



**Subversive Survival: Reconsidering Trauma in Literary
Representations of the Holocaust, Apartheid and the 1994
Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda**

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I, Ayala Sarah Maurer, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This dissertation examines literary representations of trauma and survival in relation to the Holocaust, apartheid and the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda. Although the theoretical study of trauma and its relationship to literature is vast and varied, it is simultaneously limited both by claims of the Eurocentrism of the discourse, and by the fact that the field is currently dominated by cultural trends that point towards absence, lack and void as wholly constitutive responses to violence: assumptions that have come to characterise survivors and their writing. My thesis interrogates these two positions. Written in English, Hebrew, and French, the texts I study here demonstrate how testimony subverts the orthodoxies and expectations associated with trauma and its literary aesthetics, suggesting the need for broader discussions around trauma and its representation. My first chapter, which puts Primo Levi's *If This is a Man* in conversation with Mark Mathabane's *Kaffir Boy* and Yolande Mukagasana's *La Mort ne veut pas de moi*, explores how literature demonstrates resilience, and not submission, in the face of violence. Next, I turn to Otto Dov Kulka's *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death*, Ellen Kuzwayo's *Call Me Woman* and Révérien Rurangwa's *Génocidé* to ask how survival is represented within autobiography in ways that defy the conventions of the genre. Chapter Three develops my discussion of survival by examining how fiction raises difficult questions surrounding victimhood, identity and memory, calling upon Imre Kertész's *Liquidation*, Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* and Gilbert Gatore's *Le Passé devant soi* to do so. Finally, through discussion of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*, K. Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* and Diogène Ntarindwa's *Carte d'identité*, I ask how intergenerational trauma might make itself felt – if, indeed, it is transmitted at all.

Impact Statement

This thesis began with the question of how literary responses to violent limit events might shed light on what is currently a psychoanalytically-inspired canon of theory that positions void, lack and haunting as wholly-constitutive reactions to traumatic encounters. Reading across fiction, autobiography and drama, this thesis carried out a comparative textual analysis of three very different cultural contexts and found that individuals are capable of responding to traumatic events in a far more resilient and complex way than current trends in trauma theory admit. Whilst these ideas emphasise repression, these texts suggest that some victims of extreme violence remember these events all too well; where this theoretical canon claims that silence is a common, yet aesthetically and politically complex response to limit events, these authors – and the aesthetic choices they make – demonstrate a capacity for agency that not only allows them to *remember* the past with accuracy, but to confront it directly.

This study and its findings have strong implications for future academic research. Theoretical discussion around comparative studies, particularly in relation to atrocity, is marked by a hesitancy generated by concerns of specificity and uniqueness. Whilst attention must of course be paid to specific contexts and outcomes, the particular way these texts testify to the benefits of discussing one violent history in tandem with another demonstrates the virtue of comparison; a finding that I hope will encourage more comparatively-led studies of violence in the literary context. A significant contribution to knowledge made by this thesis is to be found in its innovative readings of the texts that constitute its corpus. In addition to providing the first extended critical reading of Mark Mathabane's *Kaffir Boy*, this thesis extends the theoretical discussions around each of its primary texts; asking new questions and providing fresh perspectives that are fruitful ground for future research within the discipline. This research has also flagged certain questions regarding representations of alterity and degrees of intergenerationality that point to new directions for inquiries into the dynamics of trauma's literary representation.

Outside of the academy, mental health practitioners might find this dissertation's argument for the resilience possible in traumatic responses particularly instructive. Whilst clinicians and psychoanalysts

currently work primarily with the PTSD definitions as originally outlined by the DSM-IV in relation to trauma, the findings of this thesis argue that the symptomatology and diagnostic criteria associated with this disorder are perhaps too narrow to encompass the breadth of human response. This dissertation's argument for the agency that individuals are able to retain after traumatic violence calls for expanded thinking not only around diagnostics, but therapies; instead of assuming cognitive inhibition and interpreting silence as evidence of traumatisation, practitioners might look to this thesis for an expanded understanding of the motivations behind survivor silence and work with patients to encourage the resilience that this thesis demonstrates individuals to be capable of in the face of limit events.

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Introduction

Trauma: Conceptions, Constructions and Afterlives

Exploring the space between Cathy Caruth's claim that 'trauma [...] may provide the very link between cultures'¹ and Stef Craps's argument that modern trauma theory explicitly 'disregard[s] the connections between metropolitan and non-Western or minority traumas',² this thesis interrogates the relationship between trauma, culture and individual lives. Beset by self-contradictions, political biases and interdisciplinary incongruity, the ideas that constitute the contemporary canon of trauma theory are far from being a unified set of principles, perceptions or rules. In fact, conceptions of trauma and of traumatised people across disciplinary lines are markedly different. Whilst such variation does not preclude the possibility of theoretical productivity, it is notable that Euro/American psychoanalytic ideas regarding the nature of trauma have assumed dominance within the field, characterising trauma itself, and responses to traumatic events, in a very specific way. Scholars from multiple disciplines have tended to bring these psychoanalytic insights to bear upon non-Euro/American contexts and populations without considering how their particular traumas may resist, complicate, or refuse coercion into this potentially culturally-specific evaluative framework. Using a literary lens to contribute to discussions on trauma and victimhood often dominated by Euro/American psychoanalysis, this dissertation comparatively examines literary representations of the Holocaust, South African apartheid and the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda to probe, and respond to, the theoretical debate regarding trauma theory's cultural specificity or universal purchase.

Aiming to undertake a dialogic study of post-violence writing that neither prioritises nor marginalises specific cultural voices, this comparative enquiry addresses the question of Euro/American trauma theory's applicability in a global context by posing several of its own. How, this thesis asks, might literature shed light on the relationship between culturally specific and individual responses to suffering? Do these texts raise questions and challenge assumptions regarding the notions of identity and

¹ Cathy Caruth, 'Introduction' in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 3-11, p. 11.

² Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 2.

victimhood that might demonstrate the need for more sensitive, culturally inclusive thinking around trauma? How does literature enable the asking of such questions, and how might these texts in conversation provide a basis for considering trauma in a global context? In addition to testing the opposing claims of trauma theory's Eurocentrism versus its ability to forge multidirectional connections between transnational and transhistorical moments of violence, this thesis examines the dynamics of trauma's literary representation. Whilst arguing that modern trauma theory 'take[s] for granted the universal validity of definitions of trauma that have developed out of the history of Western modernity', Craps – echoing theorists such as Robert Eaglestone and Roger Luckhurst – notes that 'a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia' has been privileged 'as uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma'.³ Tracking and interrogating the modes of writing and generic categories employed by the authors whose texts constitute its corpus, this thesis asks how literary aesthetics might indicate cross-cultural commonality and/or difference in post-traumatic responses. Embracing and exploring the possibilities of the ambivalent spaces within literary testimony and testimonial fiction, this dissertation examines how its corpus challenges the literary and theoretical orthodoxies that currently dominate discussions of trauma and its representation.

Trauma: Contested from the Start

Roger Luckhurst argues that the theoretical study of trauma is metaphorically akin to a knot: 'one of those distinctive 'hybrid assemblages' that [...] tangle up questions of science, law, technology, capitalism, politics, medicine and risk'.⁴ Trauma's interdisciplinarity is its attraction; engaging researchers from diverse academic, clinical and cultural contexts, theoretical interest in trauma has risen sharply in the past six decades and seen much of its lexicon integrated into mainstream vernacular. Providing medically, psychoanalytically and legally legitimising explanations for the lived experience of the trauma of many diverse groups, the discursive and often politically motivated usage of the concept has mobilised the rights and narratives of those whom it has defined as its victims. Theories of trauma, in this sense, are empowering and constructive. However, the history of the study

³ Craps, p. 2.

⁴ Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), pp. 14-15.

of trauma, as Judith Herman points out, is 'one of episodic amnesia'.⁵ Alternating with periods of exceptional attentiveness, the study of trauma has, at other times during the last century, fallen by the wayside of theoretical exploration; whilst Herman explains that 'the subject provokes such intense controversy that it periodically becomes anathema',⁶ Ruth Leys attributes this phenomenon to psychoanalytic theorists' inability to concur on the origin, manifestation and treatment of traumatic neuroses.⁷ This lack of consensus poses a distinct challenge to critics attempting to trace trauma's historical development as a psychoanalytic concept, whilst divergent understandings of trauma in fields such as anthropology, law and gender theory further complicate its mapping. Theorists such as Jeffrey Alexander, Ruth Leys and Kalí Tal have produced genealogies of trauma that delineate trauma theory's progression along specific disciplinary lines in relation to specific Euro/American social groups. This dissertation's focus on a comparative *range* of voices, however, requires something quite different. Following an interdisciplinary model of enquiry into trauma employed by Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, this genealogy aims to expand the scope of their work whilst demonstrating the limitations and ambiguities of trauma's various definitions. Interrogating the punctuative gaps in trauma theory's development that monodisciplinary histories may gloss over, the following genealogy demonstrates not only how the trauma concept has interacted with various individuals and groups who, in attempts to legitimise and prioritise their own suffering, have driven trauma's medical, psychoanalytic, social and legal development over the past century, but how these ideas have constructed specific – and contested – notions of suffering and victimhood.

Etymologically originating from the Greek "τραῦμα" meaning "wound",⁸ trauma was first defined as early as 1684 in a physiological sense as a specifically external bodily injury. The onset of modernity and the development of the railroad in 1815, however, brought with it a reconsideration of trauma. The public's awareness of the rising number of railway accidents⁹ and the strange reverberations of their aftermath meant that concerns about the negative effects of long-distance railway travel began circulating quickly. Danish surgeon John Erichsen supported the idea of trauma as a physical wound, claiming that 'a

⁵ Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), p. 7.

⁶ Herman, p. 7.

⁷ Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), p. 3.

⁸ "trauma, n.". OED Online. March 2014. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/205242?redirectedFrom=trauma> [accessed May 01, 2014].

⁹ The Railways Archive – found at <http://www.railwaysarchive.co.uk/index.php> - provides detailed accounts of any railway accident in the history of the United Kingdom.

severe jarring or shaking of the spine and its contents could result in a partial suspension of spinal cord function similar to the transient partial or complete loss of consciousness associated with brain concussion.¹⁰ Fellow surgeon Herbert Page, however, argued against this purely physiological thesis stating in 1875 that ‘patients with spinal concussion actually had little more than traumatic lumbago or nervous disturbance with overtones of simulation or hysteria’ whilst noting that ‘real and alleged injuries could be aggravated by claimants seeking generous compensation.’¹¹ In addition to defining trauma as a pre-existing *mental* hysteria that was only aggravated by railway-induced spinal movement, Page – acknowledging the ‘plethora of lawsuits against railroad corporations mounted by injured plaintiffs’¹² – alludes to the existence of a claim culture both created and perpetuated by a specific idea of victimhood; an element of the traumatic experience that has endured to this day.¹³ Even in their earliest conceptions, then, understandings of trauma defied singularity and brought together the fields of medicine, psychoanalysis, law and culture.

Erichsen and Page, however, were not alone in thinking about trauma in Europe at this time.¹⁴ As Shoshana Ringel points out, it was neurologist ‘Jean Martin Charcot [...] [who] was the first to understand that the origin of hysterical symptoms was not physiological but rather psychological in nature’.¹⁵ Diverging from the dominant understanding of trauma as a uterine condition manifesting itself as hysteria, Charcot noted that traumatic events could induce a hypnotic state in his patients; subsequently surmising that ‘hysterical attacks are dissociative problems – the results of having endured unbearable experiences’.¹⁶ Charcot’s hypothesis saw popular conceptions of trauma move from the physiological to the mental; a shift reflected by the changing treatments of hysteria during this period.¹⁷ Studies of trauma subsequently saw an etiological drive, spearheaded by the work of Sigmund

¹⁰ Thomas Keller and Thomas Chappell, ‘Historical Perspective: The Rise and Fall of Erichsen’s Disease (Railroad Spine)’ in *SPINE*, Vol. 21, No. 13 (1996), pp. 1597-1601, p. 1598.

¹¹ Keller and Chappell, p. 1599.

¹² Keller and Chappell, p. 1599.

¹³ For reflections on the relationships between compensation culture, personal injury and social values, see *Damages and Compensation Culture: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. by Eoin Quill and Raymond J. Friel (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2015).

¹⁴ This section deals primarily with European analysts, as Europe was the hub of such thinking at this time. There is, however, evidence to suggest that American psychoanalysts were thinking along similar lines: see, for example, Eric Caplan’s *Mind Games: American Culture and the Birth of Psychotherapy* (California: University of California Press, 2001).

¹⁵ Shoshana Ringel, ‘Overview’ in *Trauma: Contemporary Directions in Theory, Practice, and Research*, ed. by Shoshana Ringel and Jerrold R. Brandell (London: Sage Publications, 2012), p. 1.

¹⁶ Ringel, p. 1.

¹⁷ Before Charcot, the treatment for hysteria was a hysterectomy. Pierre Janet also advocated hypnosis and abreaction in place of invasive surgeries. See Elton Mayo’s *The Psychology of Pierre Janet* (London: Routledge, 2015) for more detail.

Freud and Pierre Janet. Undoubtedly informed by Charcot, Freud explained trauma as the psychic consequence of a sexual experience – emphatically stating that ‘infantile sexual experiences are the fundamental precondition for hysteria’.¹⁸ But whilst Janet’s ideas posited the emergence of hysteria as purely *reactionary* to the experience of childhood sexual molestation, Freud’s famed seduction theory – in which experiences of sexual violation in childhood were recalled later in life through the acquisition of knowledge that rendered that memory traumatic – implied that trauma was *pathological*. The pathology, claimed Freud, lay in the existence of *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action). Traumatic memories, insisted Freud, acquired their character as such through a belated conferral of meaning by the unconscious that would manifest itself in hysterical symptoms. Freud eventually dismissed seduction theory altogether,¹⁹ and his writing is evidence of the extensive vacillation his thinking around trauma represented.²⁰ But whilst the idea of *Nachträglichkeit* became a cornerstone of Euro/American literary trauma theory – as will be discussed below – the shifting of the locus of trauma from the event to the individual suggested a new interplay between agency, history and memory in relation to trauma.

Whilst psychoanalysts debated the assumptions around trauma, these assumptions became crucial to another area in which trauma was gaining prominence – the insurance industry. Claims for compensation for railway-related injuries inspired increasing amounts of psychoanalytically justified litigation; but the 1898 law that granted compensation to employees injured at work pushed trauma further into the social and political spheres of life. In 1907, Dr. Edouard Brissaud popularised the notion of “sinistrosis”, an after-effect of trauma that saw the victim unable to return to work after an accident – a impairment, he claimed, that was directly linked to a desire for compensation. As Claudine Herzlich explains, ‘[a]ccording to Dr. Brissaud, they were not malingering: the worker really was sick, but was sick because of compensation [...] a patient recovered or did not recover depending on whether or not

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, ‘The Aetiology of Hysteria’ in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 106.

¹⁹ In 1897, Freud dismissed seduction theory entirely in favour of ideas regarding infantile sexuality. In his new proposed etiological view, the child’s existing fantasies and internal sexual impulses produced neurotic symptoms.

²⁰ Freud had previously declared that ‘we consider it essential for the explanation of hysterical phenomena to assume the presence of a dissociation, a splitting on the content of consciousness [...] a hysterical attack is the recurrence of a physical state which the patient has experienced earlier’ - that “state” defined as ‘a precocious experience of sexual relations committed by another person [...] [which] is the specific cause of hysteria’. Conceptualising here a theory of interior psychological dissociation provoked by memory, Freud flatly contradicts his previous statement of childhood sexual violation – the event itself – as the root of trauma.

he was insured.²¹ In addition to suggesting the intersection of the physiological and the social, this specific etiology of trauma is significant because it designated trauma as a condition affecting a specific group. Labour-related injuries, which could only have been suffered by the working class, integrated trauma into the hierarchical environment of Victorian society. Fassin and Rechtman extend this observation. They note that the workers of the early twentieth century ‘found to their cost that the same law that protected them by granting them financial compensation also relegated them to the degrading new status of “hysterical trauma victim.”’ Continuing to write that this status ‘focused the social prejudices of the time, inspiring scorn and drawing suspicion,’ Fassin and Rechtman conclude that here, ‘trauma neurosis came into conflict with the moral values of the nation.’²² Joining the ranks of the females who still bore the stigma of hysteria, the working class men who presented with hysterical symptoms were viewed with the same disdain and suspicion as their female counterparts – despite the sinistrosis diagnosis which aimed to distinguish them. Trauma, now, was as political and social as it had been psychoanalytic and physiological.

