and when it does the

details of his life are often wrong ... his story remains somehow unspoken or unspeakable in the national narrative” (381). Even after the fall/falling of apartheid, despite his singular role in drawing world attention to the immorality of apartheid, and despite his fiery political undertakings that scholars such as Twidle (2015: 381) equate with Nelson Mandela’s during the freedom struggle, he was “hidden away for so long, gradually fading from national consciousness... remaining opaque to any single ideological reading – unusable, unwanted figure within the narratives of struggle and liberation, or truth and reconciliation”. Upon his death in 1999, Tsafendas was also condemned to anonymity. He was buried in an unmarked grave, and his passing on received little media/ national attention (Kleyn, 2014; Twidle, 2015).

In recent times, however, scholars have been engaged in revisiting and revising his past, based on emerging evidence, especially after his death (Dousemetzis, 2022). These scholars point out the historical wrong that was committed on the person of Tsafendas, and how that was a reflection of a historical lie – a lie that apartheid was, fundamentally – which was, regrettably, allowed to stand as official truth for decades. In the course of about nine years, Harris Dousemetzis (2022) dug up and sifted through historical records, Tsafendas’s own letters, and extensive interviews, among other records, in the search for the actual truth about Tsafendas. Dousemetzis (2022: ix) records:

The more I learnt about Tsafendas’s character, his activism and lifelong interest in politics, in particular his loathing of apartheid and colonialism, the more I felt that a major historical injustice had taken place in portraying him to the world as a lunatic and his assassination of Dr. Verwoerd as an apolitical and mindless act. I felt a moral imperative to expose one of the greatest cover-ups in apartheid history and reveal the truth about a brave and humble man who was treated so foully by history.

Similarly, the story “Tsafendas’s Diary” underlies the imperative of finding the truth, not just about the actual identity of Tsafendas, but also about the motive surrounding his call to murder. In “Tsafendas’s Diary”, the narrator and his Granny visit Pretoria in search of answers to the killing of the Prime Minister, as they sought to find his diary at the Police Museum in Pretoria. They are in search of circumstantial evidence that will help put to rest the unresolved question of motive regarding the Prime Minister’s killing (“Tsafendas’s Diary”, 93). “Tsafendas’s Diary” epitomises the search for truth, and therefore the need for closure. The diary, in itself, would constitute the actual truth about Tsafendas’s self, and therefore, a recognition about the probable perspective from which authenticity could be framed in the whole story about Tsafendas and the murder of the Prime Minister. As Cathy

Caruth (1996) contends, telling constitutes an ethical undertaking. The attempt to look for Tsafendas's diary by the family constitutes an obligation to the victims, in this case, to Verwoerd, his family, and his Afrikaner followers. On a symbolic level, the story parodies a truth commission where the search for truth encapsulates the investigation of the motive of the offender/ perpetrator. The fact that the grandmother and her family take a personal initiative to look for Tsafendas's diary, and the circumstances of the murder, may be a pointer towards the family's rejection of official history (if it ever existed) regarding the murder by Tsafendas.

Vladislavić revisits a memory of grief and loss that the Afrikaner had struck deep into the recesses of memory. It is a vexing memory, however, that must be processed for the final time in order to heal. It is the "missingness" in that memory that invites contradictory responses from the characters in the story. Granny, largely responsible for reorganising Afrikaner memory in her symbolic knitting (in both "The Prime Minister is Dead" and "Tsafendas's Diary", as observed earlier), undertakes one last push to recover the identity and motive of Tsafendas. This underlies the desire to revisit past memories about Tsafendas, particularly of his commissioning and complicity in the murder of Verwoerd. Granny's and the narrator's search for the diary is akin to processing through the memory in the search for authenticity and closure. Tsafendas's diary shifts from being Tsafendas's private document into the public, visible domain of the victims. Granny explains the significance: "We must have Tsafendas's Diary... We are its rightful owners. It's a shame to keep it locked up somewhere, away from the world" ("Tsafendas's Diary", 91). Granny wants to remove the diary from the historical effacement of being kept at the Police Museum (Pretoria Central Police, where Tsafendas was spending his incarceration?) in Pretoria, into the public realm where its significance can be recovered. Writing in respect of the recovery of traumatic memories in the present, Danijela Miodrag Dimković (2016: 2) raises two important questions: "how to start remembering the horror? How to keep the memory of something we would prefer to forget?" The pursuit of the diary, from the onset, is to try to revisit the horror and to exhume unwelcome memories. Furthermore, as observed in the previous section, Granny, as a double to the historical Betsie Verwoerd, requires the diary to ascertain the actual motive behind the killing of her husband. The search for the diary signifies a review of memory, as well as the need to confront the traumatic memory head-on in the attempt to try to effect a purgation of the painful past. The grandmother's role in this story appears to be one of ethical purgation in which unwelcome memories of the past are rendered out of the consciousness of the present, but after confronting them and processing them first.

In the search for truth, Granny invests her collective memory into her grandson, the narrator. She knits for him a “thinking-cap”, which he will “pull it down over my ears ... right over my face, and look out through the two eye-holes” (“Tsafendas’s Diary”, 91). This thinking-cap, a figuration of an assassin’s concealment of identity, would allow him to enter into the inner self of Tsafendas, as Granny expects him to use it to do “some thinking”, “incomunicado” – precisely as an assassin held captive, which is who Tsafendas was, upon committing the murder. Tsafendas’s diary holds “the key to all mysteries. The mysteries of meat and the imagination” (“Tsafendas’s Diary”, 92). Granny understands the skewed and eschewed memory of Tsafendas, especially the hidden histories, the lack of truth, as well as the “imagination” of the tapeworm and its graphic connection to “meat” as figured out through the dead and decaying Prime Minister.

In effect, the thinking cap functions as a reflective garment, a purveyor of dreams that allows the narrator to walk through Tsafendas’s journey, as prefigured in his wearing it, and the instantaneous effect the cap has in transporting him to the world of Tsafendas. He uses the thinking-cap given to him by his grandmother to enter into the recesses of memory, and this cap allows the narrator to enter into the world of the South African ghosts, as he claims: “I dream I am the curator at the Houses of Parliament” (“Tsafendas’s Diary”, 92). In other words, the thinking-cap stations him right in the memory of the evil of Tsafendas as a perpetrator, and how he planned his evil. It is at the Parliament that he walks the “pale-grey carpet to a square of stainless-steel pillars and chains, which marks the spot where Tsafendas slaughtered the Prime Minister” (“Tsafendas’s Diary”, 92, 93). This same thinking-cap takes him to Pretoria, alongside Granny, and it is at this point that Granny, the purveyor of memory, first “sights” Tsafendas:

‘He’s there,’ Granny says, pointing with her crochet-hook, ‘He’s been there all these years. Sitting on his secrets, hatching them, feeding them from his filthy mouth, caring for them until they are dark and ugly enough to be sent out into the world. He’s there all right. I can smell him (93).

Granny’s memory, the confusion between sight and smell, her old memory confused in terms of capacity for reflection because of the ensuing dementia, renders the authenticity of her statements questionable and unstable in this context. However, it is possible that is what her traumatic memories process at that instance, as she evokes and contextualises the painful memory of the Prime Minister’s killing. The narrator, who does not identify Tsafendas at this instance as invoked by Granny, ultimately manages to sight his own version of Tsafendas later, from his own perspective, as he sees through his “eye-holes”:

I see the killer. He crosses the pale grey carpet and comes to a door. I smell the fearful sweat on his palm as he reaches for the door knob. He opens the door. He looks from side to side. He goes out into the street (94).

The Tsafendas, in the narrator's perspective, kills the Prime Minister and moves out effortlessly. His own narrative reflection stands in contrast with official reports concerning the circumstances of the killing. Adams (2014: 199) records that the stabbing of Verwoerd by Tsafendas in the white Parliament was the "most dramatic and bloody scene in South Africa's history". It was done in the full glare of the cameras and witnessed by leading members of the white legislature. Its dramatic nature was heightened by the anonymity of the perpetrator, Tsafendas, who was then working in Parliament as a messenger. This distortion in the narrator's perspective purveys the potential of narrative truth to overwrite actual historical circumstances, as the circumstances are reviewed and re/contextualised by secondary participants and witnesses, such as the narrator. The narrator's perception of the killing, as imagined by him, completely draws out the context of the murder, but it is precisely in the revival of memory, and the context of distortion, as explored in the previous section, that holds sway. Apart from conjuring up the commissioning/ the mental path of the assassin, the narrator also figures out the tapeworm, which was a central figuration in the development of Tsafendas's narrative of his insanity during the trial. The narrator conjures up the critical image of Tsafendas's tapeworm in his dreams as a parody of Tsafendas's motive in the killing of the Prime Minister:

In the morning, before breakfast, a fried egg leaking like a sunrise on my white plate, I am composing Tsafendas's Diary, dredging it up from my dreams, bringing it back in a bottle. I line the words up one behind the other" (Tsafendas's Diary, 96).

The structuration of the tapeworm invoked through words lined "up one behind the other" in a continuous line ("Tsafendas's Diary", 96) in the consciousness of the narrator invites back traumatic experiences in this context, especially as he appropriates Tsafendas's intrusion into his white identity. As the thinking-cap allows him to travel into the inner consciousness of Tsafendas to read his commissioning of the murder, the thinking-cap equally feeds him with intense traumatic memories, that, at some point, he is unable to process, and he proceeds to remove it, signifying his decided push to cut off memory of the past. This signifies the limits and the extent to which he can revisit the past.

The Grandmother's rocking (in a) chair is deeply symbolic of the inability to transcend past traumatic memories. By taking the narrator in the futile search for the diary, when, all along she has had the diary, she not only attempts to provide the narrator with an

alternative way to process the reality of the past but also to allow the narrator, on his own accord, to process the actual truth and, in fact, create his own *narrative truth* about the past. Whichever the case, the truth in the actual diary, together with the need to pursue it, is finally suspended. The search for visible marks of the motive is finally disavowed; the futility of recovering old memories, as, for example, when the narrator reads the last knitted letter “D” in his thinking-cap to be a metaphor for death, in which he imagines himself as a victim, can only mean that a further pursuit for truth, in the act of further uncovering, may symbolise catastrophic consequences for those who seek to exhume the skulls. In effect, the very act of revisiting the past invites dearth on memory, and affirms the need, in what he does afterwards, to bury all bad memories, to render them all invisible in his own compost heap of memory.

In “Tsafendas’s Diary”, the narrator has his own compost heap, where he buries “piles of food along the rim into the hole. Potato peelings, bones, bread-crusts, meat. I dig it in. The mixture bubbles and steams” (“Tsafendas’s Diary”, 92). This heap figures the putrefaction of history, in which the decaying meat magnifies the decomposition of traumatic memories. The imagery of bones and meat is particularly significant, as they are a pointer to the figuration of death and decay as conceptualised in the story. Part of these memories are still signified by the visible marks of apartheid in the Police Museum in Pretoria, where, instead of finding the diary, the narrator confronts the images of apartheid violence and brutality. In “a dark corner” of the Museum, he finds “a miniature landscape” that portrays a hill, an expansive veld, and houses with corrugated iron bearing the marks of a shooting of a child by an unidentified man. This miniature, a representation of Verwoerd’s grasp on the South African land, is a hidden memory that speaks to its systemic violations as imagined through the graphic deaths, blood and bullets (“Tsafendas’s Diary”, 94, 95). The miniature is also a metaphor of apartheid’s deployment of violence on ordinary civilians, which forms part of Verwoerd’s apartheid legacy. This scheme of violence, which was all meant in support of the apartheid system, prevails over the ‘missing’ diary. The narrator’s attempt, in the end, to bury all their memories, including their pursuit of the diary, and the recalibration and rejection of the pursuit of Tsafendas and his motives in the murder, can be equated to a final search for closure; a decided refusal to let the past still speak to and for the present. The digging of the compost heap is therefore an exercise in mourning; it is one stage of grief that the narrator and his family must follow to its conclusion. The narrator mourns:

I am digging it in. I have to feed the insatiable earth. I put in bones, leaf-mulch from the gutters, vegetable peelings, blankets, papers. I soak it all down. The ink begins to run. I take up my spade and I dig it in. (“Tsafendas’s Diary”, 98)

In the end, the narrator must purge the past, must dig it in, to process forgetting and genuine closure. He can no longer afford to manifest his mind in the diary, including the grandmother’s “lop-sided” blanket, itself a figuration of traumatic memorial sites in the story (“Tsafendas’s Diary”, 93). The narrator’s emotive evocation of the need for closure and the inevitability of that gesture of burying the past is heightened by his desire to consign all his memories and wishful attempts to bury the past in the “insatiable earth”. Dimković’s (2016: 2) leading questions regarding remembering the horror, in this particular case of what is contained in the diary, together with the itineraries of psychological reflections on the enactment of the perpetrator’s murder, must be, eventually, consigned to the compost heap to forget, not just Tsafendas, but also his motive, altogether.

What the narrator implies is that traumatic memories, especially of the departed, heavily impinge on the consciousness of the living. The dead, and their remembering in the present, is imbued with ethical ambiguities. Murray (2013: 20) contends that “Monumental statuary commemorating past injustices always provokes a cautionary uneasiness, a wary discomfort about the lingering past, and unresolved anxieties about living in the here-and-now with the ghosts of the past”. Their visibility in the present invokes past traumatic anxieties. Reading memories of post-war Germany, Aleida Assmann (2014: 135) argues that when monuments of terror dot the landscape, they constantly invoke traumatic memories. South Africa’s past under apartheid contains visible images that continue to signify and underwrite that past in the present. According to Leonard Thompson (2000), the memory of apartheid in South Africa is echoed through political actors who created the foundations of apartheid. Hendrik Verwoerd, B.J. Vorster, P.W. Botha, and J.G. Strijdom, to name but a few, have featured consistently in acts of memorialisation of the past under apartheid. These historical figures, now dead, remain etched in the memories of South Africans in different guises and forms.

Walking in the city with his father while in readiness for the procession and interment of Verwoerd’s body, the young narrator in “The Prime Minister is Dead” comes face to face with “old statues, the flesh blistered and corroded, stared down at us” (“The Prime Minister is Dead”, 6-7). These monuments, stripped of their mortality, remain as vestiges of memory that continue to impinge on the consciousness of the living. The statues are bereft of life, and they signify, to a large extent, passages from life to death; from a sense of reflection about events

and historicising practices to the “hard expression” of “blistered and corroded” memories. The terror of death is imagined through the visibility of cracked monuments. Looking at his father, especially at the moment of his grief at the loss of the Prime Minister, the boy could visualise the form and shape of a statue in the face of his father, as he/ the father, pushed him atop the wheelbarrow:

I leaned back at the wheelbarrow so that I could look up at my father. His jaw was as set and craggy as a statue's. His eyes looked stonily ahead. The hair that curved back from under the beret could have been cast in bronze. Then I too looked ahead and tried to mould his hard expression to my face. (“The Prime Minister is Dead”, 7)

Avishai Margalit (2002: 67) argues that “when history is contrasted with memory, history is habitually labelled as cold, even lifeless, whereas memory can be vital, vivid, and alive.” To look at history “stonily” by the narrator, therefore, is to suspend memory and feeling. It is to act indifferent to the very singular procession of burying the most significant member of the Afrikaner community, now rendered lifeless. The narrator's adoption of his father's hard gaze at history and its permutations symbolises a posture of looking at history; a look that portrays some kind of transfixion; a posture that is decidedly hard to figure out. This is the same expression that the narrator encounters in the images at the cemetery, where, “on either side the stone faces of the men in the history books looked down from their columns, unblinking, unmoved” (“The Prime Minister is Dead”, 9). These monuments (presumably of past leaders such as Cecil Rhodes, Paul Kruger, and Jan Smuts, etc) speak through their visibility. Their stony faces, although “unblinking, unmoved,” capture the attention and evoke trauma of the past on the living. The assumed retaliatory look from the characters (such as the narrator) may symbolise their refusal to accept the traumatic significations that these memories invite them to reflect on.

One of the “many consequences” that the death of the Prime Minister evokes is the making of a monument in honour of the departed Verwoerd. The narrator observes:

Once the Prime Minister was dead they started renaming streets after him, and stations, and schools, even pleasure resorts. Then they renamed our suburb after him. They wanted us to live in a monument. It was a new suburb, and no one minded.

To live in a monument metaphorically signifies the attempt(s) to live with the past; to accommodate old memories, and therefore to accept the painful reality evoked by the ghosts of the past. It is an affirmation of living in the past in the present, especially in the memory and consciousness of the living, as the statues remain bereft of mortal feeling. We gaze upon monuments, while they remain seeing, and unseeing/ “unblinking” at the same time. On the

one hand, as Margalit (2002: 78) argues with respect to sustaining memories of specific historical circumstances, it is the duty of humanity to remember evil acts against humanity by processing them through remembrance. This monument would precisely do that for the Afrikaner, and especially those mourning his unfortunate demise. On the other hand, the monument retains some sense of intrusion, especially for those who would mind its intruding presence in their spaces. According to Dimković (2016: 2), monuments are expressions of the transience of power. In this case, monuments may lose their meaning through time, or evoke other contradictory emotions, as their once-alive replicas are long dead, and communities begin to appraise and criticise their significance in the present, as observed in the previous section, and as intimated at the beginning of this section, with respect to Ricoeur's assertions on remembering. The contentious issue emerges on what happens about "individual pain and suffering, as well as the revival of the crimes that were previously concealed and repressed" when such monuments are erected in societies with diverse sets of cultural memories (Dimković, 2016: 2). In the story, no one minded the re/naming of a street after the Prime Minister largely because it was a new street, and therefore its place and position was protected by a relative sense of anonymity. The people remembering him also hold fond memories of the deceased, and want his memory immortalised by the installation of the monument. However, "public", visible monuments such as that of J.D. Strijdom, and insignias such as the "whites" only benches, among others, are being removed, and/ or consigned to museums on account of infringing on the consciousness of those whose memories connect them to past suffering, as we shall see subsequently.

Mbembe (2016a) calls for a strategy in which buildings, monuments, architecture and other historical artefacts can be transfixed into a questioning gaze in order to render them "harmless" by de-emphasising their significance for the present. Vladislavić's "The WHITES ONLY Bench" reflects Mbembe's (2016a) view in the de/commissioning and recalling of a significant bench that was used during apartheid in the service of the Population and Registration Act. Christopher Warnes (2011: 109) argues that Vladislavić, in his narrative strategy, gives prominence to everyday images such as an ordinary bench which would otherwise have remained invisible/ inconspicuous, rendering these images as symbolic and political in the new, assumed context. Young (2011: 114) similarly argues that Vladislavić transforms museum relics to bear on topical discourse on politics and social lives by giving ordinary photographs and monuments fresh vitality. These views signify, in part, Vladislavić's re-configuration of symbolic histories that function to mediate South African realities. As Jane Poyner (2017) argues, Vladislavić symbolises art and architecture in his

writings to mediate the relationship between art in its varied forms and the concern with the particularities of South African history. Of greater significance is how characters mediate their own experiences by sighting these historical images.