If Freud’s hypotheses were marked by vacillation in the pre-war years, the reverberations of World War I complicated conceptions of trauma’s etiology hundredfold. Put succinctly by Leys, ‘were not the thousands of cases of combat hysteria observed in apparently healthy adult men the direct result of the external trauma of trench warfare?’²³ Suddenly, Freud’s psychically internal seduction theory or ideas of pre-existing infantile fantasies became inadequate to explain the ‘compulsion to repeat’²⁴ the obviously externally-induced traumatic experiences that were being suffered by his patients through nightmares and flashbacks. Called upon to account for the mysterious behaviour of combat soldiers who seemed to be displaying symptoms traditionally presented by the hysterical female, Freud reverted back to his earliest ideas regarding non-sexual dissociation as a response to a traumatic event. Freud now posited the existence, as explained by Leys, of:

a protective shield or “stimulus barrier” designed to defend the organism against the upsurge of large quantities of stimuli from the external world that threatened to destroy

²¹ Claudine Herzlich, ‘Modern Medicine and the Quest for Meaning: Illness as a Social Signifier’ in *The Meaning of Illness*, ed. by Marc Augé and Claudine Herzlich (London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995), p. 158.

²² Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 36.

²³ Leys, p. 21.

²⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works*, trans. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1968), p. 22.

the psychic organization. Trauma was thus defined in quasi-military terms as a widespread rupture or breach in the ego's protective shield.²⁵

Stating that trauma was caused by the psyche's inability to master external over-stimulation resulting from the unbinding of the death drives,²⁶ Freud now argued that hysterical symptoms were the psyche's attempt to constantly replay the traumatic event in order to eventually process it; a concept that became yet another defining influence on literary trauma theory, and raised new questions about agency and individuality in relation to trauma.

The Freudian postulation of yet another theory of trauma, however, did not do much to quell the suspicion that now surrounded the concept – suspicion that was both a reaction to the rise of compensation culture and fuelled by doubts regarding the mental constitutions of the soldiers who claimed to be traumatised. The medical screenings these combatants had to undergo served the primary purpose of rooting out malingerers, and those designated as having been “traumatised” were seen as mentally weak cowards. Rather than being a pathological condition or a reaction to an unbearable experience, suffering from trauma became a personal deficiency, often translated as a nervous unwillingness to fulfil one's patriotic duty. As Fassin and Rechtman note, this gave rise to ‘extreme diagnostic and therapeutic techniques which sometimes went as far as brutality’ – ‘the horror of combat’, they explain, ‘was simply the window that revealed the weakness of these men who were ultimately more unworthy than ill.’²⁷ Psychiatric responses to these so-perceived malingerers were reflective of the disdain with which they were encountered. French neurologist Clovis Vincent, for example, advocated for aggressive electrotherapy that was designed to make malingerers admit their fears and return to the front. What is fascinating in this historical moment is the about-turn evident in both the conscious display of hysterical symptoms on the part of the individual and the reluctance to diagnose trauma by the medical profession. Those previously accused of compensation-led greed now faced charges of unpatriotic cowardice; those previously seeking to diagnose trauma now sought to deny traumatic symptoms to prevent depletions of the rank-and-file on the front. Victimhood, now shameful and distinctly non-lucrative, was not hastily claimed.

²⁵ Leys, p. 23.

²⁶ The very concept of Freudian drives is contested in terms of the force they are considered to exert. See Harold Bloom, ‘Freud: Frontier Concepts, Jewishness, and Interpretation’ in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 115-116.

²⁷ Fassin and Rechtman, p. 45.

There were, however, a significant number of soldiers presenting with traumatic symptoms; and, in efforts to explain their presence, yet another group of people were painted as the victims of these neuroses. Polish psychologist Adam Cygielstrejch claimed that war-related neuroses were class-specific. Publishing *Les Conséquences mentales des émotions de la guerre* [The Mental Consequences of War Emotions] in 1912, Cygielstrejch compared the effects of expected social upheavals to those of unforeseen disasters and concluded that 'it was not the event itself that was traumatic, but the surprise which it engendered'.²⁸ According to his research, unprecedented natural disasters could affect anyone, whilst social upheavals that could be anticipated only affected those who were predisposed to mental disturbance. Thus, he proposed, surprise could not explain combat-related trauma, as soldiers knew that they would be exposed to extreme experiences. Therefore, he writes, '[i]t is generally thought that those who suffer nervous illness are almost exclusively officers, educated and refined people'.²⁹ For Cygielstrejch, those capable of analysing the danger around them without the blind enthusiasm of patriotism that drove the rank-and-file were more likely to suffer from neuroses. This reversed the class-based biases of trauma that had categorised the previous years; whilst the middle and upper classes had previously frowned upon the working class's workplace accident-related *sinistrosis* and claims for compensation, World War I saw the more educated members of society cast as the new malingersers. The status of victim that attended the experience of trauma was, once again, in flux.

As the numbers of those affected grew, however, there was a movement away from the perception of neuroses as compensation-driven behaviour or overly analytic mental process and a reversion to conceptions of trauma as originating within the individual's unconscious. English neurologist William H. R. Rivers protested the stigma attached to soldiers affected by what was now being commonly referred to as "shell-shock".³⁰ According to his research, nervous breakdowns and hysterical symptoms were not a sign of a deficient patriotic register, but a fear of losing comrades. Such a claim is significant in that it once again repositions the sufferer of war-related trauma, replacing – albeit tentatively in this historical

²⁸ Fassin and Rechtman, p. 46.

²⁹ Adam Cygielstrejch, 'Les conséquences mentales des émotions de guerre' in *Annales médico-psychologiques*, Vol 1 (1912), pp. 257-277, p. 260.

³⁰ The phenomenon of "shell shock" has been analysed extensively. See, for example, Dr. Peter Leese's *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), Fiona Reid *Broken Men: Shell Shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain 1914-1930* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011) and Ben Shephard *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists, 1914-1994* (London: Pimlico, 2002).

moment – the status of malingerer with that of victim. Rivers was supported by others in the field such as Karl Abraham, Sándor Ferenczi, Ernst Simmel and Victor Tausk, who all denounced the debasing and brutal electroshock therapies of the previous years. Freud too concurred, citing a new war-inspired theory of narcissism which claimed that ‘the war neuroses were the consequence of conflict, not between the ego and the sexual drives, but between [...] the soldier’s old peace-loving ego, or instinct for self-preservation, and his new war-loving ego, or instinct for aggression.’³¹ Abraham also claimed that the source of trauma was internal, borne out of an overdeveloped narcissism in the subject. Ferenczi supported the idea of neurosis as narcissism, but in a different way; summarised neatly by Fassin and Rechtman, ‘he held that overdeveloped narcissism [...] could inspire fighting spirit in some subjects [...] in a desire for recognition and military prestige’³² – thus, narcissism functioned etiologically for Abraham and reactionarily for Ferenczi. Regardless, however, a new commitment to not shaming those returning from battle with shell shock saw psychoanalytic therapies replace aggressive psychiatric treatments. Trauma was once again attributed to the individual; but instead of being viewed as a sign of weakness, trauma now became a sign of difference that distinguished the sufferer from their unaffected comrades. The interrogation of this difference and discovering the reasons for it became the goal of psychoanalytic therapy, which became a confession of sorts. As trauma was now perceived as a sign of a mental disturbance buried in personal histories, the traumatised individual saw analysts delve deeply into the recesses of their unconscious – complete avowal became the price to pay for displaying wartime neuroses. Whilst some specialists like Moreau still viewed traumatic neuroses as compensation-seeking behaviour, shell shock was recognised as a legitimate mental illness by the end of the war; and those suffering from it as legitimate victims.

It was the aftermath of the Second World War that entirely reconfigured trauma, both disciplinarily and in the minds of those encountering and treating its symptoms – a shift that can be attributed to the change of focus from what was *missing* in the individual, to what *remained* after an extreme experience. The end of World War II – specifically, the liberation of Europe’s concentration camps – presented clinicians with an entirely new sample of traumatised victims. As charges of selfishness, narcissism, malingering or a lack of patriotism could not be levied against Holocaust survivors, a new model of

³¹ Leys, p. 22.

³² Fassin and Rechtman, p. 62.

trauma was desperately needed. Whilst memory had previously been painted as unreliable in relation to trauma – viewed as constructed for compensation, or defective due to shock or age – memories of trauma now became central to building a narrative surrounding what was, to many, an unprecedented genocidal occurrence. Where trauma had previously pointed to the mental failings or greed of an individual, trauma now came to represent the human experience of unforeseen accident or catastrophe. In addition to the 1960s ushering in multiple new trauma-associated syndromes such as survivor syndrome, Holocaust survivors represented a victimhood that, in its radical newness, demanded a re-evaluation of what it meant to have been traumatised.

In addition to having significant ramifications for changing conceptions of trauma and those affected by it, the aftermath of the Holocaust saw the rise of trauma's politicisation. Jeffrey Alexander, who argues expressly for trauma as a 'culturally conceived'³³ state of being, claims that post-violence labels of victim, aggressor, victor and loser are decided by influential societal parties – 'which narrative wins out', he writes, 'is a matter of performative power'.³⁴ Alexander proposes a two-part idea regarding the social nature of trauma: firstly, that 'religion, nation, race, ethnicity, gender, class [...] can be a medium for inflicting social pain'³⁵ and, secondly, that '[i]ntellectuals, artists, politicians, and social movement leaders create narratives about social suffering',³⁶ creating traumatised collectives that, for political ends, 'must be imagined into being'.³⁷ In the aftermath of the Holocaust, argues Alexander, such a collective was constructed. Whilst noting that the American people did not easily identify with 'the starving, depleted, often weird-looking and sometimes weird-acting Jewish camp survivors [...] [who] could just as well have been from Mars, or from hell',³⁸ Alexander argues that recognition of Nazi violence was political. 'Roosevelt', he claims, 'took advantage of the public outrage [towards *Kristallnacht*] by emphasizing the purity of the American nation and its distance from this [...] violence and ethnic hatred.'³⁹ In addition to demonstrating how suffering can be appropriated, this example is evidence of how the trauma affecting one person, or one collective, can be manipulated by those who have never

³³ Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), p. 1.

³⁴ Alexander, p. 2.

³⁵ Alexander, p. 1.

³⁶ Alexander, p. 2.

³⁷ Alexander, p. 2.

³⁸ Alexander, p. 33.

³⁹ Alexander, p. 41.

been directly touched by it.⁴⁰ Demonstrating the ever-widening reach of traumatic affect, the 'horrific trauma of the Jews' – who bore the physical and psychological scars of the depths of human barbarity, 'became the trauma of all humankind.'⁴¹ Alexander argues that the reassertion of America's moral character after the war depended on the proliferation of Holocaust memory, delineating a brief history of the personalisation of Holocaust trauma through the rise of texts such as Anne Frank's diary to demonstrate the process by which the Holocaust became symbolic. Whilst trauma had hitherto been somewhat present within politics by virtue of its connection to the legal processes of compensation and its intersection with patriotic idealism during the Great War, the aftermath of the Holocaust was a landmark moment for trauma. In this historical moment, the boundaries of post-traumatic victimhood opened up, psychoanalysis came to the fore and, through the political dissemination of anti-fascist rhetoric in both Europe and the United States, the trauma of the individual became not only the trauma of the Jewish collective, but that of many societies that sought to reassert their morality through the recognition of the other's pain.

Holocaust victims, however, did not have exclusive trauma victim status in American society for long. In 1962, paediatrician Henry Kempe published a landmark paper entitled 'The Battered-Child Syndrome' that would both widen the scope of those considered to be suffering from trauma and lay the foundations for the official codification of trauma in medical, psychoanalytic, psychiatric and legal discourses. He reported that in a single one-year period, '[a]mong 71 hospitals replying [to his call for statistics], 302 such cases [of child abuse] were reported to have occurred; 33 of the children died; and 85 suffered permanent brain injury.'⁴² Most of the paper delineates the physical symptoms of Battered-Child Syndrome, 'from those cases in which the trauma is very mild and is often unsuspected and unrecognized, to those who exhibit the most florid evidence of injury to the soft tissues and skeleton.'⁴³ Although the use of the word 'trauma' in this context harks back to its etymological connotation as an external bodily wound, Kempe's report also demonstrates the diffusion of the concept beyond this physiological boundary. Writing that 'often there is complete denial of any knowledge of injury to the

⁴⁰ The relationship between trauma, politics and people is complex, and extensively commented on. See Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁴¹ Alexander, p. 64.

⁴² Henry Kempe et al, 'The Battered Child Syndrome' in *Child Abuse and Neglect*, Vol. 9 (1985), pp. 143-154, p. 143.

⁴³ Kempe, p. 144.

child and the maintenance of an attitude of complete innocence on the part of both parents',⁴⁴ Kempe's analysis invokes the reality of the repression, amnesia, suspicion and undesirability that had come to be associated with trauma in its psychoanalytic and psychiatric contexts at the start of the century. Despite writing several decades on, Kempe confirms that locating trauma was still a largely unfruitful effort; '[p]sychiatric factors are probably of prime importance in the pathogenesis of the disorder,' he writes – 'but our knowledge of these factors is limited.'⁴⁵ Psychiatry, as it had in the cases Holocaust survivors, could not totally account for the motivations behind, and the effects of, child abuse – facilitating the upsurge in psychoanalytic therapies that emerged as more suited to the task of locating, and treating, trauma. Kempe's paper indicates both the widening status of traumatic victimhood and the appropriation of the trauma discourse to highlight the sufferings of another demographic. Joining the hysterical women, working-class men, shell-shocked soldiers, educated army officers and Holocaust survivors that could now claim traumatic victimhood due to the evolving understandings of trauma's effects, the experiences of physically-abused children were now included in mainstream conceptions of what constituted trauma.

Kempe's statement that '[p]hysicians [...] may have great reluctance in believing that parents were guilty of abuse'⁴⁶ – in addition to reflecting the suspicion, albeit reversed, that has almost always attended trauma – indicated a professional complicity that formed the basis of another group's claim to traumatised status: victims of sexual abuse. As Fassin and Rechtman note, although child abuse became a social priority in the years following Kempe's article, sexual abuse within the family was not explored.⁴⁷ In 1971 however, feminist theorist and social worker Florence Rush changed this. Presenting a revolutionary paper entitled 'The Sexual Abuse of Children: A Feminist Point of View' at the New York Radical Feminists Rape Conference in that year, Rush forcefully opposed Freud's designation of the child as seducer, and proposed that the majority of children – specifically, girls – had been subject to sexual molestation that, because of the 'massive repression'⁴⁸ identified by Herman and Emily Schachtow, rendered them unaware of their violation. Furthermore, as Elizabeth Pleck writes, women who had come forward had been historically ignored by therapists who held that 'one clear message

⁴⁴ Kempe, p. 145.

⁴⁵ Kempe, p. 154.

⁴⁶ Kempe, p. 154.

⁴⁷ Fassin and Rechtman, p. 79.

⁴⁸ Judith Herman and Emily Schachtow, 'Recovery and Verification of Memories of Childhood Sexual Trauma' in *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, Vol. 4 (1987), pp. 1- 14.

from Freud's rejection of his seduction theory was that children or women who bring charges of rape or sexual molestation cannot be believed.⁴⁹ The Freudian roots of Rush's argument produced what has come to be known as "The Freudian Coverup" – a theory, pioneered by Rush, that posited Freud's knowledge, and purposeful ignorance of, the sexual abuse his female patients suffered.⁵⁰ In this historical moment, America's sexual politics defined trauma in an entirely new way. Developing at a time when economic prosperity encouraged women to remain housewives, the growing feminist movement rebelled against what they perceived to be political efforts towards the continued marginalisation and silencing of the female voice.

Supported by feminists such as Susan Brownmiller, Diana Russell and Louise Armstrong, Rush challenged Freudian concepts that had become orthodoxies. Her work revealed that many women suffered traumatic symptoms and, to her mind, the nightmares and anxiety they suffered testified to the very real trauma of their sexual molestation. The feminist movement therefore turned to psychoanalysis, despite its ambivalence towards Freud, to help women recover their memories of abuse and legally accuse the perpetrators who Rush's research often revealed to be uncles, brothers and fathers. As Kalí Tal notes, the strengthening voice of feminism 'created an atmosphere in which it was possible for some women to begin to talk about sexual assault [...] and to begin to connect that assault to political, racial, economic and social issues within the framework of the patriarchal system in which they lived'.⁵¹ This marked a new era for trauma: in addition to opening the floodgates for a new genre of testimony in the form of the incest and rape narrative,⁵² this "modern" turn in trauma studies empowered the very women who were defined from without by nineteenth-century psychological analysis. The American feminist movement, alongside the rise of the recovered memory movement,⁵³ changed this. "Victim" became synonymous with "survivor". Suddenly, the badge of "survivor" – in addition to semantically connecting

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny: The Making of American Social Policy Against Family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present* (Chicago: Illinois University Press, 2004), p. 155.

⁵⁰ Rush's paper, and the flurry of research it provoked, provided the basis for her book, *The Best Kept Secret: Sexual Abuse of Children* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1980).

⁵¹ Kalí Tal, *Worlds of Hurt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 155.

⁵² Pioneering examples of such narratives are Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975) and Louise Armstrong's *Kiss Daddy Goodnight* (New York: Pocket Books, 1978).

⁵³ The recovered memory movement is a highly controversial development in trauma's history. For details, see Renee Frederickson, *Repressed Memories: A Journey to Recovery from Sexual Abuse* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), Elizabeth F. Loftus *The Myth of Repressed Memory: False Memories and Allegations of Sexual Abuse* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996) and *Recovered Memories and False Memories: Debates in Psychology*, ed. by Martin A. Conway (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

survivors of sexual abuse with survivors of war – was one of pride and determination, not shame. Although some women did not – and indeed, still do not, or cannot – speak out, where there was once inescapable silence, there was now recourse to speech; where powerlessness once existed now stood the opportunity to produce, and control, the narrative dissemination of sexual abuse and the opportunity to bring predators to justice.

As with many developments within the history of trauma, however, the efforts of the feminist movement to extend the right to legal process and victim status to abused women met with several issues. As Richard McNally notes, researchers could not accurately estimate the number of people who had been abused, ‘in large part because what counted as sexual abuse varied from study to study [...] anywhere from 3 to 62 percent of the population of American adults were classified as survivors of sexual abuse in childhood.’⁵⁴ The lack of standardisation in any medical or legal literature pertaining to sexual abuse made legitimising its occurrence a profound struggle, and often worked in favour of those attempting to undermine these women’s testimonies to their molestation. Importantly, too, the feminist movement itself came under fire for its racial biases. ‘The active members of the sexual abuse survivor communities’, Tal writes, ‘were predominantly white and middle class [...] Narratives by women of color were ignored, decontextualized or appropriated’.⁵⁵ The criticism levied by Tal against those defining the sexual trauma narrative is similar to the charge Laura S. Brown raises against the façade of “normality” required by psychic diagnostic criteria for trauma. Brown argues that ‘[t]he range of human experience becomes the range of what is normal and usual in the lives of men of the dominant class; white, young, able-bodied, educated, middle-class, Christian men. Trauma is thus which disrupts these particular human lives, but no other.’⁵⁶ Whilst this declaration emphasises the need for a more inclusive discussion of trauma that this dissertation aims to facilitate, it also highlights the “whitening” [...] of the “normative” sexual abuse narrative⁵⁷ in American society. As Tal explains, ‘women of color suffer under the conditions of both sexism and racism, and for that reason they may not view sexual assault as *the* traumatic event which shaped their lives [...] [r]ace and gender combine to place black women in a

⁵⁴ Richard J. McNally, *Remembering Trauma* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 5.

⁵⁵ Tal, p. 156.

⁵⁶ Laura S. Brown, ‘Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma’ in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) pp. 100-112, p. 100.

⁵⁷ Tal, p. 156.

double bind'.⁵⁸ The sexual trauma of black women – in American and elsewhere – is therefore differentiated from that of white women by virtue of the cultural and sociological context in which it takes place. Despite, therefore, the widening of the boundaries of victimhood this historic period made possible, a distinctly Euro/American conception of trauma and victimhood dominated to the exclusion of the experiences of certain others – an exclusion that this dissertation specifically aims to react against.

America's white women, however, were not the only ones pushing for a new lens through which to view trauma at this time. The aftermath of the Vietnam War, coinciding with the rise of the feminist movement, was an equally crucial political moment that widened the scope of traumatic victimhood and was responsible for the inclusion of the term "trauma" in mainstream society's consciousness and vernacular. The end of the war brought its veterans home; but, with these returning combatants, as Allan Young writes, came 'an epidemic of suicides, antisocial acts, and bizarre behaviours [...] high rates of mental health problems [...] alcoholism and drug addiction.'⁵⁹ Much like the Holocaust survivors who could not be assessed through pre-existing diagnostic criteria, Vietnam veterans found themselves diagnostically unaccounted for. 'Mental health professionals', explains Wilbur Scott, 'assessed disturbed Vietnam veterans using diagnostic nomenclature that contained no specific entries for war-related trauma.'⁶⁰ As details about the war emerged, specifically the shocking exposure of the My Lai massacre and American involvement in severe human rights abuses, the Vietnam war acquired a new character; one that demanded a diagnostic framework for subjects who were not just victims, but perpetrators, of human barbarity. Robert J. Lifton was a vocal advocate for the psychiatric re-evaluation of returning combatants,⁶¹ whilst Chaim Shatan coined "post-Vietnam syndrome" in 1972. According to Shatan, the symptoms displayed by these veterans – 'guilt, rage, psychic numbing, alienation, feelings of being scapegoated – constituted a distinctive, but officially unrecognized and untreated, disorder.'⁶² When a committee, under the direction of Robert Spitzer, was formed to revise the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in 1974, psychiatry –

⁵⁸ Tal, p. 159.

⁵⁹ Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 108.

⁶⁰ Wilbur Scott, 'PTSD in DSM-III: A Case in the Politics of Diagnosis and Disease' in *Social Problems*, Vol. 37 (1990), pp. 294-310, p. 298.

⁶¹ Lifton used the term "atrocious-producing situation" to argue that war, not the soldier's personalities, caused them to commit the horrific human rights abuses and massacres that were being uncovered at this time.

⁶² Young, p. 109.

which had been forced to defer to psychoanalysis after the war – recognised an opportunity to assert its relevance. Necessitating deeply personal delving into women’s personal histories, the still predominantly male field of psychoanalysis had come to be seen as promoting an inherently suspicious mode of enquiry that contradicted the feminist aim of providing an unquestioning space for women’s stories. This moment, then, was psychiatry’s chance to reposition itself as a cutting-edge discourse on trauma and its pathological reality.

In 1980, the DSM-III was published – including, for the first time, the diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Fassin and Rechtman note that whilst ‘the semiology of PTSD was virtually identical to that of the condition formally known as shell shock’, the official, documented formulation of such a disorder ‘marked a complete reversal in attitude [...] there was no need to seek out any original trauma, since the event alone was sufficient to produce stress [...] the victim of trauma [...] was a priori credible.’⁶³ The decision to discard the word “neurosis” in the classification significantly reduced stigma, cementing the bearer of traumatic symptoms as an unquestionable victim – now, the aberration was the event, not the individual who experienced it. The classification, however, was not uncontroversial. The Veterans’ Administration (VA) had not been entirely in favour of broadening the criteria for PTSD as this would vastly increase the number of veterans who were entitled to compensation – creating a huge burden for the organisation and its administration. In addition, the moral implications of diagnosing veterans who had committed war crimes alongside those who hadn’t presented a concern. The decision not to differentiate the traumas of these groups was the decision, perhaps, to make ethics defer to political practicality. To cast all Vietnam returnees as suffering victims simplified the question of how they should be received, whilst compensation – being, as a result, the same for all – similarly became a much more straightforward process. Eliding the need to locate a specific traumatic *event*, this new diagnostic framework rendered traumatic *symptoms* the sign of having endured an unbearable experience. The new classification was wide,⁶⁴ it was inclusive, and – crucially – it was well known. Conceptions of trauma have, of course, developed since the publication of the DSM-III – new editions of the DSM have been published, new conflicts have been analysed through the notion of trauma as a

⁶³ Fassin and Rechtman, p. 77.

⁶⁴ The effects of expanding the diagnosis are documented in Robert Whitaker’s *Anatomy of an Epidemic: Magic Bullets, Psychiatric Drugs, and the Astonishing Rise of Mental Illness in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 2011).

critical concept,⁶⁵ and new understandings of trauma have surfaced across disciplines. But the character that trauma and its symptomatology bear in our era takes its roots from this historical moment. With the publication of the DSM-III, trauma became enshrined in interdisciplinary understandings of what it means to come into contact with catastrophe and made available a victimhood that could be claimed through the voicing of pain.

'Trauma', writes sociologist Kai Erikson, 'can create community'.⁶⁶ And, historically, it has. Despite initially defining the experiences of Victorian females, the status of traumatic victimhood has expanded to accommodate – thus far, and amongst others – the Victorian working class, shell-shocked corporals, educated army officers, Holocaust survivors, physically abused children, female victims of sexual molestation and Vietnam veterans. On the one hand, this genealogy has illustrated the growing inclusiveness of the trauma diagnosis – as history has progressed, the definitive parameters of the term "victim" has continually widened its bounds. But on the other, the developments that have been portrayed in this section have each been prompted by the need to give voice to the experiences of a specific group of suffering individuals. Trauma, then – and the "right" to be defined as traumatised – occupies a strange space between inclusiveness and exclusivity, and is defined by contestation on all levels. The criticism inspiring the feminist push for recognition of sexual molestation comes the closest to the issues around inclusivity in relation to trauma that the remainder of this thesis aims to address. Through comparative readings that will seek out literary polyphony, I will discuss representations of postcolonial, genocidal violence alongside the Euro/American perspectives that have dominated the field thus far. The profoundly transcontextual, interdisciplinary history of trauma appears to confirm Young's statement that formalised traumatic disorders are 'glued together by the practices, technologies, and narratives with which [they are] diagnosed, studied, treated and represented by [...] various interests, institutions, and moral arguments'.⁶⁷ Yet, the history of trauma simultaneously reveals an Occidental bias that has contributed, as Ethan Watters observes, to Westernising expectations of responses to trauma.⁶⁸ Whilst each of the groups outlined in this genealogy have harnessed and

⁶⁵ See, for example, Jeffrey Alexander's discussions of Nanjing, India and Pakistan in his monograph, referenced earlier in this chapter.

⁶⁶ Kai Erikson, 'Notes on Trauma and Community' in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 183-199, p. 185.

⁶⁷ Young, p. 5.

⁶⁸ Ethan Watters, *Crazy Like Us: The Globalization of the Western Mind* (London: Robinson Publishing, 2011), p. 1.

claimed ownership of a definition of trauma that has facilitated self-assertion and the acquisition of certain status, Euro/American subjects alone primarily constitute these collectives; and it is a central aim of this thesis to seek a place for non-Euro/American voices amongst them.

Trauma, Race and Post/Colonialism: A Brief Introduction

'Given its Euro-American origins,' ask Jill Bennett, Rosanne Kennedy and this thesis, 'can trauma studies provide a rubric for understanding [...] other traumatic events [...] Does psychoanalytic theory, used so effectively in the study of Holocaust testimony, have purchase in other areas, particularly where survivors are non-European?'⁶⁹ That postcolonial theorists in literary and cultural studies *have* employed Euro/American psychoanalytic theory in their analytical pursuits is clear. Indeed, analysing Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*, Kennedy herself summons the most Freudian of lexicons to claim that Dangarembga's protagonist Tambu struggles 'to break out of a repetition compulsion'⁷⁰ and epitomises 'the condition of belatedness'.⁷¹ This statement, and others like it,⁷² demonstrates how the Euro/American nomenclature of trauma is unquestioningly applied elsewhere. Bennett and Kennedy claim that in its global, interdisciplinary reach, 'trauma studies might be seen [...] as indicative of a new kind of cultural politics [...] a new contemporary identity'.⁷³ But although the theoretical notion of trauma certainly intersects with cultural politics, the collective trauma-based identity Bennett and Kennedy envision ignores the specificity of individual traumatic experiences and the events surrounding them. Whilst the idea of a collective identity might be sentimentally attractive, it is crucial – even whilst searching for commonalities – to be cognisant of differences even within certain cultural traditions. This section, therefore, discusses how Euro/American ideas of trauma have circulated outside of these regions and how trauma theorists outside these bounds might challenge these ideas.

⁶⁹ Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy, 'Introduction' in *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time*, ed. by Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 4.

⁷⁰ Rosanne Kennedy, 'Mortgaged Futures: Trauma, Subjectivity, and the Legacies of Colonialism in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*' in *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 40, No. 1 & 2 (2008), pp. 86-107, p. 87.

⁷¹ Kennedy, p. 88.

⁷² See, for example, David Lloyd, 'Colonial Trauma/Postcolonial Recovery?' in *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, No. 2, Vol. 2, pp. 212-228, p. 213.

⁷³ Bennett and Kennedy, pp. 3-4.

A voice that cannot be ignored in any discussion of the development of the trauma concept outside Euro/American borders is that of W. E. B. Du Bois. Writing at the same time as Freud – though with less international recognition – Du Bois published *The Souls of Black Folk*. Here, Du Bois coined and explained the term “double-consciousness” – “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others”.⁷⁴ ‘One ever feels his twoness’, writes Du Bois, ‘An American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings [...] The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife.’⁷⁵ In addition to describing the ‘vast veil’⁷⁶ he metaphorically theorises as foreclosing the possibility of social integration, Du Bois also notes the ‘poverty [...] ignorance [...] the accumulated sloth and shirking and awkwardness of decades and centuries’ and ‘the red stain of bastardy’⁷⁷ supplementing an already complex, divided black consciousness. It is Du Bois’s realisation of these additionally complicating factors that prompts a statement most relevant to this thesis. ‘A people thus handicapped’, he writes, ‘ought not to be asked to race with the world, but rather allowed to give all its time and thought to its own social problems.’⁷⁸ In addition to suggesting that those outside of it cannot provide mediations on black lived experiences, Du Bois explicitly argues for the specificity of this scenario and the impossibility of comparisons. What is curious, however, is Du Bois’s acknowledgement that whilst he is ‘different’ from his white countrymen, he is also ‘like [...] in heart and life and longing’.⁷⁹ Despite Du Bois’s insistence on experiential specificity, this statement admits some commonality – showcasing a duality of thought regarding race and traumatic experience that provokes this dissertation’s discussion of trauma in relation to culture and individuality.

But whilst Du Bois first used the term “double consciousness” in the context of race, another influential figure introduced the concept to colonial and postcolonial theory. ‘Colonialism,’ writes Frantz Fanon, ‘forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: “In reality, who am I?”’⁸⁰ For Fanon, colonial and postcolonial trauma is a condition intrinsically linked to identity; the identificatory schism engendered by colonialism, he argues, is not a singular experience, but a *state of being*. Writing from the midst of the Algerian war, Fanon both experiences and theorises trauma in a markedly different

⁷⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Soul of Black Folk* (London: Dover Thrift Editions, 1994), pp. 2.

⁷⁵ Du Bois, pp. 2-3.

⁷⁶ Du Bois, p. 2.

⁷⁷ Du Bois, p. 5.

⁷⁸ Du Bois, pp. 5-6.

⁷⁹ Du Bois, p. 2.

⁸⁰ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin Classics, 2001), p. 201.

way from his Euro/American contemporaries. Fanon claims that in the case of colonial trauma, there is no one limit experience; the political and social conditions engendered by racial subjugation create, as Milena Bubenechik points out, 'a continuous accumulation and enhancement of traumatic stressors.'⁸¹ In addition, identity formation in the colonial setting - as delineated in Fanon's work - is far from a stable or unambiguous process; it is, as Homi Bhabha writes, 'a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation.'⁸² For Fanon it is within this state of non-ending transformation that colonial trauma is located. Trauma inheres, he argues, within identities and societies that are constantly in flux. Stating clearly that 'one should investigate the extent to which the conclusions of Freud or of Adler can be applied to the effort to understand the man of color's view of the world',⁸³ Fanon identifies the need for specificity that underpins this dissertation's central questions. He points out that 'Freud and Adler and even the cosmic Jung did not think of the Negro in all their investigations [...] It is too often forgotten that neurosis is not a basic element of human reality.'⁸⁴ Claiming that 'ethnologists are [...] so imbued with the complexes of their own civilization that they are compelled to try and find them duplicated in the peoples they study',⁸⁵ Fanon appears to have been aware – and wary – of the tendency towards the universalisation of Western "norms" of cognitive, emotional and physical responses to trauma that this thesis aims to question.

However, the vacillations, ambiguities and exclusions characterising Euro/American conceptions of trauma also assert themselves in Fanon's writing. In addition to setting up overly-simplistic West/The Rest binaries⁸⁶ that refuse the possibility of productive exchange, Fanon's barely-disguised animosity towards women⁸⁷ results in their traumas being almost entirely excluded from his discussion; traumas which this dissertation specifically seeks to explore. However, in spite of its flaws and Fanon's call for

⁸¹ Milena Bubenechik, *The Trauma of Colonial Condition: in Nervous Conditions and Kiss of the Fur Queen* (Hamburg: Anchor Academic Publishing, 2013), p. 4.