Vladislavić's "Propaganda by Monuments" focalises on the ambiguities of invisibility and visibility in the monuments of two prominent figures, J.D. Strijdom, a symbol of apartheid and colonial empire, and V.I. Lenin, a symbolic leader of communist Russia. The story is set at a time when the past hungered for forgetting, signified by the respective monuments as they were being de/commissioned and erased from public view. The story juxtaposes the crucial moment when Boniface Khumalo, from South Africa, and Pavel Grekov, from Russia, confront the visibility of the respective monuments at the time when both monuments were being rendered invisible.

Addressing the concept of translation of cultures between Russia and South Africa while reading Vladislavić's "Propaganda by Monuments", Popescu (2011) argues that Lenin was concerned with the commodification of monuments and the need to indelibly secure the future of memories in statues. Lenin's central philosophy was that monuments were expected to stand the test of time as figures of propaganda. In "Propaganda by Monuments", Grekov visits the Square in an attempt to procure Lenin's monument requested by Khumalo. At the Square, he comes head-to-head with Lenin's monument, and the head is particularly visible: "The eyes in the head of Lenin looked straight at Grekov" ("Propaganda by Monuments", 18). Grekov registers his personal experience with the monument for the first time. The revealing detail of Lenin's unusual head communicates an ambiguous reception by Grekov. His recognition and exposition of the implication of the monument is canvassed through shifting perspectives in his narrative: "Naturally, the stone head loomed larger the closer he got. The features, at first indistinct, now clarified themselves. The eyes were still looking straight at him, even though he had changed pavements" ("Propaganda by Monuments", 18). The monument achieves a certain figuration that impinges on his consciousness, overbearing and larger-than-life. His shifting geographical positions, which was "undoubtedly a question of perspective" may symbolise shifting historical gazes between the past and the present, as processed through his perspective ("Propaganda by Monuments", 18):

They were kindly eyes, if not quite grandfatherly, then more than avuncular; but as the mouth came into focus, beneath the sculpted wings of the moustache, the whole face changed, it became severe and irritable, it took on the cross expression of a bachelor uncle who didn't like children. And then, quite unaccountably, as he came

closer still, the face foreshortened into friendliness again.” (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 18-19).

What is significant to note in this encounter is that Grekov’s conscious self meets with the monument as the Other. The reflection that ensues from it is marked by what Zahavi (2005: 94) would call “self-apprehension from the perspective of the other.” Grekov’s apprehensions modulate the different interpretations of the monument as the Other in his consciousness. Grekov’s changing perspectives may be consistent with the changing historical circumstances which condition shifting allegiances and ambiguous ethical responses to monuments and the people they represent. On the one hand, as John Cairns (1989) argues, one of the perspectives of reading history is through an empathetic lens. According to the scholar, empathy is needed in reviewing the past, especially when one is redefining one’s present. On the other hand, monuments are signatures and reminders of past violations. Grekov, therefore, registers the ambiguity between a kindly relation and an irritable uncle, all at once. Therefore, the values one espouses of Lenin depend on one’s historical and ethical positioning with respect to the person in the monument. We note the subjective revelations on Lenin’s head, which figure the shifts in the ethical, from the good to the bad, depending on the historical angle one looks at it from.

Grekov’s ambiguous position of witnessing the visibility of Lenin’s monument for the first time, and ironically for the last time, as he is “in good time” (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 17) to witness its removal and eventual invisibility, is an experience that Khumalo also has with respect to his wishes for the effacement of the monument and the memory of J.G. Strijdom. Grekov’s experience, therefore, provides a duplicate experience that points forward to the universality of (post-traumatic) memories across different transnational contexts. Khumalo visits the Strijdom Square, and catches “a glimpse of the dome like a swollen canvas sail over the head of J.G. Strijdom” (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 35). This monument, “unveiled by Mrs Susan Strijdom on Republic Day, 31<sup>st</sup> May 1972” (38), and attended by the Prime Minister at the time, B.J. Vorster, marked the foundation of Afrikaner nationalism. Visible on the monument were the inscriptions that defined its place in apartheid South Africa: “J.G. Strijdom had been leader of the National Party in the 1950s and Prime Minister of the Union from 1954 to 1958. He was one of the great builders of apartheid. The details were on the pedestal” (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 36), (“He was one of the great builders of apartheid”, however, appears more as an interpolation in the consciousness of Khumalo’s mind, rather than an actual signature in the pedestal.) The monument carries the visibility of the Afrikaner, with the name of the

Afrikaner designers clearly identified on the pedestal, except for the “disappointing anonymity” of the unnamed contractors. By signposting an essentially Afrikaner visibility on the moment, Strijdom’s monument achieves its best element in Afrikaner “propaganda” on power. (Sabine Marschall [2009: 139] records that the “gigantic head of former prime-minister”, a monument on J.G. Strijdom’s Square in Pretoria, collapsed in 2001 on its own, which appears to mock its celebrated architectural strength as imagined in the story).

Dimković (2016: 3) argues that the angle or the axis in which monuments are designed is determined by the perspective of the concerned architects. However, the same author registers that the meaning ascribed to such monuments would still be drawn largely from the perspective from which individuals reflect on their cultural memories. It is through Khumalo’s perspective that we uncover the historical significance that the monument has had on people like him. To his conscious self, the monument appears as the Other. His sighting of the Strijdom statue invites a set of contradictory values. To the black Khumalo, Strijdom did not take a central place in his cultural memory. Khumalo’s historical knowledge of Strijdom was zoned out of his consciousness. Dimković (2016: 2) argues that cultural memory is often associated with particular groups, such as racial or ethnic groups. Coming from a black community that felt aggrieved by Strijdom’s apartheid, Khumalo’s memory of Strijdom is limited to the stories shared by his community. Sue Kossew (2010: 575) argues it is “the unofficial monument in the form of [the] threatening song, rather than the officially-sanctioned monument that holds sway” in reference to Khumalo’s reactions to the monument of Strijdom. The only vestige of memory Khumalo has of Strijdom is rooted in the popular myth about the man as being responsible for black suffering during apartheid. Khumalo’s re-creation of the signification in/of the monument in his mind upon sighting it is connected to the lived realities of black people in apartheid South Africa:

But though he had passed the monument often, Khumalo had never bothered to read what was written there. All he knew about Strijdom he had gleaned from the words of a popular political song. ‘Sutha sutha wena Strijdom!’ the song said. ‘Give way, Strijdom! If you don’t, this car, this car which has no wheels, will ride over you!’ (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 36)

In a significant way, Khumalo’s memory shift echoes what Ricoeur (2004: 58) refers to as the “temporal mark of the before” as a feature of remembering which is manifest “under the double form of simple evocation and of the recognition that concludes the process of recall.” His consciousness on the monument, now evoked by a possible fall of the monument, seamlessly makes him to recall the monument in the light of the imagery in the political song

that was long lost to him until now. Appreciating the monument with a new wave of consciousness, Khumalo comes to terms with an alternative reality of Strijdom that his mind and memory register at the present, and never before: “Strijdom’s face had never borne the serene, far-sighted expression he saw on it now” (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 36). This serenity in his mind is a fleeting reflection that gives way to “a look of stupefied terror” (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 36). He finds himself in the gaze of history, and in an instant, he is party to the trauma that was caused by Strijdom and apartheid. This ambiguity flashes in his mind, and his past memory connects to his present (traumatic) state of consciousness, and in an instant, he registers: “*This* Strijdom is *that* Strijdom” (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 36, emphasis in the original). What prevails, in the end, is a registered smile on his face that signifies his ultimate triumph at the impending fall of (the monument of) Strijdom.

The monument has always been invisible to him in the past, but when the monument does finally become *visible* to him, his mind registers a “serene, far-sighted expression” of Strijdom, which contradicts his (collective) memory of him as “the old scavenger” (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 36, 38). Nevertheless, he does not seem to advance genuine empathy toward Strijdom, and his gesture can best be described through the lens of deceptive empathy, as envisaged by Nils Bubandt & Rane Willerslev (2015). Appropriating Bubandt’s & Willerslev’s (2015) argument, Khumalo’s posture can be regarded as conspiratorial empathy/ deceptive empathy, which explains the lack of genuine/ authentic feeling, as it is clear in his mind that his singular wish is to have the face of Strijdom be completely effaced from history and from his consciousness.

Similarly, Grekov visits the square to procure the Lenin monument, and his historical moment becomes purely deceptive in intent. Although he enjoys momentary gratification from meeting history face to face as he registers the removal of Lenin’s statue, and the consequent plan to transpose it to another context, it is not lost on us that he equally registers his apprehensions and insincerity in the whole business. Bearing history, he becomes “the only grown-up who had ventured out to watch this monumental lump of history toppled from its pedestal,” signifying his outsidership with respect to the changing political dispensation in his country (“Propaganda by Monuments”, 18). He believes that he is especially lucky to witness part of his history at the moment of its effacement, as he “judged that he was in good time” to witness its removal. However, he derives no satisfaction from the experience.

For both Grekov and Khumalo, the reflective engagement with history provides a perfect response to history and its passages. Shame, humiliation, guilt and complicity are ambiguous values that come by individuals as they register their personal selves into the

historical permutations in their respective countries. By meeting Strijdom and associating his traumatic past with his memory, Khumalo can process his own place and position in the larger South African society, and, in the end, appreciate his place in the schema of collective memory.

But it is not just the statues that swing precariously between visibility and invisibility. Khumalo's sauntering like the traffic light's green robot while crossing a street is an image re-cast as playing safely from being destroyed by the whirlpools of history. He is a man who is fighting against his own shadows of invisibility. Despite writing a letter to Grekov/Christov in which he paints himself as an "illustrious" person who has previously worked as "gardening assistance", "packer", "packer O.K. Bazaars" and "currently taverner and taxi-owner", his air of visibility is dented when Grekov misunderstands "packer O.K. Bazaars" to reflect on apartheid's reference to "so-called 'baas' – a term that zones him as inferior to whites; and "Lucky Dube" as charity "sweepstake" by misappropriating the meaning of the word "Lucky". His attempt to write against his black invisibility is disapproved by Grekov's fixing him as a junior black in the apartheid system who is in a lower caste to the whites. Grekov cannot even understand a significant black musician who is potentially Khumalo's role model, so it would be very difficult to fix Khumalo out of his cultural invisibility. By being black, Khumalo is already perceived as an underachiever.

To a significant extent, apartheid created invisibility for black people. The post-apartheid period witnessed the opening up of spaces where black people could regain their visibility. One such visibility is captioned in Vladislavic's "The WHITES ONLY Bench" when Correta King, the wife of the American civil rights movement leader, Martin Luther King Jr., is photographed while seated in an assumed bench previously earmarked for whites only. Placed outside the museum in a bower "under the controversial kaffirboom" (65), this bench catches Mrs King's attention. Crucially, both she and her husband were against apartheid in South Africa. In 1984, she was arrested in South Africa for her anti-apartheid sentiments (Theoharis, 2018: 164). The apartheid government also feared the late Martin Luther King Jr., and the sight of Mrs King signified the extension of the rallying calls for the black struggle against apartheid (Boesak, 2019). So, when Mrs King sits on the bench, this signifies triumph; the critic of apartheid was finally now seated in the prohibited apartheid bench. However, the irony is that the bench is not the real one. The inauthentic bench is a syllogism of apartheid, and King's sitting on the bench, captured at the moment as one of "ironic significance", is fixated into a specific historical gaze when a photograph of her seated on the bench is taken: "behind the bench, the trunk of the controversial kaffirboom;

and on the right, perched on the very end of her seat, our subject: Mrs King” (“The WHITES ONLY Bench”, 52). Barthes (1977: 22) argues that a photograph’s “pose” is inflected through “a store of stereotyped attitudes which form ready-made elements of signification.” Mrs King’s relaxed posture as a black “subject” on the bench signifies triumph over apartheid.

From an ideological perspective, her sitting on the bench and the photograph that is taken of her provide “interesting angles and ironic juxtapositions” (“The WHITES ONLY Bench”, 51). By sitting on a previously forbidden bench, King can overwrite the restrictions that apartheid had on the black race. Furthermore, the fact that the photograph was in black and white gave it a historical timelessness, which could mean, quite ironically, that it could have been taken at an earlier point in time, for example, during apartheid: “The photograph might have been taken thirty years ago, or yesterday” (“The WHITES ONLY Bench”, 52). This lack of historical fixity served two purposes; one, that the photograph might have been taken during apartheid, in which case, this would have challenged the historical modulations associated with the bench as just for whites only when in fact a black person was sitting on it, and, two, it might represent the present, in this particular case, in 1986, when she visited South Africa. It could also date any other future time. The narrator sights:

There’s an odd ambiguity in her body, and it’s reflected in her face too, in an expression which superimposes the past upon the present; she looks both timorous and audacious. The WHITES ONLY sign under her dangling thumb in the very middle of the picture might be taken up the wrong way as an irreverent reference to her eyes, which she opens wide in an expression of mock alarm – or is it outrage? (“The WHITES ONLY Bench”, 52)

But her sitting on the bench invites some sort of ambiguity, between fear and fearlessness; in between getting alarmed at sitting on the hitherto forbidden bench and inviting racial outrage by doing the previously unthinkable act of a black sitting on a “whites only” bench. The photograph also tends to superimpose the writings on the bench against the whites of her eyes, thus obliterating the historical significance of the writings on the bench as it appears in the photograph. Barthes (1977: 25) argues that in the interplay between text and image, “words” become “parasitic on the image”. Mrs King’s image, therefore, obliterates the wording on the bench. This sense of underwriting history into the everyday serves to reduce the symbolic bench into the familiar, thereby parodying the bench’s original restrictive status. The narrator also thinks that Mrs King provides the appropriate context that makes her the ideal subject for the bench, as justified by the narrator’s belief that “the photographs would be exceptional” (“The WHITES ONLY Bench”, 51). This exceptionalism can be justified by what

Barthes (1977: 26) identifies as the combination of the “graphic” and the “iconic” in the same frame of reference, as the modulations on the inauthentic bench combine with the iconic image of Corretta King as an anti-racism leader.

However, her visibility at the bench is countenanced by her identity as a non-South African. Therefore, her experience sitting at the bench, as a non-South African and non-white, conflates the actual historical position of apartheid. She does not proclaim the memory of “survivors” as Crane (1997: 62) would call it, and therefore her ambivalent expressions, as gleaned from the photograph, justify this point. Her involvement in the Civil Rights movement and the fight against racial injustice in America *partly* authenticates her experience in the South African setting, but she remains a disembodied individual. Through her visibility in the exceptional photograph, her symbolic capital is used to recast the South African experience to the world beyond. Nonetheless, she remains a non-original symbol in re/representing the fight against apartheid. In this figuration, she and the inauthentic bench are outliers of significant “fakes” but with greater uses in/for the present. Like the separate bench, Mrs King can question the legacies of apartheid without posturing towards the demands for authenticity. Her sitting on the bench is also historically significant: apartheid shared fundamental similarities with the American experience and the accompanying wars against racial injustice, of which Mrs King and her husband were critical pillars.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

Commemorative spaces are places of deep ambiguity. For some, they are markers of assumed historical progress. For others, they are sources of deep pain and anguish. This chapter has demonstrated that Vladislavić’s literary vision rests in remembering commemorative spaces of apartheid without annihilating the past. Focusing closely on the concept of self-awareness and consciousness arising out of first-person experiences of characters in Vladislavić’s fiction, the chapter has argued that the pursuit of authenticity in monumental objects and in traumatic events by fractured and disoriented individuals in Vladislavić’s stories is imbued with ethical ambiguities, as the characters in question respond in duplicitous ways to changing historical realities. These duplicities reveal a vexation around memories in general and in processes of memorialisation in particular. The chapter has shown that in the pursuit of historical truth, the search for authenticity is a critical undertaking. This is the commitment behind curative processes in museums, as detailed in “The WHITES ONLY Bench”. In “The Prime Minister is Dead”, Vladislavić critiques the authenticity of professed Afrikaner/white privilege by presenting a humble Afrikaner family whose fortunes and dreams do not fit into the narrative of white privilege as generally conceived in

colonial/apartheid narratives and in the stories of the empire. This he does by presenting instances of marginality of the Afrikaner as inflected through histories of Afrikaner nationalism and culture. Vladislavić configures the story around power and its illusions in apartheid South Africa, especially as it relates to the whites.

A fundamental observation in the chapter is the constant pursuit of closure, which patterns many responses from individuals. This chapter has shown that monuments, photographs, and museums, among other memorials, invite guilt, complicity, and compassion, among other feelings. To some, they are images of shame, while to others, they may be images of longing and nostalgia. The characters in “Propaganda by Monuments” find themselves entrapped in memory about the significance of past architectures of memory. Consequently, they develop ambiguous ethical responses towards them. These contradictory feelings are purely a matter of perspective. The chapter has also reflected that “Tsafendas’s Diary” envisages a path in which memories of traumatic events, when invited back to consciousness, lead to the fracture of the self. Framing closure as an ethical concern that invites deep divisions within a character’s psyche, the chapter has read the story to make a claim that painful memories of the past can only be stashed into a purgatory in order to process full closure. The processes of acceptance of the painful reality of the past, in many ways, constitute Vladislavić’s engagement with history, memory and ethics. In this Chapter, significant attention has been devoted to past memories and histories of the Afrikaner/white South Africa, which is also, largely, a reflection of Vladislavić’s thematic orientation in the narrative and poetics as a white writer. In the next Chapter, we turn our attention to narratives of/about black experiences in post-apartheid South Africa, and then submit how individuals and communities enunciate ethical concerns in a context where the past still impinges on the present.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ETHICAL AMBIGUITIES OF THE SELF IN THE COLLECTIVE

#### 5.1 Introduction

The end of apartheid triggered a quest for the pursuit of morally redeeming society by all communities of South Africa. For the black community, this quest was premised on putting the past behind them to allow for recovery after decades of systemic injustices and societal fractures occasioned by apartheid. Years on, however, this pursuit has been anything but productive. The past has continued to influence the present as a burden, with individuals existing in a world of conflicting values and inconstant social norms. Placed in a society where their aspirations remain unmet and where the society continues to make unreasonable demands on the individual, these individuals develop deceptive dispositions to escape from the limitations imposed by the community. As such, they remain largely unreliable and undependable. Post-apartheid South African literature has taken a keen interest in this state of affairs, with the first-person point of view emerging as a narrative strategy of choice, which has demonstrably magnified the fracture and disorientation of the South African self. In this chapter, I focus on unreliable narration by critically evaluating the disposition of first-person narrators, showing how their portrayal as unreliable frames ethical uncertainties in the texts under interrogation. The first section builds on the concept of unreliable narration in Niq Mhlongo's *After Tears* and in Thando Mgqolozana's *Unimportance* by evaluating the multiple ways in which the first-person protagonists and characters choose a mode of behaviour that leads to unreliability as they engage with the challenges facing them. It then delineates how unreliable narrators navigate through opacity, falsehood, perversity and self-abnegation in the community that imposes expectations on them. It also frames how apprehensions such as crime, poverty, criminality, and the tendency to scapegoat are not only revealing of individual fracture and disorientation but also reflective of the collective anxieties of the past as inflected on the present. The second section focuses on Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207* and Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* to identify instances of unreliability in characters, in particular, of bad faith or bad will, which condition such characters to deception and wilful avoidance of responsibility. Framing such ethical ambiguities as deceptive empathy, indignation, theft and other complex individual aberrations, this section magnifies the ethical uncertainties of unreliable narrators, who are, in this case, considered fallible and untrustworthy. Moreover, the section shows how bad faith, manifested in the tendency to lie and take advantage of morally ambiguous situations, is deployed by the narrators in the

novels to wilfully project their own self-interest, thus rendering the pursuit of empathy, consideration and responsibility uncertain.