⁸² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2004), p. 2.

⁸³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 109.

⁸⁴ Fanon, *Wretched*, p. 117.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Fanon claims, for example, that 'there is a dialectical substitution when one goes from the psychology of the white man to that of the black [...] In cold actuality, we change worlds' (*BSWM*, p. 116). In addition, Fanon's claim that colonial trauma is a unique experiential condition that cannot be reflected in the European experience is simplistic. Jewish, homosexual, gypsy and Roma victims of the Nazi regime were also subject to several years of violent discrimination before deportations to the concentration camps. In addition, Fanon was educated in France but does not admit these influences in his thinking.

⁸⁷ Black women, in Fanon's world, are inherently insecure and 'must have [...] whiteness at any price' (*BSWM*, p. 34). White women only surface with discussions of the black man's 'quest for white flesh' (*BSWM*, p.59).

caution regarding Western trauma theory in the post/colonial setting, his work has been widely employed to the opposite effect. Despite citing 'Fanon's belief that decolonization of the nation calls for the decolonization of the mind,' Kennedy conducts her analysis of the postcolonial text by 'put[ting] Fanon's analysis into the language of trauma theory.'⁸⁸ In light of her acknowledgement that '[f]or Fanon, language plays a central role in the process of colonization and identity formation',⁸⁹ her decision to superimpose the language of Western trauma theory onto the postcolonial experience is both puzzling and frustrating. She is, however, not alone in disregarding Fanon's reservations about the meeting of Western and postcolonial trauma. Stuart Hall, she insists, is dedicated to 'reading Fanon through a Lacanian lens'⁹⁰ – forcing Fanon's work to take a detour through the Western subject from whom Fanon felt fundamentally other. Furthermore, David Lloyd claims that 'we can map the psychological effects of trauma onto the cultures that undergo colonization. By the same token, the after-effects of colonization for a culture could be held to be identical with those for the traumatized individual.'⁹¹ Here, Lloyd disregards entirely any notion of traumatic uniqueness, conflates the idea of the individual and the community, and displays what Fanon identified above as the desire to re-produce the Westerner's traumatic experience across cultures and societies. In addition, the cartographic metaphor Lloyd employs signals what Craps has identified as 'the uncritical cross-cultural application of psychological concepts developed in the West [that] amounts to a form of cultural imperialism'⁹² within the postcolonial context. The following analysis therefore aims to explore the balance between individual and communal responses to traumatic events by reconsidering the suitability of this methodology and the cultural assumptions that are made in its exercise.

Although this thesis seeks out similarities within reactions to trauma alongside the cultural specificity of their manifestation, it would be injudicious to suggest that culture does not influence trauma's origin, treatment and exhibition. Commenting, for example, on the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka, Craps observes that 'Western trauma counselors [...] trampled local expressions of grief, suffering and healing',⁹³ misinterpreting religiously-motivated acceptance of the disaster as denial. Culture, clearly, is

⁸⁸ Kennedy, p. 91.

⁸⁹ Kennedy, p. 92.

⁹⁰ Kennedy, p. 95.

⁹¹ David Lloyd, *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008), p. 24.

⁹² Stef Craps, 'Beyond Eurocentrism: Trauma Theory in the Global Age' in *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*, ed. by Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant and Robert Eaglestone (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 45-63, p. 48.

⁹³ Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*, pp. 22-23

something that cannot be ignored in discussions of trauma – something to which the many texts analysing traumatic events around the world attest.⁹⁴ But rather than relying upon the cultural assumptions regarding the reception of trauma outside of Europe that critics such as David Lloyd employ, this thesis asks how literature produced by those who survived catastrophic state-sanctioned violence testifies to the existence, and specific character, of their trauma; allowing these writers to delineate their experiences on their own terms.

Despite their geographical distance from Europe and historical distance from the Holocaust, South African psychologists Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela and Chris N. van der Merwe notably state that ‘our arguments are linked to Viktor Frankl’s plea for a “tragic optimism”’.⁹⁵ This invocation of a Holocaust survivor intimates a perceived sense of commonality between Holocaust and apartheid violence; a mutuality confirmed by their definition of trauma. Arguing that ‘[t]he experience of trauma impairs the capacity to register events fully as they occurred’, stating that trauma is ‘loss: loss of control, loss of one’s identity, loss of the ability to remember, and the loss of language’ and noting the ‘repetitive intrusion of traumatic memory’,⁹⁶ Gobodo-Madikizela confidently applies the Euro/American nomenclature of trauma to the South African context. In so doing, Gobodo-Madikizela not only endorses the dominant trauma theory canon, but seemingly rejects the need for racial specificity that Fanon and Du Bois appear to require in any evaluation of non-European trauma. As with most discussions surrounding trauma, however, this position is not without contest. Asked whether or not PTSD is a helpful category in South Africa, Carmen Low-Shang of the Cape Town Trauma Centre (CTTC) answers ‘no [...] it [trauma] becomes more complex because of the types of communities they [the

⁹⁴ See, for example, *Memory, Truth and Justice in Contemporary Latin America*, ed. by Roberta Villalón (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), *Psychoanalysis in China*, ed. by David E. Scharff and Sverre Varvin (London: Karnac Books, 2014), Paul U. Unschuld, *The Fall and Rise of China: Healing the Trauma of History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), *Cambodia’s Hidden Scars: Trauma Psychology in the Wake of the Khmer Rouge: An Edited Volume on Cambodia’s Mental Health*, ed. by Beth Van Schaack, Daryn Reicherter and Youk Chhang (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2011), *Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts*, ed. by Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (New York: Routledge, 2017) and *Trauma and Public Memory*, ed. by Jane Goodall and Christopher Lee (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

⁹⁵ Chris N. van der Merwe and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, *Narrating Our Healing: Perspectives on Working Through Trauma* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), p. viii.

⁹⁶ van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, p. vii.

CTTC's clients] live in.⁹⁷ Referring to the high rates of domestic violence,⁹⁸ gang violence⁹⁹ and widespread poverty¹⁰⁰ in South Africa, Low-Shang – echoing Fanon – implies that trauma is a state of existence for many black South Africans. Indeed, whilst her colleague Ntombi Mcoyi comments that 'post-traumatic stress disorder [...] has become a way of life, of surviving' and that many of their clients 'would not see themselves as being traumatized at all',¹⁰¹ Miriam Fredericks states that alcohol abuse, insomnia and violent behaviours are not reactions to, or symptoms of, trauma, but coping mechanisms for living within it.¹⁰² The CTTC counselors also make repeated references to the differences between Europe and South Africa. Low-Shang, for example, points to a treatment programme 'that deals more specifically with recent traumatic events, in terms of the more European idea of trauma as an event',¹⁰³ whilst Fredericks – discussing the curative properties of faith – notes that 'in Europe people have become more secular, but here in South Africa the faith base still exists.'¹⁰⁴ From the perspective of these practitioners, South African trauma exists on a different plane to that of any other; an opinion shared by South African social psychologist Don Foster. Acknowledging the evaluative limitations of the DSM-IV, Foster employs the term 'continuous traumatic stress syndrome' to the stress experienced by South Africans 'just to differentiate it from the European notion.'¹⁰⁵ 'The Europeans', he notes, 'medicalized everything. For us it was always political, and they wanted to medicalize it.'¹⁰⁶ But in addition to implying the unsuitability of European approaches to trauma to violence of this kind, Foster also points out the *range* of responses to the turbulent apartheid years: 'many [...] glued themselves together during those years and came out quite resilient [...] some of them have literally fallen apart'.¹⁰⁷ Lending credence to this dissertation's call to attend the specificity of traumatic events, Foster argues

⁹⁷ 'Political Violence, Children, and Trauma Response – An Interview with Miriam Fredericks, Ntombi, MCoysi, Gugu Shabalala, Nicole Paulsen, and Carmen Low-Shang' in *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in South Africa: Interviews*, ed. by Ewald Mengel, Michela Borzaga and Karin Orantes (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2010), pp. 75-102, p. 86-87.

⁹⁸ For an excellent discussion of gender-based violence in the public and private spheres of South African society, see Shahana Rasool Bassadien and Tessa Hochfeld, 'Across the Public/Private Boundary: Contextualising Domestic Violence in South Africa' in *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, No. 66 (2005) pp. 4–15.

⁹⁹ For statistics and history, see Gary Kynoch, "Urban Violence in South Africa" in *We Are Fighting the World: A History of the Marashea Gangs in South Africa, 1947–1999* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2005) pp. 1–11.

¹⁰⁰ See Julian May and Andy Norton, "A Difficult Life": The Perceptions and Experience of Poverty in South Africa' in *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 41, No. 1/3 (1997), pp. 95–118.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹⁰⁵ 'But Even Bodies Never Speak Pure Languages – An Interview with Don Foster' in *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in South Africa: Interviews*, ed. by Ewald Mengel, Michela Borzaga and Karin Orantes (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2010), pp. 103-126, p. 106.

¹⁰⁶ Foster, p. 107.

¹⁰⁷ Foster, p. 107.

that 'three quarters of the world in the current climate [...] live permanently in traumatic circumstances [...] So, for a great many people this Western construct of PTSD as an event doesn't make sense.'¹⁰⁸

But whilst there is opposition to, and endorsement of, Euro/American notions of trauma in the South African context, there is a theoretical faction that remains ambivalent. One such voice belongs to psychologist Ashraf Kagee. Whilst critiquing the Euro-American/African dichotomy that Foster mentions above,¹⁰⁹ Kagee acknowledges that 'the DSM diagnostic category of post-traumatic stress disorder is probably limited in capturing the experience of people who live under conditions of continuous trauma.' 'However,' he continues, 'there is no such category, so under these circumstances we need to [...] go by the diagnostic criteria that have been agreed upon by the community of scientists'.¹¹⁰ But Kagee also draws his own conclusions regarding trauma and PTSD in the South African context based on his own fieldwork. Whilst admitting that PTSD is 'to some extent a construction', he finds that many of his patients 'do experience [...] avoidance, and intrusion, and hyper-arousal' – findings that lead him to categorically state, 'I don't think it's appropriate to discount the DSM useology in the context of traumatization in South African society.'¹¹¹ Kagee's suggestion that ideas relating to trauma are capable of transcending cultural and geographical borders is a fundamental concept to this thesis, which asks how literature, too, might perform this very function.

Following the genocide of 1994, many studies have attempted to identify symptoms of PTSD in the Rwandan population as outlined in the DSM-IV¹¹² - studies that have notably been undertaken by non-Rwandan psychologists and anthropologists. But whilst they are far less numerous, Rwandan practitioners undertaking fieldwork have largely stayed within this evaluative framework. Naasson Munyandamutsa et al, for example, conclude in their study that the 'prevalence of PTSD was estimated

¹⁰⁸ Foster, p. 124.

¹⁰⁹ 'Testing the DSM Model in South Africa – An Interview with Ashraf Kagee' in *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in South Africa: Interviews*, ed. by Ewald Mengel, Michela Borzaga and Karin Orantes (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2010), pp. 127-136, p. 127.

¹¹⁰ Kagee, p. 129.

¹¹¹ Kagee, p. 128.

¹¹² See, for example, Phuong N. Pham, Harvey M. Weinstein and Timothy Longman, 'Trauma and PTSD Symptoms in Rwanda' in *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 292, No. 5 (2004), pp. 602-612, Thomas Elbert and Heide Rieder, 'Rwanda – Lasting Imprints of a Genocide: Trauma, Mental Health and Psychosocial Conditions in Survivors, Former Prisoners and their Children' in *Conflict and Health*, Vol. 7, No. 6 (2013), pp. 1-13, and Caroline E. Sakai and Suzanne M. Connolly, 'Treatment of PTSD in Rwandan Child Genocide Survivors Using Thought Field Therapy' in *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2010), pp. 41-50.

to be 26.1% [...] Somatic symptoms such as hiccups, fainting and loss of speech or hearing delineated a specific pattern of post-traumatic stress syndrome [...] PTSD remains a significant public health problem in Rwanda'.¹¹³ Specifically analysing adolescent survivors of the genocide in 2005, Vincent Sezibera et al – conducting their study using questionnaires in Kinyarwanda in group sessions – found that 71.6% of this population sample met the DSM-IV criteria for PTSD.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, discussing the fact that PTSD levels remained high years after the genocide, Sezibera et al compare their study to Amir and Lev-Wiesel's research which found that Holocaust survivors were still displaying PTSD symptoms after 55 years.¹¹⁵ In addition to implying an equivalence between the two genocides which directly opposes the European/African dichotomy many of the South African psychologists discussed above insist upon, Munyandamutsa and Sezibera's employment of the DSM-IV criteria for PTSD suggests that there is a strong basis for the kind of comparison this dissertation's methodology employs based on evident commonalities in trauma's symptomology across cultural lines.

Although these studies suggest similarities between Rwandan responses to trauma and those found elsewhere, there is also compelling research pointing to contextual and responsive specificities. In their study of PTSD-related panic attacks in Rwandan widows, Athanase Hagengimana et al conclude that '[s]omatically focused panic-attack subtypes seem to constitute a key response to trauma in the Rwandan population', and warn that 'future studies of traumatized non-Western populations should carefully assess [...] somatically focused panic attacks'.¹¹⁶ In addition to highlighting the need to account for gender within discussions of traumatic response – something this dissertation aims to consider carefully – the study's conclusion emphatically insists that the Rwandan case provides a prime example of 'a culturally specific catastrophic cognition'.¹¹⁷ Hagengimana explains that 'Rwandans often interpret the shortness of breath during a panic attack to indicate [...] the cultural syndrome known as

¹¹³ Naasson Munyandamutsa, Paul Mahoro Nkubamugisha, Marianne Gex-Fabry and Ariel Eytan, 'Mental and Physical Health in Rwanda 14 Years after the Genocide' in *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, Vol. 47, No. 11 (2012), pp. 1753-1761, p. 1753.

¹¹⁴ Vincent Sezibera, Nady Van Broeck and Pierre Philippot, 'Intervening on Persistent Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Rumination-Focused Cognitive and Behavioral Therapy in a Population of Young Survivors of the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda' in *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy: An International Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (2009), pp. 107-113.

¹¹⁵ M. Amir and R. Lev-Wiesel, 'Time Does Not Heal all Wounds: Quality of Life and Psychological Distress of People who Survived the Holocaust as Children 55 Years Later' in *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Vol. 16 (2003), pp. 295-299.

¹¹⁶ Athanase Hagengimana, Devon Hinton, Bruce Bird, Mark Pollack and Roger K. Pitman, 'Somatic Panic-Attack Equivalents in a Community Sample of Rwandan Widows who Survived the 1994 Genocide' in *Psychiatry Research*, Vol. 117 (2003), pp. 1 – 9, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Hagengimana, p. 7.

'Ihahamuka', translated as 'lungs without breath', and adds that '[i]n the Rwandan culture, shortness of breath may be interpreted as caused by an ancestor who never received a proper burial [...] returning as a spirit to strangle a living relative as punishment for not having conducted the necessary rites'.¹¹⁸ For many surviving Tutsi who do not know where the bodies of their murdered relatives are located, this idea generates genuine fear – a fear that, whilst perhaps appearing to demonstrate a symptomatology associated with the Euro/American definition of PTSD, is actually motivated by Rwandan cultural beliefs. It is also important to note that in Rwanda, the genocide's perpetrators often continue to live amongst their victims' families. Memory of the genocide, therefore, never becomes invisible, curtailing the possibility of healing the trauma of its occurrence in a definitive way. With children struggling with the loss of parents and a country still under some economic strain, the trauma of the genocide itself is not the only difficulty Rwanda is currently encountering. In addition, therefore, to responding to Hagengimana's declaration for the need to 'elucidate not only universal responses but also culture-specific responses to trauma',¹¹⁹ the following thesis aim to explore the ways that its corpus relates the trauma of state-sanctioned violence to the events that come after it. Interrogating the questions these texts raise about the relationship of gender, community, culture, religion and identity to the traumatic experience, this dissertation aims to further investigate the argument between universality and individuality that trauma inspires.