This chapter borrows theoretical insights on narrative unreliability from the works of Wayne Booth (1983), James Phelan (1996), and other narrative theorists. The chapter is also theoretically indebted to Jean-Paul Sartre's (1956) concept of bad faith to denote unreliability occasioned by lack of trust and wilful fallibility. To contextualise debates around race and (post)colonial/apartheid as a social condition, the chapter has drawn insights from Frantz Fanon (1967) and Steve Biko (1978b; 1978c), as well as from other cultural and literary scholars.

## **5.2 The Burden of the Past: Unreliable Narration in *After Tears* and *Unimportance***

In post-apartheid South African fiction, histories of poverty and want, and of disempowered communities are a constant metaphor that underwrite black communal experiences, and which are often connected with memories of the past in the present. In South Africa, the past continues to overbear in the present. In a context where the past is painfully remembered in the present, individuals are entangled in complex ways. In post-apartheid literature, there is a constant reference to the past, which is expressed in the form of a problematic background. This background is constantly being evoked in the consciousness of characters. In Chapter One of this thesis, we observed that apartheid was fundamentally against the black collective, and its invasiveness retains a conscious mark on the community. The apartheid system created enduring social and economic barriers that disenfranchised the black community. With the end of apartheid, the legacies of apartheid continue to weigh on the present as a burden. Furthermore, the African community, as socially constituted in terms of collective action, exerts pressure on individuals, who are often expected to conform to established social norms. Adam Ashforth (2003: 15) identifies "poverty and the burdens of reciprocity" as enduring challenges that plague the black community in South Africa. In his study about beliefs in witchcraft and challenges of communal networks in Soweto, South Africa, Ashforth (2003: 32) argues that "[w]ithin networks where relations are premised upon principles of reciprocity, the metaphor of 'family' serves to establish a structure of redistribution." The family is established as a significant point upon which collective aspirations are directed, often in contexts where individuals from the same set ups are unable to meet their own personal obligations.

Pointing out the ambiguities existing in African morality, D.A. Masolo (2010: 106) argues that "family ties, rather than the Kantian-like universal maxims, are considered the grounds for the moral value of actions." Masolo's assertion points out the uniqueness of

African morality in the sense that characters' behaviour is conditioned by their allegiance to family and to meeting communal expectations. Masolo (2010: 106) further contends that the "dictates of custom or tradition rather than the inner language of conscience and reason direct judgment about what is good or bad and what is right or wrong." Yet, as Kwasi Wiredu (1980) asserts, some aspects of custom, like beliefs in witchcraft, point to perceptions about endemic communal evil. Wiredu (1980: 14) asserts that "the family is the witches' domain of operation", with members of the extended families often getting blamed for visiting evil on their relatives because of jealousy and other forms of ill-will. Wiredu (1980: 14) argues that in discourses surrounding witchcraft, "there is tension, suspicion and ill-feeling often concealed by public shows of solidarity and harmony." Individuals, therefore, opt for a public show of solidarity while hiding their true feelings and allegiances. Reflecting on the challenges of Ubuntu as a moral precept in South Africa, Thaddeus Metz (2011: 532) contends that Ubuntu's preoccupation with the collective fails to recognise "the value of individual freedom." The desire of the community to conform to established social norms, even when such norms are in violation of individual rights and freedoms, places the individual in an ambiguous ethical position. The individuals are wedged between choosing to act according to their own personal motivations, on the one hand, and acquiescing to communal demands on the other. Consequently, individuals retain a sense of unreliability that conditions their thoughts and motivations for action. Post-apartheid fiction written in the first person has been revealing of this tension between the individual and the community. The ambiguity has been captured in the range of first-person voices in post-apartheid South African literature speaking back at the community, while challenging established cultural codes. The tension is captured in varying degrees of unreliability that are exhibited by characters as they contest ethical concerns that pit individuals against the collective.

Gregory Currie (1995: 19) argues that narrative unreliability is connected to the "distinct concept of an ambiguous narrative." The scholar defines an ambiguous narrative as "one which does not enable us to answer all the significant questions which arise concerning the story" (Currie, 1995: 24). Narrative unreliability is manifest in the position of the first-person narrator within the narrative, thus:

The character may be internal (or *intradiegetic*): a character within the story itself, to be thought of as telling what is in fact fiction as if it were known fact – or as lies or deluded ravings, but not, anyway, as fiction (then she is internal not only to the work but to the fictional story that work has to tell). Or she may be an external (*extradiegetic*) narrator who announces herself as telling the story as fiction, but

where there is some reason to think of this narrator's voice as distinct from and independent on that of the implied author. (Currie, 1995: 20)

Currie's assertion identifies the two types of unreliable narrators, as those that are internally voicing their unreliability in the narrative without recourse to the external reader, and those who implicate the readers by constantly evoking their unreliability to the reader. Wayne Booth (1983: 157) clarifies that an implied author is the voice that carries the reader with him or her, and that "narrators may differ from their own authors or readers in various kinds of involvement or detachment, ranging from deep personal concern ... to a bland or mildly amused or merely curious detachment" (158). Booth (1983: 158, 159) considers unreliable narrators as products of deception, which is manifest in their failure to act "in accordance with the norms of the work." The protagonists in Niq Mhlongo's *After Tears* and Thando Mgqolozana's *Unimportance* straddle ambiguous narrative positions.

Mhlongo's *After Tears* features a first-person protagonist called Bafana who is a former student and dropout of the University of Cape Town (UCT). When Bafana fails in his quest to graduate and to qualify as a lawyer at the UCT, he goes home dejected and begins to live a lie. Against a communal background that has prepared a list of demands that he must meet as an "Advo" (as the community called him the moment he set foot at UCT), he frames a fallacious identity for himself to conform to. He maintains a deceptive posture in his dealings with his family and his community back at Chiawelo, or Chi, in Soweto. Based on the above sentiments, he can be characterised as an unreliable, internal narrator as he processes his unreliability in a largely personal and detached manner. Thabo Tsehloane (2010: 84) argues that Bafana is preoccupied with self-interest, an "ethical abdication ... whose typical manifestation is to seek to assume authority and responsibility over others." Ansgar Nünning (1997: 84) argues that unreliable narrators are "first person narrators who are also the protagonists of the stories and who recount a portion of their own lives."

Nünning (1997: 84) also stretches the discussion of unreliability in the narrative to include speakers in narratives "who are clearly recognisable as speakers or writers and whom the reader gets to know quite well." This means that focalised speakers who are not in themselves protagonists in narratives can also be unreliable. Going by Nünning's (1997: 84) assertion, Bafana's "ethical abdication" can be ascribed to his privileged position as a protagonist who brings his wily ways to bear on his relationships with others in his community back at Soweto. Bafana's abdication is closely related to his community, which appears to him, in many instances, as a burden. His failure at the university is a tip of the iceberg that frames his individual fracture. Bafana's situation parodies black aspiration that is

pegged on the desire for educational achievements by black South Africans. Bafana has to contend with the limited and limiting conditions in the townships, which are in themselves a historical burden of apartheid, as they were created. Adam Ashforth (2005) contextualises how victimhood and legacies of poverty in townships in South Africa condition people's collective will and drive their actions. Ashforth (2005) argues that the will to survive in the township shapes people's attitudes and beliefs, which are demonstrably scapegoated through traditional rituals, beliefs in witchcraft and in other occult practices. Bafana's mother pegs her own dreams to amass a fortune that will allow them to have cars, alongside other material advantages, on Bafana's prospects of getting a well-paying job. In attempting to fulfil her wishes, Bafana's mother constantly looks for job opportunities that pay a lot of money in newspaper advertisements for her son the thinking that he is qualified for it, which is really not true, as he failed in the examinations, and that his future in the current circumstances is uncertain. His uncle, Uncle Nyawana, an old, invalid former tsotsi/gangster, entertains the thought of getting rich once Advo gets a big job (or once he succeeds to litigate his case to get insurance "millions" for his injuries) so that they can afford to buy gated houses in the "northern suburbs" or in the "posh suburb of Houghton" and to escape their dreary life in the township. In this dream, he can afford to be "Mandela's neighbour and own a mansion with very high walls like all the rich people do" (*After Tears*, 14). Such instances of dramatic irony in the text serve to heighten the text's orientation to narrative unreliability. Nünning (1997: 87) argues about the structure of an unreliable narration:

The structure of unreliable narration can be explained in terms of dramatic irony or discrepant awareness. In the case of an unreliable narrator, dramatic irony results from the discrepancy between the intentions and value system of the narrator and the foreknowledge and norms of the reader. For the reader, either the internal lack of harmony between the statements of the narrator or contradictions between the narrator's perspective and the reader's own concept of normality suggest that the narrator's reliability may be suspect.

A rich and decided irony in the novel is constituted by, on the one hand, a family and a community's expectation of Bafana as a prospective township pillar and, on the other hand, by Bafana's 'discrepant awareness' of his situation as a confirmed failure that stands in stark contrast to their expectations. This irony is extended by communal demands for reciprocity. Bafana's former teacher, Dilika, tongue-in-cheek, asks the narrator to buy rounds of drinks for those who facilitated his imminent success, otherwise he, Bafana, "would have been isibotho, drinking mbamba, or a tsotsi, robbing people here ekasi" (*After Tears*, 13). Bafana's

perceived success in Dilika's terms should translate to material advantages for the people who propped him out of township poverty and derelict life. The reality, however, is that Bafana is a confirmed failure of the UCT, having flunked in his examinations. Indeed, the guilt Bafana feels stems from his failure to meet his family's and his community's expectations, dashing his mother's hope that he "was going to be the youngest advocate to come out of Chi" (*After Tears*, 9), but he loses the chance to be "the first in my family to have a university degree" (*After Tears*, 59). Rather than lay out the facts bare for his family and the community to come to terms with and to accept his unfortunate situation, Bafana shrouds his real intentions in a web of mystery, letting things roll on seamlessly from bad to worse.

Even though he knows he has failed, Bafana continues to live a lie. His intentions and value system are opaque. Bafana's mother, together with Bafana, undertakes to sell the only family house so that Bafana could get school fees in order that the university could release his results (which are in fact non-existent). This decision is pegged on future material realities for the family arising out of the potential prospects of Bafana's promising future as an advocate, as observed earlier. The most significant burden that black families have had to deal with, as is illustrative of this particular context, is the notion of land and housing. Bafana's family problems are a mirror of uncertainties related to the historical burden of land and housing as imagined in the post-apartheid era. In the novel, Bafana's mother intends to sell a family house in a bid to pay for Bafana's school fees in order that he may get his "results". The house in itself is not owned by the seller of the house – Bafana's mother. It is a family house that technically belongs to the family, including Uncle Nyawana, who has not been informed regarding its intended sale, as well as to Bafana's eldest uncle, who "was in jail for arson and assault" at the time the house was put up for sale (*After Tears*, 25). Bafana feebly attempts to reason with his mother about the immorality of selling the house: "What about the family history in this house? I'm sure we're not that desperate" (*After Tears*, 25), to which his mother replies: "all the memories of this place are bad ones. Both your grandparents died here, and your uncle Guava went to jail straight from this house, after he doused a neighbour's house, accusing her of witchcraft on Yuri's mother, although it was probable she died of AIDS. There are no good memories here" (*After Tears*, 26). Mother's assertion reads well into Ashforth's claim about witchcraft as a convenient scapegoat for township problems. Bafana's mother uses bad memories as an excuse to attempt to disinherit her brothers. In pursuing a selfish and myopic agenda, the mother creates a situation in which her own private interests supersede those of the community, in this particular case, that of her siblings.

Bafana's mother emerges as an untrustworthy speaker whose character, to use Nünning's (1997: 89) assertion, "does not accord with conventional notions of sound judgement." She blackmails her two brothers, including Guava, her imprisoned brother, into acquiescing to sell the family house. Later, when Uncle Nyawana is on his deathbed, Mama cries crocodile tears, and wells up that they should leave the ghost house that had claimed the family, including the one who was about to die in the same house. This suited her, since the house had been committed anyway. Her moral inconsistencies stem from her wilful desire to let her personal interests prevail. Rebecca Fasselt (2017: 471) argues that the family in the novel "constitutes an ambiguous, unstable space where family structures are characterised by versatile, rather than unequivocally more inclusive membership." This behaviour is a pointer towards the ethical uncertainties facing individuals in post-apartheid contexts such as townships. Leonard Praeg, in *A Report on Ubuntu* (2014: 51) argues that in "the townships and cities of industrialising South Africa, Africans encountered the solitariness of life associated with modernity in a context where it is expected of individuals not always to rely on community networks" but to find themselves problematically having to recreate ingenious ways to personal survival. It is in this context that Bafana and his mother become barons of deception, rather than adopt the spirit of consideration and empathy towards their deserving family members.

Bafana lies to Gava, his uncle in prison, that he would take to him brandy, yet he had no intention of visiting him after he signed for the sale of the house: "joking to quell my guilt, but to my uncle it must have sounded like a genuine promise" (116). His primary interest, together with that of his mother, is to extract Guava's signature and permission to sell the house. Bafana is an irredeemable serial liar. Nünning (1997: 85) argues that in order to gauge a speaker's inconsistency, we should look at signals such as "textual inconsistencies, the verbal habits of the narrator, and the discrepancies between the fictional world presented by a text and the reader's world-knowledge and standards of normality." Bafana creates his own world that is independent of shared relations, and he acts, wittingly or unwittingly, without conviction or reflection about the result of his actions. Upon the sale of the house, and after getting the money, Bafana's superficial guilt gets him again, particularly as connected to his dying uncle (Uncle Nyawana) in the hospital. His conceited character crumbles at the surface upon the realisation of the futility of the entire criminal enterprise of selling the house:

As I thought about my uncle I suddenly became very tense. I realised that I had set myself a trap. There I was, in that taxi, stuck with the cash that I was supposed to pay

for my non-existent results. What was I going to do with it now? I asked myself.  
(*After Tears*, 133)

However, the self-reflexive realisation of his untoward behaviour is momentary. After arriving in the city, he spends part of the money on buying himself his favourite whiskey and treats himself “to a nice breakfast... At least money wasn’t an issue any more”, and spends a little to buy two newspapers (*After Tears*, 138). The month-long search for a buyer for the house, and the accompanying realisation of the dodgy and controversial history of the sale of the house that belonged to someone else, magnifies Bafana’s vain and hollow character in the way he expends the money. He knows that what remains for him is to “cook up a story” about some job in a law firm in order to generate further protective covers to his failure (*After Tears*, 133).

As indicated above, the house did not actually belong to Bafana’s family. It is a house that is symbolically tied to apartheid as a burden, especially on its legacy of disenfranchisement and dispossession. It has a tinge of the history of Bafana’s family intertwined with John Sekoto’s, the man who is apparently the owner of the house which they have committed to sell in order to secure Bafana’s “non-existent results” (*After Tears*, 34). It is only from the conversation between Mr Sekoto and his mother that the narrator/ Bafana gets to know of his family history, and his grandmother’s dispossession of Sekoto after he, Sekoto, was condemned to Weskoppies Mental Hospital during apartheid. When Mr Sekoto came to stop the intended sale and to reclaim his house, Uncle Nyawana and Bafana’s mother did not sympathise with the old man. Bafana’s family committed a treachery against a fellow black person who had been dispossessed by apartheid. Uncle Nyawana confirmed that his father must have dispossessed him of the house, as he had done to many others: “That man, my taima, was a real tsotsi. Many people lost their homes because of him” (*After Tears*, 45). When Bafana does finally visit the mother’s lawyer regarding the intended sale of the house, he comes to terms with his “complicated family history” of swindling unsuspecting victims (*After Tears*, 74). It was the same thing that his mother was trying to do to her own brothers. He further comes to terms with his family’s history of being swindlers and tsotsis when he realises that his uncles got their RDP houses through corrupt means, and Bafana now understands his family legacy: “Things were getting stranger and I drew back in shock. I had realised that I didn’t know my family that well. I was sure about that now” (*After Tears*, 74).

And in the attempt to dispossess the rightful owner of the house, Bafana’s mother’s lawyer also lays out a strategic plan that is not only contextualised within the uneasy material

realities of apartheid, but also uses the inconsistencies of apartheid to justify the treachery against Mr. Sekoto:

We might argue this case [of Sekoto's dispute over house ownership] by saying that although Mr. Sekoto was technically the rightful occupier of the house since 1971, he never owned it. This is because since 1968 black people had no legal title to the land that they occupied in urban areas like Soweto...Therefore, the house that Mr. Sekoto occupied in Chiawelo, which is the centre of contention here, belonged to the council until the 10<sup>th</sup> of June in 1989. That's the year in which the council itself decided to sell it to Mr. Kuzwayo, your father. By the time the Land Tenure Act was repealed in 1986, so that black people could start owning land in urban areas, Mr. Sekoto didn't have the legal capacity to do so. That's because he had been committed to Weskoppies Mental Hospital in Pretoria in 1979. (*After Tears*, 72).

For Bafana's family, apartheid is convenient as far as ownership of the contested house is concerned. By attempting to disinherit her poor brothers to solve her own personal problems, Bafana's mother's actions speak against community ideals. She has a personal whim in her decision to sell the house all by herself without informing or getting the rights from significant stakeholders. A greater moral uncertainty rests on Bafana's shoulders, as he has to justify the proceeds from the sale of this house, even with the full knowledge that he had dismally failed.

In a wilful desire to practise as a lawyer, even without proper qualifications, Bafana devises a plan to procure fake certificates. He does finally collude with Yomi, a Nigerian, to get these. Convinced that his criminal plans will pay off, he gets for himself the fake certificates. They had all the marks and seals of the UCT, and they passed off as genuine. He is excited by the blunt exaggeration in the transcripts: "I had received very high marks in all the courses that I had failed dismally", and he takes up this defective disposition with glee (*After Tears*, 136). He starts a law firm that, even though it promised some sort of financial security, casts a dark shadow over his false life. His shady certificate in his "office" in Chi, his village in Soweto, is an image of apprehension, guilt and fear. While his mother prides in him as a successful lawyer, he himself "felt like a criminal", which, in fact, he was (*After Tears*, 161). He has constant fear of getting caught, and his insecurities lead him to consider staying away from his mother. His "success" at the courts is partially because he has had a past experience living in Soweto and understood its criminal posture, and has been with people who have taught him "a lot of things" regarding the courts and criminal life in general, including Zero, the taxi driver and former drop-out of the University of Fort Hare. He

manages to mask his failure in the community as several people begin to savour his “success” at the streets of Chi. He continues to lie to justify the “success” at his “attorneys” office, even though there are practical times when his success in litigation is more a product of blind chance, rather than by sound legal reasoning. The legal system is also a reflection of a systemic failure in checks and balances, as the practising judge was neither acquainted with the academic credentials of the new advocate nor probed his legal acuity during the proceedings. He also develops a corrupt connection with court officials that quickly hems his position within the corrupt judicial structure, thus initiating himself and his deception into a similarly morally bankrupt institution.

Deception permeates Bafana’s relationships with others, especially Yomi, his business “associate” at Chi and his enabler of fake certificates, and Vee, a close Zimbabwean woman and former college mate. He enters into dealings with these two foreigners as a matter of financial and social convenience. He uses these two individuals to escape from the vagaries of his own position as a man who must live in spite of failing at the university. Vee, the Zimbabwean, appears to be his close friend, way after they left the university. Vee, however, passed her examinations and is currently working in South Africa. Her immediate problem relates to getting work permits to enable her to work without interruptions or harassment from the South African authorities. Bafana entertained a thought of marrying her because he felt she had “good manners”, as opposed to Lerato, his Soweto girlfriend. His mother, equally, did not approve of Lerato because she did not speak her South African language, Sesotho, but spoke English with “a nasal private school accent”. On her part, his mother fully approved of Vee’s conduct and disposition on the many times she visited their home and participated actively in family chores. However, the futility of this aspiration is subverted when Vee, disturbed incessantly by the South African government on account of being a foreigner on a work permit, approaches Bafana for a (convenience) marriage that will naturalise her stay in South Africa. She reasons that should he be disinterested in the union (which would exist in paper, anyway), they would seek the annulment of the union, once her permanent residency is confirmed. Vee’s choice of this criminal route is informed by the practical realities on the ground for foreigners in South Africa. She understands the implications of her criminal conduct, but promises to keep it all under wraps. Outwardly, Bafana fakes his feelings on the criminality of that enterprise, but he is secretly looking forward to it because Vee promises a substantial amount of money for the arrangement. Their personal interests motivate both Bafana and Vee to engage in criminal acts. They proceed to file for marriage, and in the day of the arranged marriage, Bafana’s mother storms into the

marriage office to find Bafana and Vee planning to get married without her consent or knowledge. Bafana's mother is incensed by this new betrayal that shocks her, given that she was looking for Bafana to explain her realisation that Bafana failed at the university.

When Bafana's mother eventually finds out the truth regarding his failure at UCT, she finds Vee as a convenient scapegoat for his failure. She thinks her son was good until he started associating with a foreigner. Rather than explain the true position to her, that his failure was independent of Vee's influence, he takes advantage of the confusion, runs away from the scene, and the arranged marriage aborts. Bafana's relationship with Vee is ambiguous. He uses her proposal as a justification for his need for business capital, and not out of love or consideration for Vee, in spite of his earlier admiration of her. It is also worth remembering that Bafana's mother had greater regard for Vee as a potential marriage partner as opposed to the South African, but she trumped up the foreigner card when it turned out to be convenient. Bafana emerges as an unreliable character who employs the scapegoating of foreigners as a political tool to actualise his own selfish pursuits.

Another source of uncertainty, which appears to stem from the tendency to scapegoat in the novel, is the persistent projection of witchcraft as a communal challenge. Communal assumption, in which witchcraft operates, destroys individual aspirations and distorts expectations of justice and equality. The belief in witchcraft is portrayed as a threat to communal unity, and it disorients individuals into acquiescing to the whims of a broader intangible communal power. Wiredu (1980) contextualises communal uncertainties surrounding witchcraft discourses, which belie deep societal fractures, with the extended family often getting blamed for visiting evil on their kin. In the novel, during periods of self-uncertainty, such as during personal disorientation and inexplicable illnesses, individuals visit witchdoctors, who would often locate individual confusion as originating from witchcraft committed on them by immediate and distant relatives, as well as by jealous neighbours. As a consequence, individuals live under the constant fear of death. As Ashforth (2003) observes, discourses of witchcraft often appear alongside discourses of poverty and reciprocity. Owing to poverty and deteriorating economic systems, communities often depend on a few members of the community to assist a poverty-stricken population. Suggesting the danger of the failure of these reciprocal networks, Ashforth (2003: 32) argues that the "obligatory transfers in the name of 'kinship'" also ironically leads to "excluding others on the same grounds" because of varying degrees of relationships, which ensures that a sister feels more obligated to a brother than to a distant cousin. Such failures in reciprocity, or perceived fear surrounding the nature and function of obligation in the community, renders witchcraft as a

convenient site of blame. For fear of witchcraft, Uncle Nyawana defends himself from “bad luck and township witchcraft” (*After Tears*, 20). Even upon his death, the family does not think he died of natural causes, and his corpse, in preparation for his burial, was not brought into the family yard as bringing his body in would “spell further misfortune for my family”, in Bafana’s, and by extension, the community’s thinking (*After Tears*, 190). His funeral assembles immediate and distant relatives, some of whom have never been to the family or established connections with them before. They are gathered with the expectation for a usual collective funeral engagement; “to benefit from the after tears that would be held immediately after the funeral” (*After Tears*, 191). These superficial networks disappear once the funeral is over, signifying, in part, the loose and artificial kinship arrangements in the socially tense townships.

The Soweto community in *After Tears* is riddled with poverty and crime. Tsehloane (2010: 83,84) observes that Soweto is a racialised space that is inflected by poverty. The township is in itself an ambiguous locale, set between the allure of the city on the one hand, and poor marginalised black “reserves” on the other. The possibility of one getting robbed by members of one’s community is high. The robbers “who don’t have ubuntu” (*After Tears*, 7) waylay their victims in trains and along the highways, where South Africans and foreigners are their victims. Uncle Nyawana and PP are former tsotsis/ gangsters. PP was “a notorious carjacker in Soweto and his name alone carried terror in the township” (*After Tears*, 11). He has “grotesque tattoos” that serve as a reminder of his ways. He had served a seven-year sentence in prison, “and he always boasted that he was the leader of the feared prison gang the 26s” (11). PP is proud of his tsotsi “achievements”, and he has “things” to show for his gangsterism. Community members believe that his business “empire” is a product of his hard work as a gangster in the township (*After Tears*, 203). Uncle Nyawana, PP’s childhood friend, was also a tsotsi, and his amputated leg was a result of a robbery gone awry, when he fell off a moving train. In this context, they bring their historical burden to bear on their relationships and dealings in Soweto.

At present, long after “retirement”, their criminal past is a subject of communal humour and societal uncertainty, often shared through stories told with pride and glamour by the concerned to excited township residents. These stories are also flavoured by a strong and suggestive/sexualised language and masochistic tales of conquests. In the speeches of the characters, sexual profanities abound. Tsehloane (2010: 84) argues that the “bravado and valorization of sexual prowess is an element from dominant masculinity, but is amplified and vulgarized in the narrative to enhance a comic effect.” There is evidence to show, however,

that the conversations are also beyond the comical, as such perverted orientation is reflective of a larger and dominant societal fracture. There are extensive acts of perversion that are common in *After Tears's* Soweto. The male characters are lewd and lecherous, including Zero and PP, who hold the belief that a man's worth is judged by the number of women one has slept with. PP has many maintenance cases in court with different women, both in South Africa and elsewhere on the continent, which caps his belief that women are "easy", in sexual terms. Zero's taxi rides are marked by lewdness and profane language toward women, whom he ogles at, even in murky places. In similar acts of perversion, Uncle Nyawana thinks that Bafana will take all the girls in the township because he is educated, but he warns him that the girls have AIDS. In fact, PP and Dilika are known paedophiles whose reputation in the township spans several decades of sexual perversion in the township and elsewhere. However, as old as they are, Uncle Nyawana and PP are interested in making sexual jokes which are often spurious against the dignity of women. To Uncle Nyawana, anyone who is not interested in women is a moffie/gay (*After Tears*, 93). Those like PP hold the view that condoms are ungodly and that if one were to use them and they break, it is a punishment from God, and this discolours his own attitudes and beliefs regarding a disease that he may potentially have contracted, considering his symptoms. Writing about HIV/AIDS and its persistence in South Africa, Lizzy Attree (2010: 6) contends that witchcraft and HIV discourses are often intertwined, with individuals usually exhibiting "racialized and sexually homophobic attitude to HIV/AIDS." This discourse reveals an enduring fracture of the South African self that seems to rationalise serious concerns in the township. Thando Mqgqolozana's *Unimportance* also expresses a fracture of the self.

Thando Mqgqolozana's *Unimportance* features a student leader aspiring to be the president of the students' organisation at the University of Western Cape (UWC). Zizi is in a campaign mood at the university, and he is fighting against opposition from some of his worthy opponents. He is also faced with a serious personal challenge. He has abused his girlfriend, and as he scours the campus after her disappearance, he is worried that this singular misfortune is going to derail his chances at getting elected as the students' representative, especially if she were to speak about his private life, which he *knows* to be questionable. To use Booth's (1983: 155) characterisation, Zizi is a "self-conscious narrator" who understands what it means if Pamodi were to speak about his violent abuse of her. Being an unreliable protagonist, he creates an equivocal context for himself by remaining as, to use Booth (1983: 305), "a narrator revealing his faults in his own words without the guidance of a superior mind." This aspect allows Zizi to have control over his own narrative, as he is the

focal point on whose experiences he decides which or how to navigate and bring to the fore. By virtue of his posture of looking at strategies to maintain a version of his own identity while occluding that of others, Zizi emerges as an unreliable and untrustworthy narrator. Nünning (1997: 89) identifies an unreliable narrator as one “whose rendering of the story the reader has reasons to suspect”, while untrustworthy narrators are “those whose commentary does not accord with conventional notions of sound judgement.” Zizi’s identity manifests a character who is torn between protecting his own personal space as a black South African student fighting for his space at the university, but also deeply aware of the precariousness of his place and position in a society where the past inflicts emotional injuries on the present. Lucy Valerie Graham (2022: 136) argues that the novel explores “Black masculinity” in a university environment “saturated with gender-based violence.” Graham (2022: 145) points out that Zizi’s divided loyalties and personal confusion emanate from his trouble with gender, especially in the misogynistic attitudes that he harbours towards women. Even then, he privileges his own self-consciousness by self-reflectively turning inward. In a night when he should be writing a speech in consultation with members of his political wing, he travels the width and breadth of campus looking for his girlfriend. He amplifies all that has gone wrong in his life by staging Pamodi as the focal point for all his troubles. In the end, the “manifesto” turns out to be a personal expression of his own frustrations and slanted opinions.

Zizi vaingloriously justifies his failures by lying to himself. Rather than explain the genesis of his failure to write his speech/manifesto on account of the disturbing relationships with Pamodi, especially with their latest disagreements, including on this particular night when he should be writing his speech, Zizi problematically chooses to think that there is nothing exciting about writing a presidential speech any time earlier. His justification that “No presidential speech is written five days ahead, because it would be out of date by the time it was delivered” (*Unimportance*, 44), is vainglorious, considering the fact that the speech, as is the tradition, is not a personal but a collective adventure that requires the input from the student leadership as well. Minesh Dass (2022: 122) contends that Zizi’s “development [in character] is fundamentally flawed because it is premised on the notion of a personal sense of self that is separate and distinct from the social order.” Demonstrating a selfish personality, he continues to lie to the comrades that he has an excellent speech ready, and denies them the collective opportunity to add their ambitions and desires in/to the manifesto. Even more appalling is that he knew the motions, as he had done it previously during his past candidature. The unacknowledged lie was that Zizi fails to show up during the session when all the members were waiting for him.

As an unreliable and untrustworthy narrator, Zizi does not disclose his fear of the opposition and chooses to instead justify his absence on account of other reasons. Furthermore, he thinks that he wanted to do it differently; to appear more like a poem in the protest tradition of such countries as Chile, Mexico, Venezuela and Cuba (43-44), even though there is no clear justification for such an aspiration. Signifying the futility of such an enterprise, he fails to write the speech in that format as he imagined. Instead, he takes naps, looks for poetry collections to copy or write in that style, fails, then continues to do other things that please him. Molly Hite (2010) argues that ethical questions in narratives may be evoked by “play with conventions of sympathy, indignation, ironic distance inciting condescension, and other affective responses.” In many instances in the novel, Zizi’s outlook on certain ethical sensibilities changes to reflect on his place and position on campus. While he remains hollow and meek in his attempt to be elected, he remains personally convinced that he is the best for the position on campus.

Zizi uses some rhetorical strategies, including evoking sympathy towards the black population on the one hand, while showing indignation against systemic injustices in the campus environment for the black student, on the other. The university becomes the new site of contest that negotiates the future of the black community, against the “survival” in “great” institutions of tertiary education of South Africa, whose original educational role was not in recognition of such black dreams and rights. Zizi addresses the question of fitting into the university environment by referring to the historical and cultural legacy of the South African university. To him, black South African students must negotiate between competition for the scarce resources, on the one hand, and surviving a racially unforgiving environment, on the other. Zizi’s choice of a running mate, for example, is consciously done with the consideration of community in mind. Amaze’s history of/in community seems to be the basis of her potential selection as Zizi’s deputy. Zizi is more concerned about Amaze’s communal orientation (including the patriarchal and gender orientation) with educational considerations playing as an “added advantage”, as subsumed in her qualities:

Amaze was born and bred in the homeland. She went to school and lived with Xhosa-speaking people her entire life, and this familiarity was part of her choosing to come to this university (72) ... She is Coloured, female, intelligent, beautiful, and she speaks fluent Xhosa ... She is the perfect draw card for an organisation that is predominantly Xhosa in a largely still Coloured university, and in a student political

arena that is overwhelmingly male-dominated, in a campus and world of female majorities (73).

To Zizi, Amaze's intelligence, probing attitude and the will to ask hard questions is part of an added advantage to the more central considerations for "balance" in the racial, social, ethnic and gender considerations in a politicised educational environment. In defining her candidature, Zizi seems to stake her acceptability on a balance of probabilities which are chanced upon her ethnic, racial, and gender/ed dispositions. Her choice is in mitigation of Zizi's uncertainties over the largely polarised university environment that continued to camouflage past historical differences. Zizi understands that his role as the president of the SRC is critical for the black South African student, and the black community in general, but even then, he must consider the most immediate South African community/communities that make up the UWC: the Xhosas and the Coloured. Herein lies his unreliability. He must appeal to the larger South African black community in his collective call to action, while at the same time maintaining his allegiance to a particular set of values only known to him (which he does, of course, appeal to us as readers). Hite (2010: 261) observes that ethical inconsistencies ensue when "the narrator seems to speak authoritatively, but because of double-voicing, that authority itself is uncertain." For example, he appears to place a high premium on Amaze's gender, when in fact it is clear that, from his relationship with his girlfriend, he does not respect women. Greta Olson (2003) argues that "[d]etecting irony and narrator unreliability comprises an interpretive strategy that involves reading against the grain of the text and assuming one understands the unspoken message beyond the literal one." Zizi's aspiration is rooted in black people's aspirations to make out in (formerly) racialised university contexts. He is a black man at the university, signifying the easing of apartheid's hold on educational opportunities skewed against black people. Zizi silently acknowledges the strides the country has made in admitting students from diverse racial backgrounds, new problematic configurations of bottlenecks notwithstanding. Zizi is a self-confessed student of Steve Biko who strives, albeit unsuccessfully, to live up to Biko in his dreams. Biko who was himself a student leader of a students' organisation during his day, defines the main goal of black education in South Africa as a gateway to uplift the standards of black students, and, to train the individual to be sensitive to communal needs to outgrow the oppressive racial and political systems of control in South African universities (Biko, 1978a). Zizi's overriding motivation as a student leader is to balance between past memories and future aspirations in an environment where memories are a significant burden in the present. Zizi therefore takes

advantage of the historical realities in the South African university. Zizi is obligated towards the South African community, along with all its past inflections:

The masses choose you to fight their battles against university management because they recognise in you the courageous, selfless aspect of themselves. They choose someone who could have been their grandfather in exile. The memories of the past regime and the present betrayal are too harsh and too fresh in their minds to be ignored. (*Unimportance*, 28)

Zizi's frame of mind appears to consider the past as a burden in the present. The legacy of apartheid, especially in terms of pain, anger and frustration about access to education by black people, weighs down on the protagonist. Saidiya V. Hartman (1997), writing about lifelong psychological manifestations of slavery on the black race with respect to American slavery, identifies some of the strategies which the enslaved population used against "racial subjection" (32). Hartman (1997: 50) identifies "the politics of the enslaved" which manifest through different strategies, including theft, destruction of property and violent confrontations. Zizi's "politics" revolve around a rejection of the legacies of apartheid, which seem to have fed into his consciousness, a neurotic personality that makes him transpose and impose the apartheid past (of exile) to the current campus politics. The neurosis of the past affects him and weighs on his decisions as a (potential) student leader. Zizi believes that every university student must get space at the university, despite all odds. He believes that every university student, apart from negotiating the meaning of their continued stay at the university, must interrogate their problematic position in the community. This tension obligates each student to balance between private and communal considerations. The narrator, Zizi, says: "We put ourselves in the proverbial shoes of each student. It is unbearable to imagine the reaction of the village family left behind if that smart student had to go back home with the news that *there is no space...*" (101). Faced with this reality, Zizi makes decisions that are subservient to communal interests. Zizi's consciousness mirrors the push for decoloniality in South African universities, particularly as he stations his fight at the arena of freedom and change. Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh (2018: 17) define decoloniality as,

the recognition and undoing of the hierarchical structures of race, gender, heteropatriarchy, and class that continue to control life, knowledge, spirituality, and thought structures that are clearly intertwined with and constitutive of global capitalism and western modernity.