What this section has explained is that much like the ideas that have contributed to European trauma theory, postcolonial conceptions of trauma – and the people, cultures and spaces it affects – are contested, ambiguous and unsure of the universality or specificity required by their evaluative methods. The challenge of this project lies in its exploration of how these texts demonstrate the experience of trauma on a human level whilst remaining attenuated to the cultural situation of each of the case studies it has selected; both elements, this thesis maintains, are crucial components of how trauma happens. In attempting to rise to this challenge, this thesis acknowledges that ambivalence must play a role in our understanding of trauma to accommodate the complexity of the meeting between trauma, people and culture – an ambivalence that calls into question both Fanon's insistence of the singular nature of

¹¹⁸ Hagengimana, p. 7.

¹¹⁹ Hagengimana, p. 7.

non-European trauma and the methodology of those theorists who have unquestioningly appropriated Euro/American trauma theory in the postcolonial context.

Writing Trauma

Just as Euro/American trauma theory has historically privileged the voices and needs of certain groups at certain times, specific modes of representing trauma in literature have been similarly favoured. Noticeably, the texts that have become representative of the trauma genre are those that mimic popular understandings of psychic trauma: texts that simulate crisis, void and psychic agony. That trauma *must* be represented is proposed by Terrence Des Pres, who insists that 'survival and bearing witness become reciprocal acts.'¹²⁰ Though the following analysis will challenge the assumption of an inescapable post-traumatic testimonial compulsion, testimony is a definitive element of violent histories. It was in the early 1990s that Shoshana Felman claimed to be inhabiting an 'Age of Testimony',¹²¹ whilst Elie Wiesel famously stated at a similar time that 'if the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the Epistle, the Renaissance the Sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony.'¹²² Despite their age, these comments testify to a social presence of testimony that persists to this day. However, trauma's ambiguity has polarised theorists' notions of how best to literarily represent it. Although the debates are many, contemporary ideas related to trauma's literary representation fall primarily into two camps: trauma's inherently non-referential "unspeakability", and the opposing view that the writing of trauma *must* be referential to enable the authentic writing of history – notions spearheaded by Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra, respectively. 'If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience', writes Caruth, 'it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing'.¹²³ In Caruth's Freudian-inspired work, trauma is 'experience[d] too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known'.¹²⁴ Caruth's work has been productive, particularly in illuminating the dialogism between psychoanalysis and literary studies. This

¹²⁰ Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (New York: Pocket Books, 1977), p. 32.

¹²¹ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 165.

¹²² Elie Wiesel, 'The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration' in *Dimensions of the Holocaust* (Illinois: Evanston, 1990), p. 7.

¹²³ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 3. Hereafter, references taken from this work will be indicated by the abbreviation 'UE'.

¹²⁴ Caruth, *UE*, p. 4.

thesis, however, questions the theoretical elision between loss and lack that motivates Caruth's writing. The unprecedented nature of the Holocaust presented a problem for writers and literary theorists; the overwhelming reality of what had transpired 'destroyed', as Geoffrey Hartman writes, 'the very instruments by which it could have been measured.'¹²⁵ Subsequently, as noted by scholars such as Giorgio Agamben, aporia, fragmentation and motifs of loss became exemplary modes of representing trauma and the voids it created within writing. Convictions of trauma's spectral nature are evidenced by the concept of haunting that has become all but synonymous with it;¹²⁶ a haunting which suggests that to encounter violence is invariably to yield to passivity in the face of trauma itself. Theoretically depicted as an aggressor of its own kind, muting the survivor and insisting upon the ineffability of its own experience, trauma is portrayed as contributing to victimhood whilst attending it in the wake of violence. Put simply, popular ideas of trauma suggest that rather than being in control of trauma, trauma is in control of us. The Holocaust may indeed, as Felman and Laub claim, be 'a trauma we consider as the watershed of our times'.¹²⁷ However, the orthodoxies that have developed in response to it have often ignored variations of Holocaust experiences whilst constructing a specific framework that shapes the way people tell their stories. Comparatively analysing the narrative methodologies of its literary corpus, this dissertation seeks to interrogate the presence of these orthodoxies in the context of world literature. Noting and evaluating the narrative aesthetics these texts employ, this thesis asks if and how writing points to similarity or variation – or a combination of both – within literary representations of trauma in a global context.

In addition to motivating the queries of this thesis, the question of what literature offers to the representation of trauma has inspired much critical discussion. For Caruth, trauma is 'not locatable in

¹²⁵ Geoffrey Hartman, *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 1.

¹²⁶ The pervasive link between trauma and haunting is evidenced by the enormous amount of writing that links the two concepts. See, for example: Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), Gabriele Rippl et al, eds., *Haunted Narratives: Life Writing in an Age of Trauma* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), Joanne Lipson Freed, 'Telling the Traumas of History' in *Haunting Encounters: The Ethics of Reading Across Boundaries of Difference* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2017), pp. 69-98, Anne Whitehead, 'The Past as Revenant: Trauma and Haunting in Pat Barker's *Another World*' in *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp. 12-29, Elizabeth Hirsch, 'Haunting Questions: A Response to "Trauma and Rhetoric" in *JAC*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2005), pp. 209-212, Carl Gutiérrez-Jones, 'Haunting Presences and the New Western History: Reading Repetition, Negotiating Trauma' in *Arizona Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (1997), pp. 135-151, Mairi Emma Neeves, 'Apartheid Haunts: Postcolonial Trauma in Lisa Fugard's *Skinner's Drift*' in *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 40, Nos. 1 & 2 (2008), pp. 108-126, Magdalena Walkigórska, 'Healing by Haunting: Jewish Ghosts in Contemporary Polish Literature' in *Prooftexts*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (2014), pp. 207-231.

¹²⁷ Felman and Laub, p. xiv.

the simple violent or original event [...] but rather in the way that its very assimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on.¹²⁸ Since trauma, in her conception, inevitably contains a latency, attempts at its representation are necessarily literary as the direct referentiality on which documentary historiography relies is stymied by the way in which she claims trauma can never be fully known. Caruth insists that a truthful telling of the past that doesn't betray the severity of its trauma relies on 'the very indirectness of this telling'¹²⁹ and the way that these accounts reveal 'what remains unknown in our very actions and our language.'¹³⁰ Indeed, her definition of history as 'the *story* [emphasis mine] of the unbearable nature of an event and the *story* [emphasis mine] of the unbearable nature of its survival'¹³¹ is itself revealing of the literariness the indirectness of this approach requires. Traditional historiography, as LaCapra points out, is de-aestheticized, aspiring towards referential transparency: it aims to 'professionalize history under the banner of objectivity and to distance, if not dissociate, it from literature [...] [it is] subordinated to content in the form of facts, their narration, or their analysis.'¹³² Countering historiographic writing, continues LaCapra, is 'radical constructivism': a form of historical narration in which 'referential statements making truth claims [...] are of restricted, indeed marginal significance [...] Essential are performative, figurative, aesthetic, rhetorical, ideological and political factors that "construct" stories.'¹³³ Literary testimony, however, can be located between historiography and radical constructivism; conflating its literary character with its value as historical record, literary testimony makes truth claims in a way that is uniquely linked to the recall associated with traumatic experience. Laub describes a Holocaust survivor's testimony whose description of 'four chimneys going up in flames' during a Jewish resistance effort conflicted with the facts of this uprising in which only one chimney was destroyed.¹³⁴ Despite many historians questioning the validity of her testimony over this discrepancy, Laub notes that one psychoanalyst strongly disagreed, insisting that the woman was testifying:

not to the number of chimneys blown up, but to something else, more radical, more crucial: the reality of an unimaginable occurrence [...] to an event that broke all the compelling frame of Auschwitz, where Jewish armed

¹²⁸ Caruth, *UE*, p. 4.

¹²⁹ Caruth, *UE*, p. 27.

¹³⁰ Caruth, *UE*, p. 4.

¹³¹ Caruth, *UE*, p. 7.

¹³² Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 2-3.

¹³³ LaCapra, p. 1.

¹³⁴ Felman and Laub, p. 59.

revolts just did not happen [...] She testified to the breakage of a framework.
That was historical truth.¹³⁵

The implication that a break with the equilibrium of normality is a version of truth that transcends the in/accuracy of evidentiary detail is particularly fitting for testimonies to genocide and mass violence, events that challenge existing frames of historical – or indeed, literary – reference. Allowing description of a historical moment's character and presenting perspectives that master historical narratives may exclude, literary testimony is an essential narrative mode for the writing of atrocity. This is a theoretical position supported by Hayden White, who states that 'our notion of what constitutes realistic representation must be revised to take account of experiences that are unique to our century and for which older modes of representation have proven inadequate.'¹³⁶ The voice that emerges in the testimonial account, argues White, is the "middle voice" – explained by LaCapra as 'the in-between voice of undecidability and the unavailability or radical ambivalence of clear-cut positions.'¹³⁷ Describing personal memory of historical events, literary testimony represents – as the very condition of its transmission – a mode that can be truthfully referential *and* narratively flexible; a mode that finds its voice in the aesthetic possibilities that literature houses.

Caruth's claim that language can only bear witness through its failure to represent and her conception of trauma as that which is not known have been criticised by her contemporaries.¹³⁸ This thesis, however, specifically challenges her claim that writing about trauma demonstrates 'the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead [...] to the encounter with another.'¹³⁹ The promise of cross-cultural engagement that inheres in this statement seems to be forgotten in the analysis that follows it. Resnais and Duras's *Hiroshima mon amour*, claims Caruth, is emblematic of the cultural bridging trauma makes possible. Yet, the cross-cultural interaction that she goes on to describe appears profoundly non-dialogic; as Craps has noted, 'we only ever get to hear the French woman's story [...] Hiroshima is reduced to a stage on which the drama of a European

¹³⁵ Felman and Laub, p. 60.

¹³⁶ Hayden White, 'Historical Emplotment and the Story of Truth' in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* ed. by Saul Friedlander (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 37-53, p. 52.

¹³⁷ LaCapra, p. 20.

¹³⁸ Ruth Leys is perhaps Caruth's most vocal critic. In addition to suggesting that Caruth represents the problematic 'postmodernist tendency to appropriate psychoanalysis for discussions of the trauma of the Holocaust' (p. 270), Leys criticises Caruth's 'extremely forced reading' (p. 283) of Tancred and Clorinda and claims that she 'is attempting not to provide a genealogy of the concept of psychic trauma but to use the notion of trauma as a critical concept in order to support her performative theory of language' (p. 275).

¹³⁹ Caruth, *UE*, p. 8.

woman's struggle to come to terms with her personal trauma can be played out; the Japanese man is of interest primarily as a catalyst and facilitator of this process.¹⁴⁰ But whilst Caruth's analysis may have fallen short of her own promise of cross-cultural connection based upon the mutuality of trauma, this dissertation aims to exercise this very claim. Using literature as a platform, this dissertation seeks to explore the narrative dynamics of cross-cultural witnessing and evaluate the potential for multidirectional identification through narrative.

Furthermore, this thesis challenges Caruth's insistence that trauma is the 'very incomprehensibility' of the traumatic event – 'the way that its violence has not yet been fully known.'¹⁴¹ Caruth's work relies on the conception of trauma as the missed encounter with history that repeats itself, unbearably, for the survivor. But what happens, I ask here, if we consider the possibility that trauma is *not* missed – that it can be utterly *known* at the moment of its happening? This line of questioning takes its motivation from recent developments in studies of traumatic memory. In his relatively unstudied monograph *Remembering Trauma*, Richard J. McNally swiftly refutes Freud's – and, by extension, Caruth's – most fundamental ideas regarding the reception and mediation of trauma by stating that 'people remember horrific experiences all too well' and claims that although 'people sometimes do not think about disturbing events for long periods of time [...] a failure to think about something does not entail an inability to remember it.'¹⁴² The following analysis therefore explores how literature suggests the way that trauma is received, recalled or forgotten across cultures, and whether these methodologies account for a culturally diverse demographic.

According to George Steiner, language 'is the root and bark of our experience'. We live,' he says, 'inside the act of discourse.'¹⁴³ Any compulsion to represent traumatic experience is the simultaneous call to language, the semiotic system of signs and references on which we rely. Violence, however – especially the scale of violence categorising genocide and mass catastrophe – wounds language; 'the ineffable', as Steiner insists, 'lies beyond the frontiers of the word.'¹⁴⁴ In addition, therefore, to asking how language and form might gesture towards the catastrophic, this thesis also asks what role silence plays

¹⁴⁰ Craps, p. 18.

¹⁴¹ Caruth, *UE*, p. 6.

¹⁴² McNally, p. 2.

¹⁴³ George Steiner, *Language and Silence* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 30.

¹⁴⁴ Steiner, p. 30.

in trauma narratives – asking how silence might not preclude witnessing, but represent another of its forms. Laub claims that the Holocaust ‘produced no witnesses.’¹⁴⁵ Read in conjunction with his previous statement that ‘one has to know one’s buried truth in order to be able to live one’s life,’¹⁴⁶ Laub seems to indicate that the survivor is caught in a web of abstraction in which the compulsion to testify is inhibited by the impossibility of witnessing – not, as might have been claimed, through the inadequacies of language, but because, in his words, the Holocaust is ‘an event without a witness.’¹⁴⁷ The silence engendered by the impossibility of witnessing, according to Laub, is due to several factors. In terms of perpetrators, the ‘delusional ideology’ under which they operated ‘eliminated the possibility of an unviolated, unencumbered, and thus sane, point of reference.’¹⁴⁸ For victims, says Laub, ‘the very circumstance of *being inside the event* [...] made unthinkable the very notion that a witness could exist [...] someone who could [...] provide an independent frame of reference through which the event could be observed.’¹⁴⁹ Despite earlier defending the testimony of a woman whose recall of four chimneys blowing up during a revolt did not accord with the documentary record of just one being destroyed, Laub seems to imply here that only a silent witnessing – a witnessing to the “unsayability” of experience – is a viable possibility. Claiming that the Holocaust ‘extinguished philosophically the very possibility of address, the possibility of appealing, or of turning to, another’,¹⁵⁰ Laub implies the implicit connection between survival and deafening, self-defeating silence; a connection that this thesis aims to interrogate on its own comparative terms.

From a psychoanalytic perspective – and it is primarily psychoanalysis from which literary theories of testimony derive – the survivor’s inability or reticence to narrate their past is also, in Caruth’s words, a result of a trauma so severe ‘it simultaneously defies and demands our witness.’¹⁵¹ Put simply, survivor silence may result from the impossibility of knowing, clearly, the circumstances of a traumatic event that defeats all comprehensive function at the moment of its occurrence. Survivor silence may sometimes be the simple result of bewilderment and the inability to access painful, repressed memories despite the passage of time. In addition, testifying can be understood as a dangerous pursuit: as Laub states,

¹⁴⁵ Felman and Laub, p. 80.

¹⁴⁶ Felman and Laub, p. 78.

¹⁴⁷ Felman and Laub, p. 80.

¹⁴⁸ Felman and Laub, p. 81.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Felman and Laub, p. 82

¹⁵¹ Caruth, *UE*, p. 5. This claim is itself contentious, as historical evidence demonstrates the opposite being true; many Holocaust survivors wanted to talk about their experiences, but found no willing or suitable listeners.

'the act of telling might itself become severely traumatizing, if the price of speaking is *re-living*.'¹⁵² Understood as such, survivor silence can be read as a defence mechanism – the avoidance of the threat of new violence and the repeated encounter with catastrophe. But there is, of course, the possibility that silence is an indicator of resilience; a marker of the mastery of the very memory Caruth designates as too traumatic to be fully known. Silence, however, is not simply the absence of speech; it also resides in the gaps and spaces within it. Comparatively analysing its corpus, this dissertation aims to interrogate the parts of those histories that remain unspoken to question the multiple possibilities that may motivate these silences.

Importantly, Laub's warning of the dangers surrounding testimony reveals the inherent reciprocity it requires. 'If one talks about the trauma without being truly heard or truly listened to,' he writes, 'the telling might itself be lived as a return of the trauma.'¹⁵³ Testimony is, therefore, an ultimately collaborative production that relies upon the listener as a conditional element of its existence. Laub continues to claim the hazardous nature of listening to traumatic histories. 'The listener to trauma,' he writes, 'comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself.'¹⁵⁴ Whilst this problematic notion of overidentification will be discussed in more detail in specific upcoming chapters, not all critics claim its necessity. Robert Eaglestone writes that 'one of the most important characteristics of the genre of testimony stems from the reader's experience of identification.'¹⁵⁵ Yet, he argues, testimony 'prohibit[s] identification on epistemological grounds (a reader cannot become, or become identified, with the narrator of a testimony: any such identification is an illusion) and on ethical grounds (a reader should not become identified with a narrator of a testimony, as it reduces and 'normalizes' [sic] or consumes the otherness of a narrator's experience).'¹⁵⁶ Thus, he concludes, '[t]estimony [...] is a genre which displays a paradoxical 'doubleness': the form leads to identification while the context and surrounding material lead away from it'¹⁵⁷ – a duality, he argues, that is a definitive characteristic of the testimonial genre. The maintenance of distance – in other words, the *resistance* to overidentification – between survivor

¹⁵² Felman and Laub, p. 67.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Felman and Laub, p. 57.