Zizi's consciousness captures the essence of decoloniality as imagined by Mignolo and Walsh (2018). The structures of race and the performativity of gender in the campus environment manifest in the ways he plays politics on campus. He is also someone who understands the manifestations of hegemonic discourses on his campus, and by positioning himself in power, he is looking for an opportunity to confront them. Zizi fully understands the structural epistemic violence that plagues his university. To a significant degree, Zizi's beliefs reflect Mbembe's (2016b: 30, 32) assertions that there is a need to decolonise access to education while questioning persistent "Western epistemic traditions" in the South African university. Zizi's main objective, as he understands it, is "to make visible, open up, and advance radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace Western rationality" (to use the words of Mignolo and Walsh, 2018: 17), and to replace it with an African consciousness that pays attention to African sensibilities and unique social conditions. On this score, he is alive to the ethical precept of Ubuntu, where he is expected to help those in need. Consequently, Zizi manages to use his position and networks to transform the systems of university admissions in the university. Yet, these aspirations are not always consistent with the material realities on the ground as students negotiate through a confluence of dreams, some of which are misaligned with individual and communal aspirations. His ethical ambiguities stem from his relationship with the past; his feelings of empathy, consideration and responsibility are affected by his ingrained feelings about the place and position of the South African black youth on campus. He is therefore emotionally and ethically entangled with the campus environment that pits him and his aspirations against the aspirations of the black community and the entire university environment. For example, Zizi takes it upon himself to knock at the door to his shared university room before he enters because he never wanted, if it ever came to that, to witness the humiliation of his roommate, should he find him rummaging through his (narrator's) bag in search of basic necessities like tissue paper without permission. His greatest fear would be for him to see his community member feel grossly shamed in that scenario. He is also largely empathetic towards the majority of the black students whom he represents as a student leader, and he dreads the probable possibility that their dropping out of college would occasion loss of personal and collective dreams. He therefore lives boxed in some kind of paranoia and neurosis permeate his feelings about the future of the black student on campus.

For Zizi, the South African black community comes first in the pecking order on campus. This reasoning forms part of the reasons why he takes it upon himself to defend failed students and re-engineer their re-admission back to campus through phony ways. Zizi

is prepared to lie to save a failed and unqualified student by bringing assumed but convenient communal considerations to bear. To mystify the white dean, Zizi says that Sqojiji is fighting with ancestors who are hell bent on forcing her out of campus. To conflate Sqojiji's situation with broader communal aberrations, Zizi mentions someone in the current South African parliament whom he thinks received a calling as a diviner, and the dean seemingly stops further inquisition. When prompted to provide her medical records, Zizi thinks he can get the dates to show she consulted a doctor, and not necessarily the records concerning the actual illness, citing patient-diviner confidentiality. He gives himself a safe leeway to be able to defend the case without providing any form of documentation. Zizi understands that Sqojiji's case was one among many such cases, and he knew that the university committee would be keen to find out any seeming inconsistencies in their defences. In the past, for example, students would provide death certificates of great-grandmothers to explain their academic failures, which would turn out to show that the said student performed exceptionally well when the great-grandmother was sick, and failed when she was of good health. Zizi understands why the dean asked for medical records to argue out her case, and he is thankful that "He was sensitive enough not to ask for proof of divination. Not everything in our society can be documented..." (*Unimportance*, 97).

Zizi's unreliability can thus be positioned within the uneasy friction between acquiescing to the decolonial push to "displace Western rationality", in Mignolo and Walsh's (2018: 17) words, and replacing it with an "African rationality". Zizi's university, the UWC, retains significant memories of the past that signify the university's attachment to the difficult path for intellectual and educational freedom in South Africa. The naming of significant buildings in the university in memory of Steve Biko, Chris Hani and Ruth First, as well as streets such as the Native Yard 1 (NY1) in memory of Gugulethu township, is an attempt to remember significant memorial architectures that signify communal contexts of struggle. The immuring of Ruth First in the university building, who was herself a firebrand crusader of black educational rights in colonial/apartheid South Africa, authenticates the calls for Freedom in Zizi's campus environment. First (1970: 453) had become increasingly aware of the stifled educational structures in Africa, and had started to speak against the stifling financial environment in South Africa against a growing demand for education. This is the spirit that Zizi seems to have internalised. In signifying the importance of re-historisation in university architecture, Zizi postures: "We are all members of the community before we are university students. That's why we have named the street that connects our residences after the longest street in Gugulethu: Native Yard 1." (*Unimportance*, 101). Zizi understands and

connects with the ideological underpinnings of education in the university, including understanding their signification on communal aspirations. The fact that he connects himself/themselves to the re-historisation of the campus concretises their own place and position within the campus environment. The remembrance of Gugulethu on campus historicises past victimhood and creates space and dialogue for discussions around the place and position of the South African university in the minds of the students. In Zizi's university environment, the struggle for freedom now, in the decolonial moment, is a struggle that is largely rooted in the poetics of the past, both in form and in character. Zizi (or anyone who is interested in campus politics) cannot extricate himself from the painful realities of the past, especially those that underwrite the collective trauma of apartheid and the accompanying demands for communal solidarity, especially at the university setup.

While Zizi's push for a decolonised university is in itself a morally gratuitous and fulfilling undertaking, it is not lost on him that their dreams have failed to materialise. Paulo Freire, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) points out the difficulties of individuals as they identify and respond to oppression. Freire (1970: 48) contends:

The oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being. They discover that without freedom they cannot exist authentically. Yet although they desire authentic existence, they fear it.

Zizi's duality exists on a plane in which, on the one hand, he is a student leader with power capable of questioning endemic injustices, while on the other hand, he has to connect his, and by extension, black students' experiences to the burden of the past and its continuing inflections on the present. This ambiguity is also replicated in fundamental ways in Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207* and Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog*.

### **5.3 Ambiguities of Fallible Characters: Bad Will in *Room 207* and *Dog Eat Dog***

Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207* features six young South African blacks, S'busiso (otherwise known as Zulu-boy, because he is a Zulu by ethnic extraction), Molamo, D'nice, Modishi, Matome, and the narrator called Noko, who live(d) together for over a decade while sharing a single rented room with a door inscribed "Room 207" in Hillbrow, in downtown Johannesburg. This room is focalised in the title of the novel. The small room, regarded as a home for close to thirteen years, envisages the uncertainties of living in cramped spaces. As city migrants from different parts of rural South Africa, the six individuals carry along communal challenges, as they share beds, constantly fight among themselves, and as they also express and vent their pain and misery in collective terms. While Noko remains as the primary protagonist, the others retain and express their respective individuality through him.

Monika Fludernik (2017: 141), writing regarding the collective voice in narratives, identifies the concept of “collective protagonists” to refer to those characters who are involved in a similar set of circumstances, express “a common attitude”, as they engage in “collective storytelling as co-authors and co-narrators.” The protagonists come from different ethnic communities of South Africa. For example, S’busiso is a Zulu, Noko a Sotho, Matome a Pedi, while Modishi is a Tswana. Marzia Milazzo (2013: 44) argues that in *Room 207*, “a simplistic and homogeneous notion of ‘black identity’ is complicated by ethnic heterogeneity.” In that regard, the novel moves beyond the identification of one black collective identity, into the identification of individuals from particular communities, some of whom, like Zulu-boy, are thought to reflect ethnically inclined social traits. By sharing the single room, the individuals of Room 207 exhibit the ideals of communitarianism that preach for collective efforts to solve communal problems. Leonard Praeg (2014: 51-2), reflecting on Ubuntu, contends that “with urbanisation and the anti-apartheid struggle, came the expansion of the secularisation of the formal principle of the Ubuntu praxis so that it no longer referred to local kinship-based and visible communities of metaphysical locality.” In effect, Ubuntu, with its precepts of neighbourliness and reciprocity, was transposed into the urban context, with its multiple networks.

Yet, beneath this ideal of sharing and reciprocity, their being together in the same room masks certain forms of individual vulnerabilities. Even though they live together in the same room in the embrace of communitarianism, their primary focus is on harnessing their individual efforts to pay rent, and collectively meet food expenses and retain a little for other necessities. However, these individuals also have their own personal pursuits, which are not generally aimed at solving their communal problems. Herein lies the uncertainty. For many years, the members of Room 207 shared an aspiration that they were going to make it out of the city. For over a decade, staying in the “dream city” of Hillbrow, each member of 207 entertains a dream that they will leave Hillbrow at a time when they have actualised their dreams. Samson Kathleen (2016: 14) argues that the “hopes and dreams of the characters ... are suspended in the hopeful yet uncertain temporality of ‘not yet’.” They live in an illusion in which they “figure their stay [in Room 207 and in Hillbrow] as an incarceration from which they are attempting to escape in order to actualise the prosperity they so desperately seek” (Kathleen, 2016: 15). The hope is inspired by illusory stories of financial breakthroughs. They therefore desire to escape from the materiality of their present circumstances into a utopia of a fulfilling life beyond 207, in particular, and Hillbrow/Johannesburg, in general. Niq Mhlongo (2008: 1) reflects on “the city’s ability to

lure people into believing that it can fulfil their egos, and their empty quests for a life of comfort, convenience, pleasure and fortune.” For Mhlongo, the author of *After Tears* and *Dog Eat Dog*, the fallacious “gleam of the city” conditions people’s entanglements with the city and urban life. The city retains a deceptive allure that feeds and consumes the fancies of anyone who comes by it. Modishi of 207, who thought he could make a career out of music in the city and earn a lot of money in the process, squanders his inheritance. The “buzzing street with neon lights” had ensnared him, forcing him to leave the relative comfort of the rural areas to live in Room 207 with his peers (*Room 207*, 49).

The first-person narrator, Noko, in many instances in the novel, excoriates post-apartheid living conditions by emphasising the unfortunate condition of the room, which is “humid and heavy” because its windows are hardly ever opened because of the constant threat of theft (*Room 207*, 14). As a primary focalizer, he expresses his own experiences, while also voicing the actions of others and commenting on their disposition, who remain as, to appropriate Fludernik (2017: 139), “agents, narrators and focalizers.” He stands at a privileged narrative position that allows him to draw conclusions on the values and experiences of others. On this account, his position is ambivalent. Kathleen (2016: 22) observes that Noko “plays host; he invites the reader-interlocutor-guest into his space, while also retaining that othering gesture – the reader remains a guest and outsider.” This position challenges his own reliability as a narrator. This is magnified by the instances in which he shares self-deprecating comments about self, and about others. For example, he entertains a wish that he is maimed through an electric fault by the overhanging electric wires in the leaking geysers in their room because that would provide him with an opportunity to take the landlord to court and hopefully secure an insurance payout that will allow him to fund “the out-of-Hillbrow party that Matome says we are going to have the day we move out of Hillbrow for good” (*Room 207*, 14). This party is subsumed in an endless dream, regarded as a figment of a successful life ahead after the mis/adventures in the dream city. However, this dream prefigures a dreamy existence of a future not altogether premised on the circumstances of the present, as they live in a condemned building that is a constant reminder of its fatalistic leanings. This problematic wish for a personal injury in order to fund an imagined communal party is a pointer to a faulty and vaulting self-sacrifice that is disguised as communal responsibility. Writing about the re/constitution of the black community in the context of slavery, Hartman (1997: 59) shares the uncertainties that plagued individuals whose connections after slavery were “forged in the context of disrupted affiliations, sociality among the constant threat of separation, and shifting sets of identification particular to site,

location and action.” Such kind of communal disruptions produce restless communities whose values and beliefs are continually in flux.

Ronit Frenkel (2013: 34) argues that *Room 207* “reinscribes stereotypes and exhibits a dubious morality.” Noko, especially, manifests his perversion and immorality, although he projects a different, outward mentality. He draws us to the persistent immoral language in the novel, while at the same time, he invites us not to prejudge him based on that language. One of Matome’s lady friends wants to “fuck” him, the narrator reports, and he/ the narrator intercedes: “Excuse the language, but that’s exactly what came out of her mouth” (26). Ibinga (2010: 63) argues that Moele’s use of vulgar language is consistent with “the mindset” of the young urban dwellers. Ibinga (2010: 64) notes that the novel uses a street language that is consistent with the characters’ social space. In this instance, the narrator’s intercession does seem to obligate the narrator to the representation of the need for good conduct: it only serves to heighten his own “horror” at the use of such a language by the female gender. Otherwise, in many instances, the narrator is implicated in the use of foul language. He rationalises, for example, the problematic distinctions between “love” and “sex” based on their assumed meanings after he had random sex with Matome’s girlfriend. He justifies the immoral encounter:

First Dimakatso was Matome’s and then she was mine and we were still living in the same room. This situation arose because Matome did not want to have sex with her, who preferred loving her without having sex because he did not want ‘to have sex at this time in my life’. (*Room 207*, 28)

Despite his closeness to Matome, the narrator does not display any guilt or remorse over his betrayal of Matome. In this profane situation, the narrator manages to have sex with Matome’s girlfriend because he, Matome, believed in abstinence and that he understood love to mean just that – love. The narrator, on the other hand, took over Dimakatso, had sex with her, and then rationalises his actions: “It was just unfortunate, the Dimakatso thing, but then another name for sex is making love, and there’s not much difference between making love and sex to you and me, I think” (28). In invoking the readers/ audience, the narrator attempts to escape responsibility over the betrayal of his friend and roommate, Matome. By inviting us to share the same point of view regarding his problematic choices, the narrator becomes unreliable. According to Seymour Chatman (1978: 233), in unreliable narration:

The story undermines the discourse. We conclude, by ‘reading out’ between the lines, that the events and existents could not have been ‘like that’ and so we hold the narrator suspect. Unreliable narration is thus an ironic form.

We can detect instances of bad faith in Noko's character. By using equivocation in language (such as in the deceptive rationalisation in the meanings of the words "love" and "sex"), and by avoiding responsibility towards what we would believe is his use of an immoral language, Noko's real intentions and character are rendered suspect. By repeatedly getting equivocal, he becomes a fallible narrator who fails to "reliably report on narrative events" (Olson, 2003:101), and instead projects his own biases and excuses to the implied audience. We can conclude that Noko has bad will in this context. Jean-Paul Sartre (1956) argues that bad faith constitutes an individual's lying to oneself. An individual develops a resisting identity which features the deceiver retaining a deceptive consciousness that conditions his or her bad faith. Reflecting on Sartre's existentialist philosophy, Cox (2009: 39) argues that bad faith constitutes an "attempted evasion of responsibility." A character engages in wilful deception by either denying responsibility for particular actions, or misplacing or misdirecting his/her empathy towards other objects.

It is ironic that he betrays Matome, a man whom he seems to have developed a sense of affection and admiration for. However, on closer scrutiny, it does finally appear to us that this form of shared understanding between the two is premised on a collective will as a "group agency" (Fludernik, 2017: 141) whose main aim is to achieve subjective ends using dubious means. Matome is a man who does not subscribe to any form of cultural memory. Frenkel (2013: 42) assesses that Moele's novel "suggests a world based on maintaining the self without recourse to any sort of overarching ideology." This assessment summarises Matome's outlook on life in the novel. Matome's present is only the now, and his future depends largely on the transient, which translates to dealing with the unforgiving social and material environment in any ingenious way possible. Matome has nothing to look out on in the past, and here, the now, for him is what is most important. Frenkel (2013: 35) surmises that the novel disavows the significance of history in the present. Matome's concept of freedom in the present is ambiguous, as he creates a different world that is not attached to his social and historical reality. Because he has no obligation towards the past, his ethical choices are often whimsical and deceitful. Matome chooses to gratify personal whims and desires by mispending money collectively contributed by the members of 207 (for the purchase of groceries) to purchase drinks and to fund other "joyful things", chiefly entertaining their girlfriends. He often uses his criminal networks to meet the obligations of the other characters of *Room 207* so that they engage in such activities as merry-making even before important financial obligations are met, such as the paying of rent. As observed above, Matome's vanity

stems, in part, from his past, which gave him no room to make acceptable ethical choices based on any sense of historical or cultural reality.

The narrator in *Room 207* also straddles from an ethical consciousness of recognition of wrongdoing and taking responsibility to a problematic recognition and embrace of Matome's evil character. Even though he initially felt disgusted by Matome's tricks of ensuring collective survival in 207 by stealing, the narrator seems to gradually get into his character as a "man of all seasons", and to excuse his wily ways, later. Initially, the narrator registers his disgust at seeing Matome shoplifting at the supermarket: "I just walked out, leaving him there. I wasn't scared. I was angry. How could he be so irresponsible with my money and expect to walk into the supermarket ... and then take whatever he wanted and walk out?" (*Room 207*, 24). He is initially appalled by the fact that he took a high amount of groceries, with the (black) security guards happily helping him to pack his shoplifted items. Then he rationalises his actions based on his past, their past: "Sometimes you have to do things, bad things, to get to a peaceful end" (*Room 207*, 24). In another episode, Matome goes to a public toilet and unrolls the entire toilet roll because he has mis/spent the collected money. Theft is serialised as a culture of survival, and the narrator chastises stealing largely as a product of the "dark days" (of apartheid). The narrator swears "with my balls" that any shortage of tissue paper will be bridged by Matome, who will "always steal – unroll the whole toilet roll from a public toilet ..." so that the members of 207 could live in relative comfort (*Room 207*, 14). Matome's action of disenfranchising the public to solve the problems of a sectarian "community" as his in 207, illustrates a sense of divided loyalty to community. The members of 207 do not find anything wrong with Matome's theft of the tissue paper. Theft in this particular scenario becomes naturalised and accepted, and it does not seem to invite ire or rage.

Gilbert Harman and Judith Jarvis Thomson in *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity* (1996: 3) argue that perceptions regarding right or wrong may become relative to individuals when it comes to making moral choices. Harman and Thomson (1996: 45) go on to identify that there should be "compelling reasons to satisfy the moral requirements that you accept" for a given set of actions to be rendered morally acceptable. However, in Noko's situation, we cannot find compelling moral reasons to warrant his immediate change of perception regarding Matome's shoplifting, other than the fact that the theft suits his desires and ultimate personal gratification. Noko, therefore, appears as a person who has no principles or values of his own. He conveniently blames Matome's thieving ways on the histories of poverty and hunger, foreclosing his anger initially, which was premised on

Matome's personal irresponsibility of mispending collected money, and later choosing to steal from the "friendly" supermarket. It therefore shows that Noko would have done precisely the same thing if he were in a similar set of circumstances. We can therefore identify an equivocal disposition in Noko that conditions his dual, ambiguous character.