¹⁵⁵ Robert Eaglestone, 'Identification and the Genre of Testimony' in *Immigrants and Minorities: Historical Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora*, Vol. 21, No. 1-2 (2002), pp. 117-140, p. 117.

¹⁵⁶ Eaglestone, pp. 118-119.

¹⁵⁷ Eaglestone, p. 119.

and reader is crucial to the viability of testimony itself. Laub claims that the listener must become 'the *enabler* [emphasis mine] of the testimony – the one who triggers its initiation, as well as the guardian of its process and of its momentum.'¹⁵⁸ Yet his statement that 'the listener has to feel the victim's victories, defeats, and silences, know them from within, so that they can assume the form of testimony'¹⁵⁹ makes the success of testimony contingent on a overidentification that, due to the all-consuming empathy Laub advocates would inhibit the listener's ability to react; so incapacitated would they be by knowing and experiencing the survivor's experience 'from within.' The vicarious victimhood that Laub works towards here is deeply problematic: in addition to implying the assimilation of a specific trauma into lives that can never know it, this conflation complicates the status of victim and undermines survivor's experiences. In addition to motivating this dissertation's chapter on intergenerational trauma, the concern of elision also forces the asking of one of its central questions: how do these writers' uses of various narrative techniques invite readers' responses to these texts? How – if at all – are readers implicated into these stories, and what is our role in reading them? Exploring the possibility that listening, like speech and silence, is an active, political and culturally-motivated act, the following analysis probes the relationship between the individual bearing witness and the audience that transforms that narrative into testimony.

Whilst Caruth sees the value of literature in the representation of trauma stemming from its non-referentiality, South African novelist André Brink identifies something quite different. 'Over so many centuries', he writes, 'literature has done so much, has probed so deeply into all kinds of human situations, and has developed so many different forms that it seems almost uniquely able to cope with the anxiety, with the anger, with uncertainty, with all these aspects thrown up by turmoil'.¹⁶⁰ Departing from the idea of literature's reliance on lack in the post-traumatic context, Brink highlights the medium's interrogative character – a quality that refuses to only highlight what is *not*, but also insists on demonstrating what *is*. Rather than claiming the need for literature to produce new forms to accommodate trauma narratives, Brink implies that literature's strength in this context is drawn from the functions it has performed before. But in addition to representing an alternative perspective on the

¹⁵⁸ Felman and Laub, p. 58.

¹⁵⁹ Felman and Laub, p. 58.

¹⁶⁰ 'Articulating the Inarticulate – An Interview with André Brink' in *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in South Africa: Interviews*, ed. by Ewald Mengel, Michela Borzaga and Karin Orantes (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2010), pp. 3-18, p. 5.

literary representation of trauma, Brink's comment also indicates literature's expansive nature; a characteristic of the medium that it is itself one of the bases of this dissertation's commitment to analysing collective and individual responses to trauma in a global context through literature.

Whilst Brink hails literature's representative capabilities, Njabulo Ndebele recognises the important place of narrative in South African life. 'In few countries in the contemporary world', he writes, 'do we have a living example of people reinventing themselves through narrative.'¹⁶¹ Referring to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Ndebele claims the restorative qualities of memory and storytelling. Whilst evaluating this specific claim regarding the TRC's function is outside the remit of this introduction, what *is* relevant here is the implication that narrative – perceived by many of the theorists above as a dangerous, potentially retraumatising pursuit – is a mode of regeneration. 'Remembering', writes Andrew van der Vlies, 'relates to memory, but also [...] to reconstitution or *re*-membering.'¹⁶² Brink himself concurs, commenting that 'memory alone cannot be the answer. Hence my argument in favour of an imagined rewriting of history, or, more precisely, of the role of the imagination in the dialectic between past and present, individual and society.'¹⁶³ Whilst acknowledging the omissions and silences inevitably characterising the TRC, what is interesting here is Brink's insistence on narrative as memory. Whilst Caruth and many of her contemporaries claim that memories of trauma defy the possibility of narrative, Brink's comment sheds important light on the specific way that trauma literature functions as both memory of the past and as an enabler of a future in the South African space.

The South African literary context is not without its own convictions of trauma's ineffability. Shane Graham, for example, claims that apartheid represents 'a past that is plagued by paradoxes [...] whose horrors elude all attempts at representation'.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, there are many theorists who base their evaluations of South African literary texts on Euro/American notions of trauma – Tim Woods, for example, relies on the idea of having to "work through" trauma in his monograph engaging closely with Freud and LaCapra throughout, despite acknowledging that '[p]athologising African writing runs the risk

¹⁶¹ Njabulo Ndebele, 'Memory, Metaphor, and the Triumph of Narrative' in *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*, ed. by Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 19-28, p. 27.

¹⁶² Andrew van der Vlies, 'On the Ambiguities of Narrative and of History: Writing (about) the Past in Recent South African Literary Criticism' in *Journal of South African Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (2008), pp. 949-961, p. 951.

¹⁶³ Brink, p. 37.

¹⁶⁴ Shane Graham, 'The Truth Commission and Postapartheid Literature in South Africa' in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2003), pp. 11-30, p. 12.

of essentialising it'.¹⁶⁵ This approach, claims van der Vlies, problematically insists on filtering representations of African suffering through a framework recognisable to Western readers and 'runs the risk of reducing all literary production to the products of therapeutic process'.¹⁶⁶ Reflecting this dissertation's focus on the relationship between trauma, literature and culture, this comment emphasises the need to analyse texts in the context of their cultural production and not to assume the presence and manifestation of trauma in the ways in which they are most commonly understood. It is Zoe Wicomb, however, who urges the need for yet more specificity in the analysis of South African literature. In addition to pointing out how low literacy rates in South Africa might diminish the narrative impact of postapartheid texts, Wicomb notes that '[t]o speak of South Africans is a confusing business [...] South Africans have always been, and still are made up of separate racial constituencies, and trauma itself would be manifested in different ways.'¹⁶⁷ Whilst the trauma of apartheid unites South Africans, Wicomb's comment makes clear that an author's positioning has important ramifications for the way in which trauma is presented through writing – something that this dissertation's focus on genre and narrative technique aims to acknowledge, explore and discuss.

Whilst pointing out that 'pain is relatively understudied in African literary criticism', Zoe Norridge subsequently explains this reluctance: 'many critics', she writes, 'perceive [...] literary pain narratives as yet another homogenising Western stereotype of Africa as an 'underdeveloped' nexus of violence and death.'¹⁶⁸ It is perhaps an unwillingness to propagate such a reductive stereotype that has facilitated the dominance of Euro/American theory and literature in relation to the study of trauma and suffering. However, the refusal of recognition is the simultaneous silencing of non-Euro/American experiences of trauma. This dissertation tackles this refusal by bringing African narratives into direct conversation with the Holocaust writing that has for so long defined them from without. It is important to note, however, that an unwillingness to discuss African histories of pain comes from an authorial, as well as critical faction of South African literary society. 'As far as re-visiting apartheid itself is concerned', claims Brink, 'I think most writers are sick and tired of it.'¹⁶⁹ Wicomb, echoing Brink's statement of authorial fatigue,

¹⁶⁵ Tim Woods, *African Pasts: Memory and History in African Literatures* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 35.

¹⁶⁶ van der Vlies, p. 958.

¹⁶⁷ 'Washing Dirty Linen in Public: An Interview with Zoë Wicomb' in *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in South Africa: Interviews*, ed. by Ewald Mengel, Michela Borzaga and Karin Orantes (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2010), pp. 19-29, p. 20.

¹⁶⁸ Zoe Norridge, *Perceiving Pain In African Literature* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 4-5.

¹⁶⁹ Brink, p. 15

states that many young South Africans 'barely know the history of apartheid [...] perhaps we should now, twenty years later, lay it to rest.'¹⁷⁰ Their words may be understood as representing a reticence and attempt at deflection grounded in the same concerns as their critical counterparts. However, the continued literary outputs of these writers suggest that contemporary South African writing now has another purpose to serve; a purpose that this dissertation seeks out in its explorations of texts from this rich, complex landscape. The prospect of this narrative shift is not without its critics. Whilst Susan Mann also argues for South Africa 'to move past victimhood',¹⁷¹ Sindiwe Magona insists that the interracial recognition and understanding that writing can create is critical to a South African society that is still far from healed¹⁷² and Maxine Case claims that the continued interrogation of the past is the key to building the future.¹⁷³ This discordance is evidence of a South African population still in flux, with the complex establishment of victimhood incomplete in some cases and outrightly rejected by others. Rather than this ambivalence rendering literature a disorientating site of posttraumatic subjectivity, postapartheid literature instead allows for crucial questions regarding the relationship of writers to trauma – writers whose positioning both during and after the apartheid years influence their endorsement or spurning of victimhood.

As Nicki Hitchcott notes in her recent monograph *Rwanda Genocide Stories*, the majority of the literary renderings of Rwanda's genocide have been produced by 'tourists with typewriters'¹⁷⁴ – non-Rwandan journalists, novelists and philosophers who have imagined the genocide based on their experiences as visitors to its sites. In 1998, the Fest'Africa 'Rwanda: Ecrire par devoir de mémoire' project saw ten African writers from across the continent visit Rwanda and reflect on that experience by writing about the genocide. These texts, produced by writers such as Boubacar Boris Diop from Senegal, Véronique Tadjo from the Ivory Coast and Abdourahman Waberi from Djibouti were published in 2000 and were primarily responsible for putting the genocide's literary representation on the world stage. But whilst the

¹⁷⁰ Wicomb, p. 21.

¹⁷¹ 'Speaking Through Silences: An Interview with Susan Mann' in *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in South Africa: Interviews*, ed. by Ewald Mengel, Michela Borzaga and Karin Orantes (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2010), pp. 49-59, p. 52.

¹⁷² 'The Magic of Writing: An Interview with Sindiwe Magona' in *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in South Africa: Interviews*, ed. by Ewald Mengel, Michela Borzaga and Karin Orantes (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2010), pp. 31-48, pp. 32-33.

¹⁷³ 'The Things We Still Don't Say – An Interview with Maxine Case' in *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in South Africa: Interviews*, ed. by Ewald Mengel, Michela Borzaga and Karin Orantes (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2010), pp. 67-71, p. 67.

¹⁷⁴ Nicki Hitchcott, *Rwanda Genocide Stories: Fiction After 1994* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), p. 9.

work of these writers afforded the genocide the recognition in its aftermath that it so desperately needed – and failed to receive – during its occurrence, the popularity of these texts has overshadowed narratives penned by Rwandans. Whilst this marginalisation has by no means been intentional, it has been reflected by the prominence of Rwandan genocide-related texts produced by non-African writers too. Naomi Benaron's *Running the Rift*, Linda Melvern's *Conspiracy to Murder*, Philip Gourevitch's *We Wish to Inform you that Tomorrow We Will be Killed with Our Families* and Julian R. Pierce's *Speak Rwanda* have widely represented the genocide in English, whilst Jean Hatzfeld's trilogy covering the experiences of both survivors and perpetrators is among the most popular and widely-read French account of the violence. Reflecting van der Vlies's concern regarding the representation of apartheid suffering, the experience of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda has frequently been filtered through the lens of an external observer. Rwanda's low literacy rate around the time of the genocide – surveyed by IndexMundi at just 48% in 1995 – may well explain the lack of texts issuing from Rwanda itself. Growing at an annual rate of 5.42% per year after the genocide, literacy rates as of 2015 were at 71.2% - a growth that has seen both increased engagement with literature in Rwandan society and the production of several Rwandan-authored testimonies to individual experiences of the genocide. But whilst more Rwandans than ever are telling their own stories, genocide texts produced by those outside of its borders continue to dominate. Reflecting Hitchcott's determination to highlight the work of Rwandan writers, this dissertation focuses exclusively on Rwandan-authored narratives in order to contribute to the relatively scant critical discussion surrounding them and explore the questions they pose about agency, victimhood and trauma.

Testimonies, however, were not absent in the immediate aftermath of the genocide. Finding itself enormously overburdened with judicial process in the years following the genocide's end, the Rwandan Patriotic Front's government implemented the Gacaca court system to work simultaneously alongside the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Promoting national healing, reconciliation and truth-telling – much like the TRC – this traditional system of community justice called upon both survivors and perpetrators to recount their experiences. Although not viewed by all as a complete success for various reasons,¹⁷⁵ the call to memory alongside the emphasis on reconciliation this process demanded

¹⁷⁵ See Lars Waldorf, 'Rwanda's Failing Experiment in Restorative Justice' in *Handbook of Restorative Justice: A Global Perspective*, ed. by Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tifft (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp.422-434 and Max

required the simultaneous recollection and repression of the genocide's trauma. Suspended between past and future in ways that reflect and oppose approaches taken in Holocaust and postapartheid writing, this thesis asks how Rwandan authors reflect this liminality through the genres, techniques and tropes that constitute their writing. Surveying a broad variety of postcolonial trauma writing, Craps and Buelens identify 'a reliance on self-reflexivity and anti-linearity [...] [and] an attachment to realism and indigenous literary practices' that represent 'a deliberate eschewal of the Western discourse of unspeakability'.¹⁷⁶ That Rwandan writing might offer a new perspective on understandings of trauma is suggested by Hitchcott's observation that 'Rwanda genocide novels [...] mostly do not demonstrate what critics identify as the trauma aesthetic'¹⁷⁷ and that 'only a tiny number of authors of fiction about the Rwandan genocide attempt to convey its unspeakable nature through experiments with form.'¹⁷⁸ Although Hitchcott makes her remark in the context of Rwandan fiction, the implication that Rwandan writing looks to motifs other than aporia, fragmentation and haunting indicates that culture may inform the representation of trauma in a significant way.

Like the psychoanalytic, social, legal and gender-related conceptions of trauma outlined above, ideas surrounding literary representations of trauma, and the roles of the various parties in the production of such narratives, have evolved with time. What is notable, however, is that these ideas primarily derive from the experiences and testimonies of Holocaust survivors. This is not to say that these ideas lack applicability elsewhere. What this subsection has argued, however, is that these conceptions surrounding trauma's elucidation and application to literature are themselves beset by contradictions and uncertainties that must be contemplated before they can be considered for application in the context of world literature. In addition to asking how genre, voice, structure and various other narrative methodologies testify to the experience of the Holocaust, South African apartheid and the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda, this thesis explores the ways that these texts construct victimhood, the character of witnessing and the challenges of survival. Ultimately however, this thesis aims to re-evaluate the theories that have come to dominate the critical discourses underpinning literary analysis. Reading across time, cultures and catastrophes, my thesis seeks to create a literary

Rettig, 'Gacaca: Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation in Postconflict Rwanda?' in *African Studies Review*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (2008), pp. 25-50.

¹⁷⁶ Stef Craps and Gert Buelens, 'Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Novels' in *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 40, Nos. 1 & 2 (2008), pp. 1-12, p. 5.

¹⁷⁷ Hitchcott, p. 20.

¹⁷⁸ Hitchcott, p. 21.

composite that not only demonstrates *what is* traumatic in the genocidal encounter, but how and why literary testimonies to their occurrence suggest what is remembered, what is forgotten, what is narrated and what remains unspoken.

Methodology, Corpus and Structure

'Events happen', writes historian Yehuda Bauer, 'because they are possible. In that sense, the Holocaust is not unique, but a warning for the future.'¹⁷⁹ With passionate arguments on both sides of the debate,¹⁸⁰ the question of the Holocaust's uniqueness is contentious and divisive. But whilst the minutiae of these opposing positions fall outside the remit of this introduction, this dissertation maintains that like all the conflicts its corpus represents, the Holocaust is both an exceptional and relational event. Whilst acknowledging the unprecedented phenomenological uniqueness of a state-sanctioned policy of absolute annihilation at the time, the violence, mass killings and narrative of hate that accompanied them are characteristics of the Holocaust that are reflected in both the South African and Rwandan contexts. This dissertation concurs with John K. Roth's statement that 'it is important to defend the Holocaust's particularity [...] so that [it is] not universalized to the point of abstraction and banality.'¹⁸¹ Refusing to acknowledge any comparisons with other instances of mass violence runs the risk of rendering the Holocaust – or any limit event viewed solely in isolation – an anachronism, an event with no bearing, relevance or pedagogic value outside of its temporal bounds. Resulting in the creation of the Genocide Convention and laying the basis for modern Human Rights legislation, this is categorically not the case. Comparing violent histories is not an act of moral equivalency; the suffering of one group is not diminished because elements of that experience are reflected elsewhere. Rather, making connections between catastrophes allows for both the continuation of their respective memories and the creation of new communities. Whilst tragic, this dissertation argues that suffering of this kind can

¹⁷⁹ Yehuda Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978), p. 37.