It is instructive to note that the narrator's earlier revulsion at Matome's thieving ways ultimately finds acceptance when he considers that Matome stole to survive. He rationalises Matome's specific misconduct because he is not only a beneficiary, but also because he does not want to efface Matome's other virtues, such as abstinence, and his loving, affable, and trusting nature. The narrator also registers another significant individual trait in Matome: he was a man who effaced his own emotional feelings without tangible expression in an existential, self-abnegating fashion. For example, the narrator is shocked that Matome was unable to register his sadness at the death of his mother. Matome invites the narrator to his home only for the latter to realise that he had been invited to attend Matome's mother's funeral. When the narrator felt "sorry and angry" at this "deception", Matome explains that he did not want to tell him beforehand because he did not want anybody to act sad and feel empathetic towards him. The narrator also found out another existentialist thinking in him: he held the view that the day one dies is way better than the day one is born, so he rejoiced at his mother's death, thinking of it as rest. It is clear that Matome's attitude to and outlook on life is conditioned by a certain sense of anguish and frustration about the past. Hartman (1997) identifies theft as one of the strategies black people have used to signify their silencing as they fight against "racial subjection". Matome's dual personality, as a serial thief on the one hand, and as a loving and considerate person on the other, can be said to be a product of a convoluted racial environment. His rejection of the narrator's empathy is because he has subjected himself to a different personal world that gives no room for the politicised and racialised environment that they live in. Danyela Demir (2019: 181) asserts that the melancholy exhibited by characters in the novel is a pointer to "their troubled relationship with the past." Strategies such as the silencing of his mother's funeral or his rejection of discussions surrounding his past reflect Demir's (2019: 181) assertion that the characters have not achieved "psychological closure." Those like Molamo suffer from a kind of rootlessness occasioned by troubled social pasts in a community that puts pressure on individuals, especially men, to conform.

Signifying his understanding of the necessity of Ubuntu in the community, Molamo demonstrates a sense of duty and responsibility over the other young men in 207. Demonstrating ethics of care, he is the older member of 207 who acts out more as his

brothers' keeper. When he shares stories about the past, and about their communities in general, he acts out as an important member whose main responsibility is to ensure that they have eaten, not so much by way of providence, as his situation was equally hard, but much more as a gesture of friendliness that signifies individual obligation towards community, in the logic of Ubuntu. His stories about the black community, however, are stories of self-abnegation and fracture, and his personal narrative is also a significant story of fracture and disorientation. His stories of township sexual proclivities and immoral behaviour, although exciting and appreciated by the other members of 207, are a pointer towards his problematic past with his many girlfriends and mothers of his children, all born out of wedlock. As a wounded man, Molamo suffers from personal fracture as a man who has not been able to reconcile himself to the many women in his life, and the uncertainties of the children in the community, as he had four children with four different mothers. As an individual, he is troubled by the sad reality that he is unable to reconcile his private life with the communal expectation of him as a man, as a member of a patriarchal society that demands that he must be in a position to provide for his women and children, and the thoughts of inadequacy cloud his mind. A greater personal frustration emanates from his ambiguous relationship with one of the women, Tebogo, with whom he has had a son – the young Molamo. By middle-class standards, the educated Tebogo owns a car, has money, and lives in a townhouse, and is currently staying with Khutso, a man who has also struggled his way up to become a successful man to match her standards. Molamo remained grossly inadequate to their son (and to her), and once when he, the son, refused to go to school, Tebogo took him to see the expensive house of her boyfriend, “Uncle Khutso”, who had a degree and owned fleets of cars. So, to teach her son a lesson, she told him to choose whether to be like his father, who lived in a rented house with five of his friends, or be like Uncle Khutso, and the boy got the drift, and never refused to go to school again. Molamo is a “wrong” example to his son.

A number of scholars have taken issue with the instances of misogyny in the novel, which are generally inflected as a “crisis” of hegemonic masculinity (Demir, 2019: 183; Frenkel, 2013: 35; Ibinga, 2010: 69; Milazzo, 2013: 40; Nichols, 2021: 3). This observation has equally been made in respect of Mhlongo’s male characters (Dass, 2018) and Zizi, the protagonist in Mqolozana’s *Unimportance* (Graham, 2022: 142). These scholars have taken issue with the overarching theme of black masculinity in relation to gender-based violence, which appears to have taken root in the South African society, and which is clearly manifest in the protagonists of the novels. The openly lecherous men in Mhlongo’s *After Tears*, Zizi’s problems with Pamodi in *Unimportance*, as well as in the banal language used by Noko in

*Room 207* establish a dominant pattern. Nafeesa Nichols (2021: 3), while relating to Mhlongo's and Moele's characters, identifies "continued spatial oppression brought about by township geographies, intense policing" of black people as some of the predisposing factors that manifest the crisis. For Demir (2019: 183), the crisis is a manifestation of ingrained communal attitudes towards women. According to Sipiwe Ignatius Dube (2016: 72), the dominant representation of masculinity through systems of violence has led to "exaggerated emphasis on the destructive and anti-social aspects of such experiences." By apportioning it as a "black" problem, it has impacted discourses on gender-based violence, on public health and especially on HIV/AIDS, and unemployment (Dube, 2016: 73). In effect, such discourses have tended to put the black man under close surveillance because they are projected to be the primary aggressors.

In Molamo's context, this "crisis" does not manifest through outward violence. He suffers internally because he fails to measure up to the standards expected of a man in his community. This also appears to be a dominant reality for most of the men envisaged in the novels. Thrust in an environment where their masculinity is threatened, the men irredeemably suffer from low self-esteem, and the unforgiving urban environment emasculates them, predisposing them to ambiguous ethical choices. Another character who suffers from imposed patriarchal standards is Modishi. Members of 207 exert peer pressure on Modishi by making fun of his childless state. They urge him on to have unprotected sex with his girlfriend, Lerato. They chide him for not having a child at twenty-three, while each one of them already had more than one. Consequently, Lerato is drawn into a pregnancy that she is ill-prepared for at a tender age, and she aborts, and aborts again the second time, before she confesses (the pregnancy and the abortion) to him. All the while, she had kept the secret of the pregnancy from him, while she was oblivious of his secret plans. Modishi feels pained at what he considered a personal betrayal by Lerato, and when he confided in his friends, they were not very sympathetic towards him, especially as they actually knew that Lerato had aborted twice in one year and had kept the secrets from him. His friends could not feel empathetic towards him. Instead, they sink him into further depression, and with a belief that he did not necessarily require comforting because he was a man, his friends deny him an opportunity to vent.

The ethical uncertainties facing the South African black male is a product of a deeper social crisis, beyond the manifestations on gender alone. The "crisis" is linked to the constitution of the South African community, particularly in its racialized geographies in terms of poverty, unemployment, lack of access to education and other social necessities that

accentuate perceived failure of men in a patriarchally-obligating society. In consequence, the kind of resistant personality exhibited by the men, together with its violent manifestations, is a pointer to this crisis. For example, the men of 207 demonstrate a resisting identity when they commit a “malpractice” of failing to pay their rent repeatedly. It is ironic that the six members hardly ever manage to pay their rent on time. The characters “celebrate” the countless number of times when they were locked out of the room, often days after they had spent their rent money on parties, drinks and women. In an effort to wish away individual obligations, they consider themselves as “freelancers” and hustlers (*Room 207*, 73, 143), and so they excuse their conduct by labelling themselves as a notoriously needy group that requires help, especially by the government. Even though they take offence at being locked out of their room when they fail to pay the rent, they take precautions not to be present during the humiliating lock-out by going to spend the nights in their friends’ houses, “not because we couldn’t afford to pay, but because we have given the money away, used it for other, joyful things” (*Room 207*, 78). This behaviour shows the absence of personal responsibility on the part of the individual 207s. The failure to exercise individual responsibility comes because of the problematic tension generated by individuals solving their collective whims in problematic circumstances. Zulu-boy, in the thinking that black people should empathise with fellow blacks the more in view of their past circumstances, often finds fault with the Xhosa housekeeper and the Zulu security guards in their apartment building. For him, they are not acting morally to force a fellow black person to pay rent when they fully understand their own predicament, as they themselves are fellow blacks with full knowledge of poverty as a black burden.

But even though they fully understand that poverty is a stumbling block to black people’s freedom, they do little to improve their living conditions. For example, the characters are united in celebrating the life of Herman Mashaba, a South African business mogul who succeeded in life without proper education, having dropped out of the university. The characters repeatedly harness the memory of Mr Mashaba to inspire them for a life ahead, even though they seem to find greater inspiration that he succeeded without an education, than in the material circumstances that forced him off campus, or that which would have guaranteed his completion. The fact that they are also drop-outs like Mashaba connect their stories of disadvantage in a similar fashion, and their aspirations for a better life ahead is prefigured, problematically, in the image of Mashaba (17).

Like us all here in 207, except for D’Nice, he [Mashaba] is a drop out of that great institution of education we call university. University of the North, to be precise. It is a very sad black story and we can all tell it very well ... Herman Mashaba is the green shoot that pushes itself out of the heavy ash to greater heights. Remember, that was back in the days of ... I take off my hat, my shoes and my balls to this exceptional darkie brother of the soil. (*Room 207*, 17, Ellipsis in the original)

The roommates’ celebration of the mis/fortunes of Herman Mashaba not only fits within a justification of the instances of failure at the university for such characters as the narrator, Modishi, Matome and Molamo, but also activates a sense of a “post-utopia” in which educational failure is rationalised in favour of economic freedom. The general apathy, as expressed in the narrator’s conscious choosing of silence over apartheid (as manifested in the ellipsis), conditions these young men’s inability to transcend the oppressive practices of the present. Demir (2019: 180) argues that “the consequences of apartheid are very real for the characters, even if they chose to avoid the source of injury.” The sadness in the characters is “due to their troubled relationship with the past, which impedes their forward movement” (Demir, 2019: 181). Apartheid becomes a taboo term, which can only be rendered through careful euphemisms. Since race signifies a past of violation that everyone wants to forget, choosing silence or rendering race through euphemisms is one of the ways of re-conceiving an ethical space for the present.

Marzia Milazzo (2013: 34) argues that *Room 207* “challenges and reinforces colorblindness discourse and, in mystifying institutional racism, appears emblematic of the ideological ambiguity and dearth of antiracist militancy.” In post-apartheid South Africa, racism no longer operates in the overt, but in the covert sphere, and its systems of operation are mirrored through the ambiguities of silences, euphemisms and tautologies of language. In introducing the figuration of apartheid and race in Hillbrow’s formerly white hotel that houses room 207, the narrator says: “It used to be a hotel in the days of ... you know, those days which the rulers of this land don’t want you to forget” (*Room 207*, 13, ellipsis in the original). In *Room 207*, apartheid is rendered through the euphemism of the “dark days”. The constant figuration of “sad black stories” in the novel, while on the one hand carefully avoiding signifying them as legacies of apartheid, also at the same time indirectly inscribes the question of race and implicit racism, by identifying the characters’ challenges as “black”. Sadness emerges as a trope of failure, of unfulfilled expectations, of the frustrations of individuals, especially as seen and reflected through individual and collective aspirations. Reflecting on Niq Mhlongo’s and Moele’s writing strategies, Lesibana Rafapa (2018b: 77)

argues that the writers address “persisting institutional racism, hegemonic silencing of black anti-racist critiques, and white talk insidiously seeking to perpetuate white privilege in an ostensibly equal democratic South Africa.” As already observed before, racist discourses have been used to legitimise black complaints against the legacies of apartheid. Matome’s belief about the relationship between individual and collective failure of the black community is linked to black people’s inability to meet their aspirations, and how anger, hate and feelings of failure stem from a problematic position of black people affected by generational hate (*Room 207*, 88-89). Molamo, on his part, believes the contradiction in black people’s desires and ambitions produces a kind of “hateful love ... a blind self-pride and artificial black proudness” (*Room 207*, 89). While Matome thinks it is the “economics of living” and not “black pride and black love” that is responsible for the degeneration of Hillbrow, Molamo quips that “This very Hillbrow that you and I are living in was cleaned by blacks back in the days”, referring to during apartheid, when they, in fact, did not live there (*Room 207*, 89-90).

The self-reflexive conversation between Molamo and Matome speaks against the many times when these black individuals blame the past for their continued poverty and the “economics” of their present circumstances, especially given that they are questioning their own black existence in the changing fortunes of the new South Africa. This self-reflective engagement with the past provides a frame in which communal aspirations are judged against individual disorientation within the city. The young people also seem to connect the failure of the black community to the notion of a lack of respect for fellow blacks, or for their circumstances. They are united in the reasoning that predominantly white suburbs would become run-down if black people were to emigrate to those places in weeks, justifying, in a way, the very problem with spatial occupation, and the utopia of black spatial occupation of formerly “white” spaces. The instances of black self-abnegation and self-annihilation constitute ethically problematic individual actions that are hinged around the politics of blame.

In *Dog Eat Dog*, Niq Mhlongo presents a novel that reveals the uneasy realities of young people in university environments. The protagonist, Dingamanzi Njomane, popularly known as Dingz, is a young man who decides he must navigate through thick and thin on campus at the University of the Witwatersrand. As a born-free young person savouring South Africa’s freedom, Dingz ensures that he makes the past to bear in his willy struggles in the present. Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe (2007: 282) figurate Mhlongo’s protagonist as the city’s ‘hustler’ who “monitors the atmosphere” as he operates, and as he tries to make sense of his place and position in the city as a student who must balance between his

obligations to his university, and to his community back in Soweto, and to self. Consequently, he has to manoeuvre “with energetic and often underhand activity, turning others into suckers, hiring less skilful players into competing against him in a game of chance” (Nuttall & Mbembe, 2007: 282). From the onset, Dingz’s real intentions are opaque. He has an ambivalent, dual personality that he activates a particular identity when it befits him. Despite his intelligence as a black student on campus, Dingz’s behaviour is primarily guided injudiciously by a desire to meet his own subjective needs. Reflecting on Kant’s morality, John Atwell (1986: 9) identifies two ends of morality – subjective and objective – in which the “objective ends are the ends of morality.” For Atwell (1986: 14), what constitutes “good will” in a person’s character includes “talents of the mind” (such as intelligence) and “qualities of temperament” (such as courage). Atwell (1986: 14) argues:

a good talent of mind (such as intelligence) and a good quality of temperament (e.g., courage) are only conditioned goods because they can become bad, and actually will be bad when made use of by a bad will. In other words, intelligence and courage are bad when employed by an evil individual.

On this account, Dingz possesses these qualities, but he wills his intelligence and courage towards subjective ends. Dingz’s character, particularly in terms of integrity, is put into question. He exhibits a divided personality. I argue that the genesis of Dingz’s divided personality stems from his diseased conscience. Dingz’s moral judgements are tinged by extraneous social, political and material factors that condition and direct his actions. His options for what he considers to be right or wrong are duplicitous. Peter Byrne (1992: 21), writing regarding individual conscience, posits:

The idea of conscience as the seat of the individual’s knowledge of right and wrong is linked to the phenomena of conscience: conscience invites us to do acts before our plans are set, witnesses our acts as we perform them, and accuses/excuses our conduct after action is complete.

Byrne’s (1992) assertions imply that a conscientious individual benefits from his/her own past mistakes and is ready to redeem in the pursuit an acceptable conduct. Dingz, however, is unable to use his conscience. By observing what Byrne (1992: 40) would call “anatomy of actions”, we can argue that Dingz’s intentions, motives and the ultimate consequences of his actions put his integrity into question. Time and again, without the benefit of hindsight, Dingz misbehaves. Right from the township, Dingz, like Bafana in *After Tears*, sustains a culture of deception. For example, a deceptive behaviour is demonstrated in Dingz’s eagerness to purchase stolen items at the township. He and his friend, Dunga,

entertain a particular group of thieves who would bring them expensive goods, which they would buy off at alarmingly low prices. When these black thieves are killed, and Dunga and Dingz find themselves as witnesses at the scene, they instantly feel a sense of revulsion, as they move away from the scene of their death “for fear that the victims might miraculously come back to life and point us out as their customers” (*Dog*, 217). They also take time to criticise the police for taking bribes to spare criminals. They fail to be self-reflexive in this context, and they therefore cannot interrogate their guilt and complicity in handling (the) stolen items, and being equally guilty and liable to prosecution. Dingz and Dunga not only manage to camouflage their complicity in the crime in the townships, but they also participate in criticising spiralling theft levels in the township without any degree of guilt. This culture of deception is replicated and pronounced in his dealings at the university.

In many of his dealings at the university, his actions are guided by bad faith. Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* argues that bad faith emanates from a kind of falsehood in which “the liar actually is in complete possession of the truth which he is hiding.” Sartre (1956: 48) argues:

The liar intends to deceive and he does not seek to hide this intention from himself nor to disguise the translucency of his consciousness; on the contrary, he has recourse to it when there is a question of deciding secondary behaviour.

In fighting back to be awarded a bursary which he had on various occasions been denied, Dingz takes advantage of old, perceived black stereotypes. He devises a plan to use the unease in race relations in the country to upstage the university administration in his attempt to complain about the allocation. So, when Dingz storms into the Financial Aid Office at the university to complain about not benefiting from the bursary kitty, he is prepared to create a racially charged scene by dissenting against the laid-down protocol and upstaging the peace at the office. Minesh Dass (2018: 119) contends that *Dog Eat Dog* is about “institutional racism and academic exclusion.” Dingz’s main bone of contention in this context is to question what he perceives as endemic racism in the award of bursaries. However, the method that he uses to address these enduring legacies of apartheid puts his personal integrity into question. He cleverly and mischievously avoids a “three-metre-long queue” at the office to ignite the ire of the (coloured) secretary and to get the attention of the university employees, who, to him, are biased against him on account of being black in awarding the bursary. He charges: “*I will show them today*” (*Dog Eat Dog*, 12, emphasis in the original).

Dingz's unreliability stems from his wilful desire to create a situation that will work for him. Phelan (2017: 94) argues that one effect of unreliable narration is its "estranging" effects, as it modifies the "interpretive, affective, ethical, or other kinds of distance between authors and audiences, on the one hand, and character narrators, on the other." By staging a defective personality, Dingz's conduct (or misconduct) generates an ethical ambiguity which exists between our criticism of his actions in this context and sympathising with him on account of the seemingly unjust educational system. Acting out of mischief, he premeditates the coloured secretary's response when he sidesteps the queue, and as he "expected", the secretary abused him publicly by claiming that black people are lazy, thoughtless, stupid, illiterate, and inconsiderate. As a coloured member of South Africa, making an ill-conceived remark against black South Africans, she unwittingly gets into Dingz's trap. When the secretary called her white supervisor, Ms Steenkamp, Dingz, in his view, registers his racial lens on her: "She shot me a shrewd look and raised her nose as if she was confronted with a disgusting township rubbish dump" (*Dog Eat Dog*, 13). So when she reprimands him for his "apish behaviour" and acting in an uncivilised manner, she also unwittingly gets into his racial trap. He is excited when she gets on the defensive ("That's where I wanted her, on the defensive" *Dog Eat Dog*, 16). All through this altercation, Dingz is prepared to feign horror at the oblique references to him as an ape, or as "emotional", proclaiming thus: "That's like saying that I was socialised with the apes and I should be living in the mountains or the zoo. Is that what you see when you look at a black person like me?" (*Dog Eat Dog*, 17). Dingz's reaction in this encounter is all a stage-managed opportunity meant to appeal to the emotive question of black under-privilege and past invisibility. Kalwant Bhopal (2018: 24) claims that racism operates at the level of resentment when it is de-legitimised, and can no longer be sustained in overt terms. This is the situation that Dingz finds himself in. He flashes up the race card to communicate his resentment over what he feels is the racial problem that has curtailed his freedom and his agitation for a good life. Dingz takes advantage of what Robin DiAngelo (2018) regards as the "fragility" of white individuals in racially charged situations, and he seethes with pretended rage in a dishonest projection of benefitting from racial bias.

Dingz is bent on bringing up the thorny issue of race and racial disenfranchisement to embarrass the white university administrators and to locate himself as a victim of racial disadvantage. Dass (2018) argues that Dingz imagines certain epistemic structures, including the bureaucratic systems in the university, such as in the award of bursaries, must fall. Dingz uses the race card against the (white) registrar of the University of the Witwatersrand, Dr. Jane Winterburn, over the unsuccessful bursary application that he has made a number of

times. Dingz notes that the “regret” letters he has received from the bursary committee were generic in nature, except for the dates. He wonders: “*Did anybody even read my applications? I wondered angrily... What more information do these people want about the poverty that my family was living in? I asked myself*” (*Dog Eat Dog*, 8, emphasis in the original). Dingz’s ethical uncertainty in this context stems from what Hite (2010: 266) identifies as strategies that unreliable narrators use to upstage others, like when he postures to the readers to be empathetic towards his cause while remaining indignant and condescending towards the university establishment. For him, he thinks that there is another reason that is being hidden behind the genial posturing; that the committee ought to have written to him thus: “We regret to inform you that you are black, stupid and poor; therefore, we cannot waste our money in your thick Bantu skull” (*Dog Eat Dog*, 8). So when he storms into the Financial Aid Office, he goes there with a sense of “entitlement” that being black should necessarily make him get a bursary. To this end, Dingz carries himself as an untrustworthy narrator. His conduct reflects Olson’s (2003: 102) view that untrustworthy narrators are “*dispositionally unreliable*” (emphasis in the original). Olson (2003: 102) adds that the “inconsistencies [these] narrators demonstrate appear to be caused by ingrained behavioural traits or some current self-interest.”

During the appeal for the bursary, Dingz provides the Chairperson and registrar of the Bursary Committee (which he had done in previous occasions) “evidence” of his father’s death, his mother’s meagre pension meant to support a family of nine, and related affidavits. The registrar notices that a family of that size cannot survive on the 350-rand pension, casting aspersions on the veracity and accuracy of his application documents. However, he defends that their situation is “difficult” to the point that they are unable to pay for water and electricity. Then he excuses his lies:

I was not ashamed that I lied. Living in this South Africa of ours you have to master the art of lying in order to survive ... As she looked at me I hid my hands under the edge of the table so that she couldn’t see my gold-plated pulsar watch, which I had bought the previous year at the American Swiss. (*Dog Eat Dog*, 22)

Dingz is acutely aware of his own character flaws in the request for the bursary. Dingz’s desire for an expensive watch against his financial situation in the university cannot be easily justified. By choosing to cling to the materialism of the postmodern/ post-apartheid culture, he loses his sense of credibility and, to use Peter Zima (2010: 194), he manages to frame his success on a culture of deception in an escapist environment where truth and objective reality are either questioned, subverted, or silenced. He is obsessed with material

advantages that place no objective demands on his present economic reality, as he is a student who is dependent on college and government help. On the flip side, however, he doesn't really fit into the category of a very poor black student, unlike his peers who came from far-flung rural areas.

Immediately upon leaving the registrar's office, guilt pricks his (diseased) conscience. He imagines himself in the image of Verwoerd, the former prime minister of apartheid South Africa, who was killed by a parliamentary messenger:

But before I could get far, I suddenly felt a sharp pain in my gut. It was as if someone had stabbed my stomach with a sharp razor blade and cut my intestines. It was the kind of pain that I imagine Verwoerd felt the day Tsafendas's knife intruded violently into his gut (*Dog Eat Dog*, 33).

Daniel Gross (2016) argues that Verwoerd's name has become symbolic in South Africa's political sphere as "a dagger of accusation." By appropriating Verwoerd's victimhood, Dingz's position as a victim is processed through ambiguity, as he is an aggressor at the registrar's office. Furthermore, by processing himself as a victim at the registrar's office, he cleverly avoids responsibility – and guilt. Guilt, to him, appears only as an abstraction, especially when considering that he continues to berate the university and racially profile on another related matter – that of examinations, as we shall observe subsequently. Fanon (1967) identifies a problem of recognition which is inflected through ingrained colour prejudices, as black people express their revulsion against the white gaze. For Fanon (1967: 93), blacks, "out of the necessities" of their racially-charged struggles, choose regression as a weapon to fight against what they feel is racial bondage and to assert their own identity. The struggle in Dingz's particular situation is the university bureaucracy that continues to racially profile black students on campus. Minesh Dass (2018) argues that Dingz's actions amount to a concerted attempt by Dingz to reflect on the continuing systemic racism at the university. For Dass (2018: 132), Dingz's actions can be read through as an attempt to make certain systemic injustices visible, and to, in the process, call for political recognition of the convoluted educational sphere. Dass (2018: 134) locates Dingz's divided self as existing in an ambiguous position in which "one's sympathy and one's condemnation are evoked simultaneously to reveal the complex ways in which class, race and gender intersect in contemporary South African society." At the centre of this complexity is Dingz's staging of his unreliability for effect in his particular situation.

Dingz takes advantage of black self-assertion to make a case for his personal whims and to individually benefit from an assumed position of white racial disadvantage. Dingz's

behaviour reflects Fanon's (1963) exposition on the dangers of intellectual manoeuvres, particularly as used to achieve selfish ends. Dingz's idiosyncrasies are not geared towards an objective search for truth, especially as an intellectual, he is only interested in taking advantage of black stereotypical images and not confronting the actual realities of black people from an objective position, as Biko (1978c), whom he has read extensively, would have expected of him. Ethical uncertainty is revealed in Dingz's problematic dealings with the white gaze, which he exploits to his own advantage. Dingz wants to take advantage of past historical and political circumstances by inviting them to bear on his problematic quest for consideration for a bursary. To achieve his own selfish ends, Dingz must re-inscribe race as a "battleground", but more emphatically, to assert his own individuality by first speaking against his invisibility. His behaviour mirrors the problematic quest for black self-assertion in the South African "post-racial" society.

Dingz's behaviour in this context approximates to a significant degree the works of Fanon and Biko in the reflection of the role of violence in racialised societies as a means to an end. Dingz's primary reason for using violence is to provide a signature against his invisibility and to stamp his authority. Patrick Crowley (2013: 55), following on Fanon's theory on violence, contends:

For Fanon, the figure who best exemplifies the problem of isolation and ineffectual resistance is the colonized intellectual. The educated individual who experiences dehumanization and social alienation within European and colonial societies because of his or her skin color, yet he has been socialized to accept Western cultural values and norms, occupies a central place in Fanon's decolonial theory.

Crowley's (2013) position can be used to locate Dingz's resisting identity to a domineering white culture at the university that haunts him to prevaricate between allegiance to past memories inflected by race and sticking to a world that is pegged on, at least in theory, shared prosperity and equal educational attainment. Dingz confuses between his quest for freedom on campus and his desire to finish and graduate from the university. That is why he doubles up committing more crimes as he pursues his personal interests in a bigoted manner. As a gifted student, Dingz was admitted to the university with impressive grades. He is also a widely read student. His favourite reads are George Orwell, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Richard Wright, and more importantly, Steve Biko's *I Write What I Like*. However, his reading lists and interests seem inconsistent with the demands of his university. While in session on campus, he fails to do a critical examination because he had not prepared well enough. He spends much of his time outside the campus, and outside the learning environment. He

entertains girlfriends, which makes him lose valuable academic time. Dingz also misses lectures so that he could go out and shoplift, assisted by his friend, Themba, in order that he could solve a pressing personal need – that of entertaining his girlfriend. When not seducing girls, Dingz spends his time drinking in bars in Braamfontein. During these flings, he and other truant students undertake competitive drinking sessions. A careless unprotected sexual encounter with his girlfriend also makes him to miss classes, as he has to visit a doctor for an urgent medical treatment of a sexually transmitted infection. Over the weekend, he prefers not to read, in the comfort of a personal adage that “There was no reason why I should copy others” (*Dog Eat Dog*, 165). Finally, when the examination does finally arrive, he finds that he is unable to answer any question. He therefore slips out of the examination room.

From the above reflection, it is clear that Dingz is not only an untrustworthy but also a fallible narrator. Oslon (2003: 101) identifies fallible narrators as those who “do not reliably report on narrative events because they are mistaken about their judgements or perceptions or are biased.” Dingz’s berating the university for his own commissioned failures demonstrates his unreliability as a character. Dingz’s lethargy in the classroom is largely because of the ways in which university lecturers dispense knowledge. Dingz is incensed by his university professor who “complicates” the learning environment through such lofty re/conceptualisation that is meant to disenfranchise his students, especially the black student. Dingz thinks that the white professor does not understand his black students. He is perceptive to note that the professor is polite when speaking to white students, knows them by their sur/names, and respectfully listens and appreciates their responses. For Dingz, black students are highly invisible in the classroom, and the professor hardly knows them. White professors consign black students to invisibility, and even when black students volunteer to participate in the classroom, their responses are rendered through a jaundiced lens and consequently rejected. Savo Heleta (2016: 2,3), writing regarding students’ participation in decolonisation of knowledge in South Africa, identifies “Eurocentrism and epistemic violence” that condition “patronising views and stereotypes” largely about black students on campus. Dingz’s attitude to the classroom situation (such as missing class, as observed before) may be thought of as one form of resistance against systemic injustice on campus. Dingz also thinks that certain forms of knowledge are not necessary, or unwanted, especially as it is not contextualised within the African setting. Gordon Crawford, Zainab Mai Bornu and Karl Landström (2021: 23) contend that the “calls to decolonise knowledge production in Africa are related to colonial practices of power and domination.” The teaching at Dingz’s university seems to reflect what Crawford, Mai-Bornu and Landström (2021: 27) consider as an

“epistemic injustice” in the constitution of the South African curriculum that pays no attention to the material realities of the South African people in totality in terms of relevance and suitability. Dingz’s, and many other students do not find reasons to be present in the South African classroom, and in the few times they attend the classroom, they find themselves out of the centre of the academic enterprise. In many ways, this escape from the material reality of the classroom contributes significantly to the cases of school drop-outs and constituent failure.

After he fails to do a critical examination, Dingz, armed with the race card, decides to approach the dean of the university in order that he may be allowed to sit for the examination. Dingz plans to look for reasons to do the missed examination takes him to visit a clinic to procure a “valid reason for absconding”, which, however, does not succeed, as the white doctor dismissed him for acting out (182). When he realises that his chances of getting a reason is getting difficult by the minute, he plans to use the student’s representative council, the SRC, to help him find some anthropological reason to explain his inability to do the examination during that scheduled time. Finally, he fabricates a “sad black story” that he was attacked by a “blackout” which was “a result of the shock news that I received about the death of my cousin” (*Dog Eat Dog*, 184), which “happened”, ironically, several months before. Dingz’s university requires that he submit documentation to show proof of relationships with the deceased. In looking for this “documentation”, he visits a mortuary in the attempt to look for a deceased person who shares his surname in order that he can transpose him as a relative by presenting his death certificate to the dean so that he could be allowed to do the supplementary examination. When he locates a deceased person with a similar surname, he visits a government office to procure a death certificate. He postures as a lawyer, and completes the process by offering the required bribe. After he procures the sham certificate, he justifies his actions, thus:

I didn’t feel sorry that I lied to get it. Lying to get a death certificate was my practical affair to me. My world at that moment was simple – no lie, no certificate, no exam, no degree and back to the township. (248)

Dingz knows that the reality in this case – that is, his failure in examinations – would have a bearing on his entire life. He therefore justifies lying because he benefits from it in the short term. Dingz cannot remain true to his cause because his cause is contradictory and subjective. When the dean prods him to ascertain the authenticity of the death certificate, he passionately hides in the supposed communality and reverence of the dead in the attempt to mystify him in the thinking that he, the dean, would be at a loss on account of his ignorance

of black people. In an attempt to benefit from white ignorance, he avers: “I explained trying to put the dean as far into his corner of white ignorance as possible” (247). When the dean continues to be hard on him and to reject his communal alibi, he snaps and plays the racial card to threaten the dean. He asks the dean to answer if he, being black, was lying with regards to his family’s bereavement, because he is predisposed as a black to lies and falsehoods, and again, if black people lie regarding their situations (the attendant problems which he thinks blacks face in South Africa). He instantly forges into anger and hatred. His personal experience suddenly morphs into a communal experience. He problematically figures his personal disappointments and falsehoods to represent the larger community, and in that, his attempt to re-historise the past proves not only ethically ambiguous but also deeply disturbing:

Most of all I was disturbed by the arrogance that he was showing about black people. I never thought that a man of his calibre would be so ignorant about the cancer of poverty that cripples so many families. Poverty means that you cannot give your loved one a proper burial. It also means that you cannot contact your relatives who live far away in times of need. Without money your children don’t go to school like other kids. In a nutshell, it means that you do not exist and you are wasted. (248)

In this outburst, Dingz primarily chooses to question what he perceives as an inappropriate air of white privilege on campus. The challenge of perceived white privilege dogs the white dean when he tries to deal with Dingz’s problematic behaviour. He knows that Dingz is potentially lying in his claim that he lost a relative, but he must give him a fair hearing, as dealing with him with a certain level of firmness would be considered inimical, considering past historical misadventures. He must consider that, as a white man, there is a different way he should deal with the black student. On his part, fully conscious of this situation, Dingz is prepared to covertly bring racism into the circle to circumscribe the dean, and hopefully coerce him into deciding in his favour. On his part, Dingz’s problematic pursuit of justice (which he thinks should be tempered by sympathy on account of his “situation”: “I faked a grieved expression searching his eyes for sympathy” [184]) is discoloured by the knowledge that two of his white friends, Paul and Nikki, who missed the same exam, have already been permitted to prepare for a supplementary exam. But how? By dint of their privileged status as whites, particularly in their being able to access a family doctor, who justified their absence from campus on medical grounds. Dingz believes that the two were undeserving as he, but now that they have been considered, he sees no reason why

his case should be different. The dean, boxed into a corner, finally promises to look into the matter, and the following week, Dingz wins, as his request to sit the examination is accepted.

Dingz manages to extract ill-deserved prospects and personal apologies from his chosen white victims. Dingz's trumping up the race card reflects the ethical ambiguities where race appears as a prominent signifier of power and shifting demands for attention. When a white "blonde" requests him to assist a black woman who was fumbling at an ATM, Dingz snaps at her, wondering if she expected him to assist her because she was from his black community. He then enjoys the racial trouble that he has created:

I could tell that my words had had a strong impact. Yes, it is true that I was implying that she was a racist. It was the season of change when everyone was trying hard to disown apartheid, but to me the colour white was synonymous with the word and I didn't regret what I had said to the blonde. Anyway, I had been told that playing the race card is a good strategy for silencing those whites who still think they are more intelligent than black people. (*Dog Eat Dog*, 39-40)

Dingz's behaviour shows him as an unreliable character with a masterstroke to employ certain vindictive methods to gain attention and assuage his ego. Dingz continues to harass the blonde until she apologises, for that was what he wanted. As Derald Wing Sue (2015) writes with respect to the racial experiences in America, whites hold the view, on the one hand, that past prejudices, including racial prejudices, no longer have meaning in the present. On the other hand, blacks think that racial discussions must continue to thread and signify ongoing dialogue, particularly on discussions around racial privilege and economic legacies of the racialised past. Dingz easily finds the reinscription of racial categories to his own personal, individual quest for recognition and visibility. Dingz, as a university student, is well aware of the fact that race has been silenced in everyday discussion in South Africa, but is, however, alive to the potency of its re-inscription in the South African sphere. Dingz then personally undertakes to take advantage of the "silencing of race" (a term Bhopal [2018: 8] uses to signify colorblindness discourse in America), to take advantage of the existing racial pre/sentiments. Dingz is portrayed as an untrustworthy narrator whose actions and values are marked by ambiguities.

#### **5.4. Conclusion**

This chapter has evaluated the concept of unreliable narration in relation to first-person narrators and characters in Niq Mhlongo's *After Tears*, Thando Mgqolozana's *Unimportance*, Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207*, and Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog*. By tracing instances in which the protagonists and characters in the texts tend to be unreliable, the

chapter contextualises their disposition as reflective of an ethically ambiguous post-apartheid society.

Figuring unreliable narration as a narrative strategy that reveals how characters approach the past as a burden, the chapter has identified instances in which the protagonist in Niq Mhlongo's *After Tears*, Bafana, chooses opacity and falsehood to survive in a society that demands compensation. What emerges in Bafana's township locale is a society populated by individuals who are programmed to lie as they live in a perpetually escapist environment. The burden of the painful past also weighs down on Mgqolozana's narrator, Zizi, who tries to find a balance between his own personal ambitions in a university that is troubled by its past historical leanings, on the one hand, while on the other hand, he is attempting to live up to the expectations and demands of his community. A recurrent metaphor in the chapter is that of apartheid, which conditions characters' responses to it and its legacies, in particular, of crime, poverty, and disease in the predominantly racialised urban landscape.