¹⁸⁰ See Michael Berenbaum, 'The Uniqueness and Universality of the Holocaust' in *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1981), pp. 85–96, Daniel Feierstein and Douglas Andrew Town, 'Discourse and Politics in Holocaust Studies: Uniqueness, Comparability, and Narration' in *Genocide as Social Practice: Reorganizing Society under the Nazis and Argentina's Military Juntas* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2014), pp. 71–86 and Bernard Harrison, 'The Uniqueness Debate Revisited' in *Deciphering the New Antisemitism*, ed. by Alvin H. Rosenfeld, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), pp. 289–325.

¹⁸¹ John K. Roth, 'The Ethics of Uniqueness' in *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide*, ed. by Alan S. Rosenbaum, 3rd ed (Colorado: Westview Press, 2009), pp. 27-38, p. 31.

also function as a crucial site of mutuality capable of fostering dialogue, empathy and understanding across cultural and geographical bounds. Comparison, when viewed in this way, is both an appropriate and definitive response to genocidal violence.

Whilst both critical theorists and Rwandan survivors have drawn comparisons between the Holocaust and the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda, it remains relatively uncommon to include apartheid South Africa in such discussions. Indeed, although some South Africans feel that apartheid was genocidal,¹⁸² it does not, as Ronald C. Slye argued before the TRC, 'fit within the specific, narrow definition of genocide.'¹⁸³ Reflecting the debates around trauma, the term "genocide" and its many definitions¹⁸⁴ has generated its own controversies and debates. What these arguments make clear, however, is that genocide, as Jerry Fowler observes, 'is a category that can encompass events that may be very different from each other, each having its own indicia of uniqueness'.¹⁸⁵ Just as Scott Straus claims that 'compar[ing] genocide cases to non-genocide cases' and 'searching for similar dynamics and processes, rather than variables per se'¹⁸⁶ is a useful exercise for investigating why and how mass violence happens, so this dissertation maintains that the same is true for the literary responses to mass violence that constitute its corpus. The South African context, therefore, is a valuable comparative element of this thesis, certainly falling within the scope of the state-sanctioned collective violence categorising both the Holocaust and the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda.

It is worth noting here that the dominance of Euro/American theories of trauma and its representation is reflected by the unequally sized literary corpuses related to the Holocaust, South African apartheid and the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda, respectively. Creating, in many ways, modern

¹⁸² Tali Nates, "But, apartheid was also genocide ... What about our suffering?" Teaching the Holocaust in South Africa – Opportunities and Challenges' in *Intercultural Education*, Vol 21, No. 1 (2010), pp. 17-26, p. 22. In his testimony *Kaffir Boy* (New York: Free Press, 1986), Mark Mathabane writes that 'a Holocaust is taking place right now in this country [...] what are homelands if not open-air concentration camps? [...] What does all that add to? Genocide.' pp. 279-280.

¹⁸³ Ronald C. Slye, 'Apartheid as a Crime Against Humanity: A Submission to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission' in *Michigan Journal of International Law*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1999), pp. 267-300, p. 299.

¹⁸⁴ See, for example, the 22 different definitions of genocide outlined in Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 16-20.

¹⁸⁵ Jerry Fowler, 'The Holocaust, Rwanda, and the Category of Genocide' in *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide*, ed. by Alan S. Rosenbaum, 3rd ed (Colorado: Westview Press, 2009), pp. 215-222, p. 221.

¹⁸⁶ Scott Straus, 'The Promise and Limits of Comparison: The Holocaust and the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda' in *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide*, ed. by Alan S. Rosenbaum, 3rd ed (Colorado: Westview Press, 2009), pp. 245-256, p. 255.

“trauma literature”, Holocaust-related texts and the analyses linked with them have ingrained places within discussions of this genre. Indeed, some of Auschwitz’s most famous inmates – figures such as Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, Anne Frank, Viktor Frankl and Charlotte Delbo – have become Holocaust literature’s best-known authors. Spanning the genres of fiction, non-fiction, autobiography, life writing, poetry and graphic novels, literary testimonies to the Holocaust address the experiences of many disparate victim groups – willing male, female and child survivors have penned narratives that delineate their own unique experiences of the Holocaust’s hellish brutality. The Holocaust has also permeated international popular culture. Whilst its reach may not be absolutely global, the Holocaust’s presence in films, television and music has mobilised its memory far beyond the geographical bounds of its occurrence. Apartheid literature, however, enjoys far less popularity. Whilst there is substantial acknowledgement of, and critical focus on, the better-known South African writers such as J. M. Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, André Brink, Bessie Head, Achmat Dangor and Zakes Mda, other texts and writers are critically sidelined. Although there are certainly well-known filmic renderings of this time period, individuals outside South Africa, or outside the institutions dedicated to the study of the country and its history are not necessarily familiar with apartheid writing. Contending that apartheid violence elicits a similar experiential multiplicity to that of the Holocaust, my thesis aims to expand the conversation around apartheid writing to include voices not previously explored. If, however, apartheid writing and attention to it pales in comparison to the Holocaust canon, writing around the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda appears almost obscure in a global context. Language may well play a part in the relative inconspicuousness of these narratives – as many are written in French, these texts remain inaccessible to some. In addition, as many survivors of the genocide were children – and, as explained above, a literary culture in Rwanda is still developing – Rwandan-authored testimonies to the genocide are still relatively few. But whilst readers of these texts are scant, critical addresses to the texts that are in circulation are noticeably sparse in comparison to the juggernaut of critical theory responding to Holocaust writing and the lesser, but still definitive theoretical work addressing apartheid. It is the obvious inequality of these literary corpuses, together with the standardised trauma theory through which they are all evaluated that motivates the discussions underpinning this thesis. In addition to allowing comment on the dominance of Euro/American trauma theory, this dissertation acts in opposition to this hegemony. By reading these literatures comparatively, this thesis undertakes a

dialogic study of traumatic expression that neither prioritises nor marginalises specific cultural voices and contributes to critical discussions around texts that have not entered mainstream critical dialogues.

Each text analysed within the body of this thesis was selected after months of extensive reading of, and around, testimonial and fictional representations of the Holocaust, South African apartheid and the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda. Notably, texts authored by black South African writers describing the realities of life under the apartheid regime were the most difficult to locate. Each text has been selected not just because of the particularity of the voice within it but because these texts do not conform to the literary orthodoxies prescribed by dominant aesthetic ideas surrounding trauma writing; these narratives are *not* exemplary trauma texts in the way that current trends in contemporary trauma theory would define them. In recounting catastrophic experiences whilst departing from these conventions, these texts raise important questions about the intersection of literary trauma theory with voice, agency and identity and suggest that thinking outside of dominant orthodoxies is crucial to gaining a broader, more inclusive understanding of how trauma is represented through writing. The nuance that this thesis argues is necessary for discussions of trauma in a global context is reflected in the close reading methodology it employs. Paying attention to the cultural, gendered and referential implications of language, this dissertation analyses each text on its own terms. The project's commitment to particularity is further demonstrated by its chapter structure, in which each text is analysed in its own section in the context of questions posed in the chapter's introduction. Whilst allowing for the establishment of both intersectional links and specificity, this structure avoids perpetuating the often-homogenising tendencies of trauma theory that – as demonstrated above – insist on analysing global trauma through a single, culturally-specific framework.

The chapters that follow track the experience of trauma from descriptions of its happening to its transgenerational manifestations. Analysing literary representations of the moment of trauma itself, Chapter One puts Primo Levi's *If This is a Man* in conversation with Mark Mathabane's *Kaffir Boy* and Yolande Mukagasana's *La Mort ne veut pas de moi*. In addition to outlining the rationale for their comparison, what, asks this chapter, is actually represented as traumatic in each text? Analysing the way in which modes of writing testify to the specificity of traumatic experiences, this chapter interrogates the intersection between culture and suffering to identify differences and commonalities in cross-cultural

perceptions of, and responses to, genocide and mass violence. Chapters Two and Three move to discuss the state of survival in autobiography and fiction, respectively. In Chapter Two, Otto Dov Kulka's *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death* encounters Ellen Kuzwayo's *Call Me Woman* and Révérien Rurangwa's *Génocidé* to explore literary portraits of post-violence selves. How, this chapter asks, does the form of autobiography point to the way that a self regenerates after existential threat? Chapter Three examines fiction to consider what this mode of writing suggests not only about memories of the past, but about survivors' imaginings of their presents and future. Constituted by a conversation between Imre Kertész's *Liquidation*, Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* and Gilbert Gatore's *Le Passé devant soi*, Chapter Three considers the relationship between cultural modes of mourning and traumatic memories. In addition to discussing the possibilities fiction offers for the writing of catastrophe, this chapter asks how fiction might point to crucial truths for the discussion of trauma and its understandings. Finally, Chapter Four asks if and how trauma travels across generational lines. Bringing Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*, K. Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* and Diogène Ntarindwa's *Carte d'identité* into dialogue with one another, this chapter questions the orthodoxies surrounding the intergenerational transmission of trauma and aims to distinguish between the trauma of the original catastrophe and the effects felt in its aftermath. Interrogating the narrative techniques employed by these authors, this chapter asks whether trauma can be owned by, or confined to, a specific historical moment. Harnessing the interpretative possibilities that literature is uniquely positioned to offer, this thesis aims to widen the discussion around trauma literature to include previously marginalised texts whilst contributing to their critical evaluations. Giving each text its own platform whilst exploring the possibility of multidirectional connection, the following chapters aim to illuminate the way in which cross-textual dialogue might challenge not only Euro/American orthodoxies defining the trauma narrative but understandings of how literature might provide a basis from which to ask these important questions.

Comparative Literature: Moving Trauma Forward

If the theoretical oscillation this introduction has displayed thus far is evidence of one thing, it is that discussions surrounding trauma do not stagnate; in Michael Rothberg's words, 'trauma today is probably not the trauma of twenty years ago and certainly not the trauma of the early twentieth

century'.¹⁸⁷ As understandings of trauma have evolved, so have the theories that attempt to explain how literature intersects with them. Given the problematic universalisation of the trauma discourse this introduction has demonstrated however, it is perhaps time for conceptions of trauma to enter their next phase – a phase, proposes this dissertation, that literature is primed to help engender. Enabling the interrogation of dominant ideas surrounding both the understanding of trauma in a global context and the literary representation of its experience, it is the ability of literature to ask questions and embrace ambivalence that might allow for the emergence of an increasingly encompassing enquiry into trauma. Working between the poles of culture and individualism requires a methodology that allows them to function symbiotically; a model that this dissertation has found in Edward Said's notion of counterpoint. In his book *Culture and Imperialism*, Said defines counterpoint as a contrapuntal mode of observation that allows us 'to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formulations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them co-existing and interacting with others.'¹⁸⁸ Whilst the questions this thesis asks challenge his claim that 'there is no particular intellectual reason for granting [women, Westerners, blacks, national states and cultures] an ideal and essentially separate status',¹⁸⁹ the Saidian notion of counterpoint is a model on which the following comparative readings are based. A universally inclusive theory of trauma and its literary representation may be a theoretical abstraction, if not an impossibility. Indeed, as Dipesh Chakrabarty notes, 'the universal [is] a highly unstable figure [...] nothing concrete and particular could ever be the universal itself.'¹⁹⁰ However, Robert Eaglestone suggests that 'one of the futures of trauma theory [...] is perhaps to look closely and more carefully not simply at the trauma, but at the structure of experience within which trauma is made manifest.'¹⁹¹ This is precisely the aim of this thesis. Exploring how cultural distinctions are maintained or challenged by trauma, how trauma effaces or reinforces transhistorical notions of otherness and whether or not catastrophe exposes common truths about humanity that may bind or separate culturally, contextually

¹⁸⁷ Michael Rothberg, 'Preface' in *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*, ed. by Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant and Robert Eaglestone (New York/Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. xi-xviii, p. xi.

¹⁸⁸ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994) p. 36.

¹⁸⁹ Said, p. 36.

¹⁹⁰ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. xiii.

¹⁹¹ Robert Eaglestone, 'Knowledge, 'Afterwardsness' and Trauma' in *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*, ed. by Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant and Robert Eaglestone (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 11-23, p. 19.

and historically disparate victims of violent persecution, the following analysis seeks to interrogate trauma's relationship to culture, its representation and those who experience it.

Chapter One

Aestheticizing Anguish: Assumptions & Actualities

Surviving the Holocaust, apartheid and the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda, Primo Levi, Mark Mathabane and Yolande Mukagasana all experienced violence of the kind that has been seized upon by trauma theorists to inform and reinforce pervasive understandings of trauma as a haunting, silencing consequence of ineffable catastrophe. It is the prevalence of this very thinking, however, which makes these texts' emphatic declarations of voice so striking: whilst Levi writes that '[t]he need to tell our story [...] [was] an immediate and violent impulse, to the point of competing with our other elementary needs'¹ and Mathabane states clearly that his text's intent is to give 'the most thorough answer I have heretofore given'² to the question of what life was like under apartheid, Mukagasana insists that 'I want to bear witness.'³ Substantiating Catherine Coquio's observation of the inevitable relationship between survival and bearing witness,⁴ the compulsive turn to testimony signalled by these writers' words immediately challenges the theoretical emphasis on lacuna, void and lack that is so frequently employed in evaluating the violent experiences their texts describe. Acknowledging and exploring the resultant tensions between voice and voicelessness, and agency and dispossession, this chapter asks: how do the narrative aesthetics of these texts navigate the task of describing memories of violence so heavily theorised as inevitably eluding the survivor? How do these writers make their voices heard against a backdrop of theory which emphasises vocal and cognitive paralysis in the recollection of deeply depersonalising brutality? Specifically exploring if and how trauma is expressed in literary depictions of these violent events, I ask how Levi, Mathabane and Mukagasana's texts might suggest responses to violence that are not rooted in the silence and submission emphasised by contemporary trends in trauma theory.

¹ Primo Levi, *If This is a Man*, trans. by Stuart Woolf (London: Abacus, 1987), p. 15.

² Mark Mathabane, *Kaffir Boy* (New York: Free Press, 1986), p. ix.

³ Yolande Mukagasana, *La Mort ne veut pas de moi*, trans. by Zoe Norridge (forthcoming). The page references pertain to the original French text, quotes from which can be found in this dissertation's appendix.

⁴ Catherine Coquio, 'L'émergence d'une littérature de non-écrivains: Les témoignages de catastrophes historiques' in *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, Vol. 103, No. 2 (2003), pp. 343-363, p. 343.

Despite its status as a now-seminal representation of Auschwitz, Primo Levi faced an extraordinary struggle publishing *If This is a Man*. Levi began drafting his manuscript just sixteen weeks after his liberation from Auschwitz, in February 1946; a manuscript that would be completed by December of the same year. Levi's biographer Ian Thomson describes Levi recording 'thoughts and events, conversations, things heard and seen at the camp, on the back of train tickets, scraps of paper, flattened cigarette packets – anything he could find [...] he wrote with extreme facility, the words pouring out of him.'⁵ The urgency intimated by this description and the timeframe in which *If This is a Man* came into being indicate both Levi's refusal of post-violence silence and his capacity for recall in the aftermath of trauma. Despite Levi's willingness to share his story, however, the world was not quite ready to listen. Italian publishing giant Einaudi rejected the manuscript in January 1947, with Levi only managing to secure a small print run of 2,500 copies with small publishing company De Silva. It was only ten years later that Einaudi accepted the manuscript; an acceptance that not only validated Levi's story in the eyes of the industry and the public, but afforded the text the publicity that paved the way for *If This is a Man* to become the literary touchstone it is today. Levi's factual prose is a distinguishing characteristic of his writing; a narrative style that various critics, and Levi himself, have attributed to his training as a chemist.⁶ The proceeding analysis, however, probes the textual recollections that force a departure from this systematic mode of narration; departures that signal anguish or pain so strong that they necessarily deviate from Levi's primarily scientific approach to memory. Arguing that these are the moments in which Levi recalls his greatest challenges, this chapter asks how his representations of these moments and their aftermaths might complicate contemporary ideas regarding victimhood, agency and trauma.