Using Moele's *Room 207* and Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog*, the chapter has stretched the context of unreliable narration to envisage the ethical uncertainties of fallible and untrustworthy narrators whose unreliability is deduced from bad will. This bad will, or bad faith, is deduced from narrators who wilfully and maliciously evade responsibility in the belief that their self-interest must come to bear before that of others, or the larger common will. In Moele's novel, we identify instances in which the protagonist, Noko, and his friends/accomplices equivocally project bad faith in their dealings in the pursuit of the pleasures promised by Hillbrow. By tracing stories of self-abnegation and evaluating instances of personal fracture, the chapter has visualised the ethical uncertainties that arise as characters develop resisting identities which are directed towards patriarchal, racial, and cultural conditions, and which are often manifested through physical and linguistic violence. The chapter has also taken a keen look at the protagonist in *Dog Eat Dog*, and has concluded that Dingz's deployment of the tactics of mischief in the campus environment is layered with deeper societal fractures. Dingz's society imposes limits on his will as a young South African on campus. To beat the systemic social injustices, he schemes for a world of his own that privileges his own personal will as opposed to the collective, thus revealing his ethically ambiguous choices.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1 Conclusions

This thesis was inspired by my fascination with the determination of post-apartheid South African literature, in its best manifestations, to probe into the most pressing problems of a society struggling to reinvent itself and to find the most evocative ways to represent the prevailing reality. One distinct aspect of this reality is that the South African society has been plagued by uncertainty about its future, especially in terms of its ethical dimension. Since the end of apartheid, one singular endeavour for South Africans has been to commit themselves to the reconstruction of the nation. As such, this commitment has been shaped by multiple voices that have not only sought to break away from the shackles of apartheid but also to navigate the uneasy present. Yet, in the attempt to foreclose the past, the unfolding ethical space has mirrored an ambiguity, as individual voices find their aspiration for a better future constantly subverted by memories, making it difficult for individuals to adapt to the present.

The study has affirmed the difficulty that individuals and communities face in shaping a new ethical dispensation in a context where the past, in its multiple inflections on the present, generates ambiguity, which in turn is amplified by varied voices that compete for attention. These numerous voices have been captured in the works of Antjie Krog, Njabulo Ndebele, Ivan Vladislavić, Kgebetli Moele, Thando Mgqolozana, and Niq Mhlongo. The works of these writers are largely representative of a growing body of post-apartheid literature that utilises the first-person point of view to represent contending obligations in South African society.

The first-person point of view as a narrative form best captures the contending ethical obligations in South Africa. Rather than envisage a unitary moral vision, the first-person point of view allows for the manifestation of multiple, and often contradictory meanings, many of which enshrine ambiguity in ethical terms. The first-person perspective amplifies the ambiguities of a fractured society. This society is not only affected by racial legacies of the past but also by shifting cultural norms, which are manifest in the memories of individuals. The use of a variety of first-person narrative strategies not only serves to illustrate the defining stylistic orientation of post-apartheid literature but also illuminates significant aspects of South Africa's moral life. These strategies not only reveal the intentions and motivations of the narrators but also permit them to address their own subjectivity in a context permeated by moral doubt. In effect, the first-person narrative strategies draw our attention to the subjective nature of the South African experience that reflects the existing

state of moral confusion. As a result, the first-person point of view amalgamates varied and often contradictory voices. These voices overlap, which justifies the multiple nature of voicing the self.

The search for truth as represented in narratives after conflict and trauma is the first step towards genuine closure. Antjie Krog's and Njabulo Ndebele's texts demonstrate that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) narrative incisively inflects on the complexity and multiplicity of truth as lived by South Africans. Their works represent the TRC as a template upon which the country's ethical space could be expressed in insightful ways in the narrative. These writers foreground the necessity of interrogating possible truths arising from multiple realities of the country's post-traumatic history. Consequently, they illustrate that mediated truths in the narrative provide a fuller understanding of such processes as the TRC, as framed through individual and collective memory, and in the pursuit of national reconstruction. They also expose the limitations of South Africa's collective memory as contained in the official narrative of the TRC. However, they imagine self-reflexive spaces that gesture towards the creation of a post-apartheid ethical future. As writers who are authorities in the intellectual and cultural realities of South Africa, these scholars portray the complexities surrounding the re/framing of witness testimonies. They also mirror the limitations that witnessing and truth-telling impose on individuals, or on the practices of truth-telling. Signifying, to a large extent, the challenge of authorial representation of memory and trauma in post-conflict societies, the writers draw our attention to the ambiguities surrounding the representation of evil, showing how narrative representation may perpetuate intended or unintended prejudices.

At the core of this representation lies the creative role that South African women have played in national reconstruction in South Africa. Narratives of women exemplify the ambiguities of telling the truth regarding historical wrongs and violations. These narratives are significant as they frame discourses on the reconstitution and re-imagining of the South African nation. Ndebele's novel insightfully contextualises the ambiguous position of women in South Africa as a dismembered population. The novel adopts a stylistic orientation that captures women's individual, yet plural ways of processing an ethical space out of traumatic pasts. These women use narrative strategies to recover their agency and to foreground their stories of resilience against separations occasioned by apartheid. More importantly, the focalisation of the experiences of the most significant woman in South Africa's iconography during apartheid and as well as the one who appeared before the TRC not only provides an alternative (fictionalised) truth about the person and character of Winnie Mandela as a

condemned anti-apartheid crusader, but also puts into sharp focus the uncertainties South African women faced under apartheid, and after. Ndebele's novel encases the role that women play/ed in the reconstruction narrative in South Africa by empathically drawing on the novel's use of communally-centred narrative perspectives, while showing the importance of recasting myth and history in the evocation of ethics in the narrative. What Ndebele's novel demonstrates is that the fictional narrative does not have to cohere with the "true" narrative, as truth as officially sanctioned can be challenged, subverted, or reframed.

In effect, fiction challenges historical truth in multiple ways. Fiction captures the ambiguities arising from the enduring tension between history and memory by probing into the depths of constituted official history to uncover the assumptions and contradictions inherent in collective memories. Fictional narratives permit individuals and communities to understand historical changes and to find coherence and closure regarding past violations. Fictional representation gives individuals avenues to process the truth that works best for them in their circumstances. Vladislavić testifies to the transformative capabilities of the narrative in the use of cryptic and evocative imagery, which manifest in the consciousness of the narrated self, as the self projects itself to remember the past while trying to re/frame it to suit the present. Vladislavić's stylistic and aesthetic choices lead us to conclude that the experience of reflecting about the traumatic past is morally draining for the individual, as the expressiveness of monuments and the self-reflexivity of the sighting subject combine in fundamental ways to generate ethical uncertainties. Vladislavić's fiction reflects on complex metaphysical questions of being generated by the duality of consciousness, of the interpellations of memory on history, and of the consequent uncertainties of the self. His works respond critically to the multiple ways in which the narrative self reflects historical shifts as countenanced by the obligation of remembering (and/or forgetting) the past. Vladislavić's fiction re-centres the subjectivity of the self in relation to processes of national reconstruction. He emphasises shifting memories of black people at the twilight of apartheid, signifying a greater ideological sensitivity to the experiences of black people. The author also privileges South Africa's history and processes of memory construction to make a case regarding the universality of ethical uncertainties arising out of cultural and historical transpositions. Furthermore, the aligning of the South African experience with histories from other similar contexts magnify the ambiguities surrounding apartheid in relation to experiences from other totalitarian regimes, especially as felt through the consciousness of the self. Vladislavić therefore manages to pattern different experiences of individuals in different contexts while maintaining the conclusion that memories and histories cannot be

transposed or replaced. Through his narrative strategies, therefore, Vladislavić anchors ethical ambiguities of the self on the diverse ways of seeing history as inflected by social, cultural, and political changes. The many faces upon which one can look at history, especially as processed through first-person consciousness, evoke multiple and competing ethical expressions. The study has therefore answered the leading question in Chapter One of this study as imagined by Robert O'Meally & Genevieve Fabre (1994) that black and white South Africans cannot escape the burden imposed by memory by merely wishing the past away, as these memories somehow find their way back into individual memory and reside there, while inflicting hurt, pain and other feelings.

Apartheid wavers precariously between remembering and forgetting. The questioning of racial inflections on South Africa's collective memory continues to be a central challenge for the different communities as they remember apartheid with unease in different ways. *Unimportance* answers, in part, Annie Coombes's (2003) assertion that black and white South Africans attach different meanings to monuments and memorials. Zizi attaches significant attention to the visible images of Ruth First and Chris Hani as embedded in the architecture of the University of Western Cape, where he is a student. These images, and all others in his consciousness, such as those of Steve Biko, remind him of the past legacies of pain and hurt, and inspire him to forge ahead. Zizi's experiences are emblematic of individuals pushing forward against the tide of racial rationalization in South Africa. Although Zizi recognises the visible strictures imposed by apartheid, what is lacking is the will to undo the surviving legacies that still plague the university environment. Zizi models himself ideologically as a modern-day Steve Biko on campus. He, however, does not concretise Biko's philosophy in his disposition in totality, preferring to ascribe to a selective version of black consciousness, while disconnecting himself in deed by his guile actions. On the one hand, he outwardly projects an intellectual, political, and philosophical outlook that signifies triumph. On the other hand, he maintains a self-serving mantra that subverts his philosophies and outlook on life. While Zizi reflects decoloniality's push that constricting binaries must fall, the challenge is what should stand in their place after the fall. Zizi's uncertainties reveal gaps in the decolonial project in post-apartheid South Africa. His inability to reconcile his aspirations with the collective desires of the community in the university set-up compels us to re-examine what constitutes freedom in the South African university.

Where apartheid and racial discourses are concerned, post-apartheid South African literature employs subversive strategies to frame discourses around power structures and

racial legitimacy. The use of unreliable narration serves as a useful strategy for characters to question assumptions regarding racial power in post-apartheid South Africa. The fact that unreliable selves, who, by all practical intents and purposes, understand what they ought to do as responsible South African citizens, but choose, time and again, to reject aspects of conventional morality and to acquiesce to personal whims, pointedly raises ambiguities surrounding race relations in post-apartheid South Africa. Dingz's character in *Dog Eat Dog* emblematises the ambiguities of racial belonging, showing how subversion continues to frame identity construction in post-apartheid South Africa. Dingz's behaviour pointedly shows the tensions in the construction of the South African self that is unreconciled to the racial dynamics in contemporary South Africa. Dingz wants to benefit from black invisibility by staging subversive rants against what he perceives as white visibility and white fragility on campus. Clearly, in terms of the attempts to decolonise knowledge and the university, the voices of this nature have not been reconciled.

The irreconcilable fact is that while Dingz's attempts to delegitimise apartheid and its strictures at the university, he ends up, ironically, delegitimising his place and position as a black South African student on campus by undercutting himself and jeopardising his chances of completing his course at the university. His situation captures the enduring paradox in the construction of the self in post-apartheid South Africa. Dingz's journey reveals that the struggle against racial and institutionalised injustices is fraught with uncertainty, as the individual's pursuit of freedom inadvertently encases the self in ethical unreliability. Bafana's ethical dislocation in *After Tears* rests on his inability to reconcile his fractured, underachieving self with an over-obligating community. Bafana is a dominant symbol of missed opportunities. He represents many South African youth who cannot reconcile their hopes with material realities in contemporary South Africa. Although *After Tears* is set outside the campus environment, the events are tied to the university, as the dismal performance of Bafana sets forth his downward spiral in ethical terms. It remains a silent fact that the cost of higher education is also a significant matter that contributes to Bafana's failure on campus, the main reason why the family would take such drastic measures as selling their only family house to secure his results, which were in fact non-existent. Mhlongo's protagonists reveal the contradictions of characters living at the fringes of the post-apartheid dream occasioned by poverty, life in segregated townships, and land and housing challenges, which continue to define post-apartheid conditions of living, and these contribute to the ethical ambiguities that characters face. His setting in the thick of township life is a mirror to the multiplicity of discourses that underwrite race, gender, poverty and

other social parameters. These parameters define and entwine the mutant post-apartheid culture in which old, emergent and refracted values exacerbate the confusion of the self. What Thabo Tsehloane (2010) has interpreted as the “comic” in respect of the novel is indeed a manifestation of dark humour that portrays a debilitating social fracture of the black collective. Bafana’s primary role in the novel, thus, is to illustrate how his own ethical uncertainties are a reflection of the uncertainties of a larger, fragmented social space. It is indeed a sad irony that Bafana, who would have created a different life for himself and for the members of his family and community, ends up disappointing both himself and the community.

Instances of collective “solidarity” as represented in post-apartheid literature remain as a decoy, masking intense levels of individual fracture of self. Consequently, such collective values as reciprocity, consideration, and love for others, for example, are severely subverted, questioned, ridiculed, or rejected. In *Room 207*, the concept of community is put into sharp focus, reconceived and debated by the characters themselves. For the individual, what matters is their own individual right over the rights of others. Signifying a “sectarian” kind of community, the six members of 207 consider themselves as a “collective” away from their black collectives. It does appear that the city destabilises notions about an imagined united black collective. Moele’s characters represent the ambiguities surrounding identity construction in post-apartheid South Africa, especially the black population. Moele questions and subverts the perception of a heterogeneous black identity. He constructs a world in which the characters’ disparate aspirations are framed around a will to survive in a broken collective. This text, therefore, draws our attention to the complexities surrounding identity formation in South Africa.

The study has insightfully demonstrated that the first-person point of view has emerged as a very productive strategy to voice ethical ambiguities in post-apartheid South African literature. It has thus sufficiently explained why post-apartheid writers of fiction continue to rely on the perspective to reckon with the ethical aspirations of a nation still struggling with a problematic past. By incisively investigating the ambiguities facing the self, this study has noted the deepening of uncertainties occasioned by bad memories, making us conclude that unwelcome memories are responsible for the emergent waves of disagreements which are ethical in nature. What South Africa can learn from this is to consciously commit to confront the realities of ethical regression by speculating on avenues in which South Africans of all races can build intersubjective relations to harness an ethically redeemed

society. In that regard, post-apartheid South Africa may benefit from literature's capacity to imagine a more developed ethical space as constructed in the narrative.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

In this study, most of the characters implicated in ethical ambiguities are men. What looms large in the uncertainty implicated in the characters in the study is the manifestation of sexual perversity by a predominantly male section of society. Furthermore, this aspect of comic perversity is rendered alongside representations of unemployment, crime, and witchcraft, among other social and communal challenges. Denoting superficial and reductionist approaches to the engagement with these issues, most studies limit themselves to the analysis of the experiences of black men as a "crisis" of masculinity by only pointing out the anti-social effects of this crisis, especially as shown through gender-based violence. Little attention has been devoted to the motivations behind black male subversion. There is therefore space to investigate more into the dynamics of oppression on men in the South African context to engage more reflectively on the historical and cultural realities of the South African black male that condition men's acts of anti-sociality as represented in post-apartheid narratives.

In the study, the constant signification of the trope of race has spelled a preoccupation with racial otherness. Even with the end of apartheid, discourses on racial victimhood abound. In many of these discourses, race continues to reveal itself as a marker of continued disagreements. In other discourses that choose to downplay the significance of race on communities through racial silencing, the gesture has invited new kinds of subversion, which ironically re-inscribes racial overtures. The reality, however, is that the "oversignification" of race in South Africa has tended to occlude discourses around reconciliation, push for equity and justice. The dream of a "post-racial" society as imagined after apartheid seems to have somehow petered out, and in this regard, South Africa would benefit from a reformulation that repudiates notions of racial privilege while protecting the interests of black and white communities, and indeed of all communities of South Africa. In other words, there is a necessity for racial dialogue that identifies racial pitfalls to national reconciliation, and then addressing them proactively. This aspiration can be modelled along the hope of a "post-racial" South Africa, which Paul Gilroy, in *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race* (2000: 27) summarises, thus:

if the status of 'race' can be transformed even in South Africa, the one place on earth where its salience for politics and government could not be denied, the one location where state-sponsored racial identities were openly and positively conducted into the

core of modern civic culture and social relations, then surely it could be changed anywhere.

Gilroy's (2000) aspiration signals for the need for a greater push towards racial reconciliation in South Africa in order to capitalise on the gains already made. There is therefore space for literary dialogue to probate on the imaginaries of racial reconciliation as represented in post-apartheid literature.

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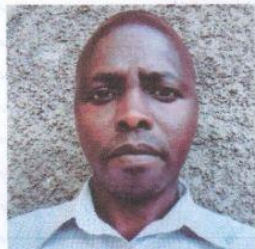


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## APPENDICES

### Appendix I: NACOSTI Research permit

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## APPENDIX II: Journal Publications

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### Ethical Ambiguities in Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207* and Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog*

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#### Abstract

This article investigates how the use of unreliable narration in Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207* and Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* reveals ethical ambiguities as represented in post-apartheid fiction. These ambiguities have been amplified by the writers who have broadly adopted the use of first-person narrators/protagonists to negotiate the apprehensions that have ensued in the process of building a new society. By adopting a close, textual and complementary reading of the two novels, this article identifies instances of unreliability in characters, in particular, of bad faith or bad will, which condition such characters to deception and wilful avoidance of responsibility. Drawing from theoretical insights on the orientation of narrators/protagonists as unreliable narrators, and on race and cultural theory to define the post/apartheid condition of social unsettlement, this article pursues instances of inconsistency and contradiction of the self to define ethical uncertainties in the texts. In effect, the article shows that bad faith and fallibility, manifested in the tendency to lie and take advantage of morally ambiguous situations, are deployed by the narrators/protagonists in the novels to wilfully project their own self-interest, thus rendering the pursuit of empathy, consideration and responsibility uncertain. The article justifies the place of unreliable narration in magnifying ethical issues in literature.

# **Collapsing Seams: The Search for Truth as an Ethical Obligation in the Montage of Voices in *Country of My Skull* and *The Cry of Winnie Mandela***

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## **Abstract**

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*The dismantling of apartheid in South Africa inspired hope that it was possible to build a new inclusive society and to cast into oblivion the deformed way of living in the apartheid past. The post-apartheid period has witnessed attempts to collapse the racial and cultural seams created during apartheid in an endeavour to heal the sutures visible on the body of the nation. Post-apartheid South African literature has plunged into this grand undertaking through spearheading the search for truth as an ethical obligation. This paper uses Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* and Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* to interrogate the extent to which ethical aspirations are negotiated in post-apartheid literature. Paying attention to memory as baggage, as manifested in the specially created institution known as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the paper strives to uncover the montage of voices in the narrative nested within the historical ambiguity generated by the attempt to move away from apartheid while at the same time succumbing to the past while attempting to find closure. Inscribing the position and the authority of the narrative in the representation of key historical events, in this particular case, how histories of the South African nation are symbolically tied to and in the narrative, the paper pursues two interrelated objectives. Firstly, it establishes the role that personal narratives and testimonies play in the (re)construction of truth pertaining to the South African past. Secondly, it uncovers the ambiguities between the personal narrative and the collective narrative as represented in testimonies. Emphasising on the limits of the narrative in terms of duplicity, the paper figures how significant histories and testimonies of the TRC have been mediated in Krog's memoir and in Ndebele's quasi-historical novel to explain how memory is shaped through testimony, and how, conversely, testimony relies on memory to negotiate the search for truth and authenticity. In revising the past as an ethical obligation for the present in the narrative, this paper uses Paul Ricoeur, Hannah Arendt and Tzvetan Todorov to reflect on the contestations on symbolic histories that render ethical pursuits ambiguous, as "truth", "good", and "evil" become contestable. The paper concludes by appraising how the texts attempt to gesture towards the acceptance of an "ethics of compromise" in its appeal to pragmatic truth for the South African community.*

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