The Chicago Tribune's review of Mark Mathabane's *Kaffir Boy*, emblazoned on the Free Press edition's back cover, states: 'This is a rare look inside the festering adobe shanties of Alexandra, one of South Africa's notorious black townships. Rare because it comes . . . from the heart of a passionate young African who grew up there.' The rarity of texts like Mathabane's indicated here is no understatement. As I discovered whilst searching for a text for this section, there is indeed a dearth of black African

⁵ Ian Thomson, *Primo Levi: A Biography* (London: Vintage, 2003), p. 229. This quotation paraphrases Levi's description of the genesis of *If This is a Man* in another of his works, *The Periodic Table*, trans. by Raymond Rosenthal (London: Penguin Classics, 2000).

⁶ See, for example, Enrico Boeri, 'Chemistry (1983)' in *The Voice of Memory: Primo Levi, Interviews 1961 – 1987*, ed. by Marco Belpoliti and Robert Gordon, trans. by Robert Gordon (New York: Polity Press, 2001) pp. 65-69.

voices in the context of literary representations of apartheid South Africa that are not mobilized in protest; a lack that this chapter, providing the first literary, critical analysis of Mathabane's text, responds to. In addition, however, this review points to the quotidian realities of apartheid experience that are regularly overshadowed by the theoretical propensity to evaluate this period exclusively through the lens of race relations. This has led to apartheid being largely understood as generating a trauma borne primarily from perceptions of black selves as defined in relation to white others; an understanding that reduces apartheid to one element of its manifestation, obscuring other potentially traumatising experiences. *Kaffir Boy* is certainly a response to racial inequality. 'The white man', writes Mathabane, 'does not know me [...] my story is intended to show him with words a world he would otherwise not see [...] and to make him feel what I felt when he contemptuously called me a "Kaffir boy."' ⁷ However, concurrently stating that 'I have sought to paint a portrait of my childhood and youth in Alexandra [...] where I was born and lived for eighteen years, with the hope that the rest of the world will finally understand', ⁸ Mathabane implies that a comprehensive understanding of apartheid relies upon the recognition of the everyday experiences of black lives under apartheid rule. Thus, the majority of *Kaffir Boy* is not focused on the encounter between black and white South Africans. Comprising, rather, of descriptions of Mathabane's childhood that see him navigate familial relationships, interethnic violence and the particular tensions created by his own culture and religion, *Kaffir Boy* complicates pervasive ideas regarding what made apartheid traumatic by presenting this experience through the eyes of a child not yet exposed to interracial tension. Examining Mathabane's representation of his childhood and interrogating his responses to these circumstances, this chapter aims to demonstrate the multifaceted, complex nature of apartheid-related trauma and the dynamics of his responses to it.

Yolande Mukagasana opens her text with the emphatic declaration that 'I am a Rwandan woman. I have not learned how to deposit my ideas in books. I do not live in the written word. I live in speech.' ⁹ This statement is not a bashful caveat regarding the absence of formal narrative or textual aesthetics: it is a statement of ownership of a text that tells Mukagasana's story in the manner most reflective of her voice and Rwanda's oral tradition. Prefacing her testimony with this assertion, Mukagasana declares control over her past and makes no apology for the directness of the language that represents

⁷ Mathabane, p. 3.

⁸ Mathabane, p. ix.

⁹ Mukagasana, p. 13.

it; a challenge both to trauma theory's insistence on survivor submission to memory and the necessarily non-referential character of its literary representation. Whilst Mukagasana's text is striking in its overt defiance of these orthodoxies, her story itself is equally compelling. Mukagasana's testimony traces her experience in the days before, and during, Rwanda's genocide of 1994. It is a story of loss, pain, sadness and mourning; but it is also a testament to courage, motherhood and remarkable strength. *La Mort ne veut pas de moi* is an important text because of the female perspective it affords a canon of trauma literature dominated by male writers.¹⁰ Interestingly, both Levi and Mathabane allude to the specifically resilient responses of women to violence in their respective texts. Levi notes how, despite understanding that they would be deported to Auschwitz the following day, 'the mothers stayed up to prepare food for the journey with tender care, and washed their children and packed the luggage' and recalls that 'at dawn the barbed wire was full of washing hung out in the wind to dry',¹¹ whilst Mathabane describes his own mother as 'a born survivor'.¹² Describing the female experience of persecutory violence firsthand however, Mukagasana's text illuminates, and raises important questions of, how femininity is used, abused, compromised and reinforced in the context of state-sanctioned mass violence. As Mukagasana states, her testimony is not characterised by experimental or modernist writing, structure or form. Drawing, however, on the emotional complexity of her testimony and the subtle devices employed in its recounting, the following chapter asks how this text's representation of Mukagasana's response to violence might call for expanded thinking around the intersection of trauma, identity and the representation of violence.

Whilst Levi's work has received a great deal of critical attention, Mathabane and Mukagasana's have received comparatively little. But despite these widely-ranging receptions, these texts are united by their confrontation of what contemporary discourses around trauma theorise as unrepresentable: their suffering. Of particular interest to this chapter's inquiry are the specifically physical descriptions of pain that feature in Levi, Mathabane and Mukagasana's texts. With these narratives demanding consideration of the ethical and philosophical complexities that facilitate and characterise brutal acts of state-sanctioned mass violence, what purpose might descriptions of physical pain serve? Interestingly,

¹⁰ Mukagasana's text is co-authored by Patrick May. However, both in public talks she has given and in her subsequent text *N'aie pas peur de savoir*, Mukagasana's account of her experiences are remarkably consistent, suggesting that the terms and content of her recall are decidedly hers.

¹¹ Levi, p. 21.

¹² Mathabane, p. 346.

discursive writing around pain emphasises the same incomprehensibility of excess and suspension of individual agency as current trends in trauma theory. Whilst Elaine Scarry, for example, claims that pain induces 'a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned',¹³ David Morrison asserts that '[p]ain passes much of its time in utter inhuman silence.'¹⁴ Both theoretical discourses champion the notion of the ineffable in relation to violence and suffering; a void of comprehension and representation that leads Zoe Norridge to observe that '[p]ain [...] in the body of works associated with trauma theory, is enduringly described through its absence.'¹⁵ Norridge's monograph *Perceiving Pain in African Literature* considers how descriptions of pain individualise suffering through the aesthetic strategies particular writers employ. This chapter builds on and extends her work to analyse pain specifically in relation to the dialogic potential through which Levi, Mathabane and Mukagasana assert their voices – thus claiming the agency that contemporary trends in trauma theory deny them. Interrogating the relationship between pain and purpose, this chapter will explore how these texts might suggest more complex and various responses to violence; responses that have significance both for our understandings of what makes an event traumatic, and how individuals across cultures meet the challenge of representing exceptionally painful and extreme circumstances.

In tracking and exploring these responses, a key theoretical concept this chapter will engage with is resilience. Acknowledging that 'trauma has become the discourse through which not only catastrophic events are articulated, but through which virtually all sufferings are expressed', Mark Neocleous argues that the 'everydayness, or naturalness, of trauma talk' has led to 'the idea of an "age of anxiety" [...] becom[ing] part of our cultural common sense'.¹⁶ It is this anxiety, Neocleous claims, that has led to a concurrent rise of the concept of resilience, borne of a perceived necessity for a level of increased preparedness in anticipation of inevitable trauma. The concept of resilience was first considered by ecologist C. S. Holling, who described resilience in the natural world as 'a measure of the persistence of systems and of their ability to absorb change and disturbance [...] a capacity to persist.'¹⁷ Whilst providing a comprehensive history of the paroxysmal and profoundly interdisciplinary growth of the

¹³ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 4.

¹⁴ David Morris, *The Culture of Pain* (California: University of California Press, 1991), p. 3.

¹⁵ Zoe Norridge, *Perceiving Pain in African Literature* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 6.

¹⁶ Mark Neocleous, "'Don't Be Scared, Be Prepared": Trauma-Anxiety-Resilience' in *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (2012), pp. 188-198, pp. 188-189.

¹⁷ C. S. Holling, 'Resilience and the Stability of Ecological Systems' in *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, Vol. 4 (1973), pp. 1-23, pp. 14-15.

concept from this point, Julie L. Davidson notes that in its transcontextual movement, 'resilience has lost some of its precision and become conceptually vague';¹⁸ an observation supported by Sebastian Strunz, who notes that understandings of resilience are now characterised by 'blurred boundaries of concepts, metaphors and an implicit mix of normative and positive aspects.'¹⁹ The parallels with the debates surrounding trauma are hard to ignore. In addition to the vagueness now associated with both ideas, resilience, too, is multiply defined.²⁰ Indeed, whilst the American Psychological Association (APA) defines resilience as the 'process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even significant sources of stress',²¹ sociologists Andrew Zolli and Ann Marie Healy state that resilience is 'the capacity of a system, enterprise, or person to maintain its core purpose and integrity in the face of dramatically changed circumstances'²² – a definition similar in implication to that of an engineering perspective which states that resilience is 'the ability of a structure [...] to withstand events [...] or consequences of human errors, without being damaged to an extent disproportionate to the original cause.'²³ Whilst the APA's definition of resilience relies on successful adaptation to changing conditions, the sociological and engineering definitions imply that it is a defiant withstanding of such change that indicates resilience. These differing views imply that discussions of resilience are as complex as discussions of trauma. The possibilities of adaptation and rejection, however, helpfully inform this chapter's investigative questions. In addition to offering new insights into the relationship between trauma theory and resilience theory, this chapter interrogates not only where and how these texts might suggest resilience, but how displays of resilience might indicate the need to broaden understandings of responses to catastrophe.

¹⁸ Julie L. Davidson et al, 'Interrogating Resilience: Toward a Typology to Improve its Operationalization' in *Ecology and Society*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2016), pp. 1-15, p. 1.

¹⁹ Sebastian Strunz, 'Is Conceptual Vagueness an Asset? Arguments from Philosophy of Science Applied to the Concept of Resilience' in *Ecological Economics*, Vol. 76, pp. 112-118, p. 114.

²⁰ For an interesting discussion of the definitions of resilience, see Krista S. Langeland et al, 'Definitions, Characteristics, and Assessments of Resilience' in *How Civil Institutions Build Resilience* (California: RAND Corporation, 2016), p. 5.

²¹ <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx> [accessed 30th May 2018]

²² Andrew Zolli and Anne Marie Healy, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 2012), p. 7.

²³ Definition from engineering standard ISO 22111. See International Organization for Standardization (ISO), "Bases for Design of Structures—General Requirements," ISO 22111:2007, undated.

Primo Levi, *If This is a Man*

Levi's Intertexts: Renegotiating Identity

'How much of what we write', asks Primo Levi, 'comes from what we read?'²⁴ Whilst the predominantly clinical tone of Levi's prose suggests that his writing is largely self-referential, the few, but unmistakable intertextual references in *If This is a Man* suggests that pre-existing literature is influential in Levi's representation of Auschwitz. What makes Levi's use of intertextuality so compelling is that it appears in the moments that Levi's identity is most in crisis; however, as I will demonstrate, it also renegotiates this embattled identity in a way that demonstrates the very agency Auschwitz sought to refuse him. Despite being the condition of his internment, Levi's relationship to Judaism is a site of decided ambivalence. Although he is a man, as Massimo Giuliani writes, 'attracted by the Bible',²⁵ Levi himself states that 'mine is the life of a man who has lived and lives without God';²⁶ whilst declaring that 'I have never felt part of a chosen people [...] I am Jewish by an accident of birth',²⁷ Levi nevertheless situates himself within the Jewish tradition by describing the Shoah as an 'ancient grief [...] the exodus which is renewed every century'.²⁸ This vacillation is evidence of Levi neither passively accepting, nor explicitly rejecting, a Jewish identity which, describing himself as an 'Italian citizen of Jewish race',²⁹ Levi had always perceived as secondary to his Italian nationalism. In the Lager, however, Levi's Judaism becomes the battleground on which the struggle to maintain his identity is fought. His experience in this regard reflects fellow survivor Jean Améry's lament: 'I don't want to be a Jew,' he writes, 'but only because I cannot be one. And yet must be one [...] the necessity and impossibility of being a Jew; that is what causes me indistinct pain'.³⁰ Levi, stripped of the ability to define himself at the gates of Auschwitz, faced the same internal conflict. But given Levi's clear statement of his Judaic disaffiliation, it seems strange that the text's epigraph is a poem that clearly invokes the Shema: the

²⁴ Aurelio Andreoli, 'La ricerca delle radici (The Search for Roots)' in *The Voice of Memory: Primo Levi, Interviews 1961-1987*, ed. by Marco Belpoliti and Robert Gordon, trans. by Robert Gordon (New York: Polity Press, 2001), pp. 98-102 (p.99).

²⁵ Massimo Giuliani, *A Centaur in Auschwitz: Reflections on Primo Levi's Thinking* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2003), p. 36.

²⁶ Giuseppe Grieco, 'God and I', in *The Voice of Memory: Primo Levi, Interviews 1961-1987*, ed. by Marco Belpoliti and Robert Gordon, trans. by Robert Gordon (New York: Polity Press, 2001), pp. 272-278, p.272.

²⁷ Grieco, p. 274.

²⁸ Levi, p. 22.

²⁹ Levi, p. 19.

³⁰ Jean Améry, *At The Mind's Limits*, trans. by Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 82.

ultimate declaration of Jewish faith, described by Mirna Cicioni as ‘central to the identity of every Jew’.³¹ Levi’s poem closely resembles the *Shema* prayer in form, mirroring the prayer’s listing technique, imperative and commanding tone, descriptions of desolation, and the warnings contained in their respective culminations. Consequently, many critics have interpreted Levi’s invocation of the *Shema* as a narrative choice with distinctly religious implications. Indeed, whilst Harrowitz names this a ‘secular *Shema*’,³² implying the abandonment of religion, Uri Cohen claims that by authoring his own *Shema*, Levi is ‘preaching a new religion of memory’.³³ However, having clearly established Levi’s non-existent theodicy, in addition to his own self-proclaimed conviction that Auschwitz was ‘an abomination, which no propitiatory prayer [...] can ever clean’,³⁴ to claim an understanding of Levi’s relationship to religion based upon analysis of this poem is to fundamentally mistake the implications of this intertext. My argument here extends Giuliani’s observation that whilst the *Shema* ‘is the profession of faith of the pious Jew [...] it is not a prayer’.³⁵ Noting what some critics gloss over in their eagerness to portray Levi as actively engaging with, or subverting, religion – an engagement or rebellion that would require a pre-existing belief in God – the translation of the primary text of the *Shema* – “Hear, O Israel, HaShem is our God, HaShem is one”³⁶ – reveals that this line is not directed to God, but is a self-declared statement of faith *by the people to the people*. Thus, Levi’s choice of intertext is carefully chosen to reflect not the theological, but the very human implications of instruction that the *Shema* implies.

What, however, is the significance of the *Shema*’s secular rendering? Emphasising through this intertext ‘what *man*’s presumption made of man in Auschwitz’³⁷ [emphasis mine], Levi uses these biblical words as a conduit for his own statement of accountability and to communicate the urgency of response towards man-made catastrophe. Appealing directly to his readers by opening his poem with ‘You’ and juxtaposing men in ‘warm houses’ with the man ‘who works in the mud’ and the woman who is ‘[w]ithout hair and without name’, Levi petitions his readers to examine the nuances of human relation and become partners in the interrogation of humanity that is *If This is a Man*. The personal imperatives

³¹ Mirna Cicioni, *Primo Levi: Bridges of Knowledge* (Oxford: Berg Publishers Ltd, 1995), p. 27.

³² Nancy Harrowitz, ‘Primo Levi’s Jewish Identity’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Primo Levi*, ed. by Robert S. C. Gordon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 17-31, p. 29.

³³ Uri Cohen, ‘Consider If This Is A Man: Primo Levi and the Figure of Ulysses’ in *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (2012), 40-69 (p. 43).

³⁴ Levi, p. 136.

³⁵ Giuliani, p. 77.

³⁶ ‘Shema’ in *The Ohel Sarah Women’s Siddur*, ed. by Dovid Weinberger (New York: Mesorah Publications, 2005), p. 68.

³⁷ Levi, p. 61.

continue: instructing his readers to 'meditate' upon, 'repeat' and 'carve' the reality of the Shoah into their consciousness, Levi appeals to the human language and intellect that was fatally absent from the Lager in which the humanity of both the victims and perpetrators was suspended. In addition to his recollection of violence and extension of these memories towards others defying theoretical statements of the survivor as cognitively inhibited, this rendering of the Shema is its own statement of resilience. Placing Auschwitz firmly in the bounds of human action rather than providential determination, it is not Levi's intent, as Giuliani writes, to 'make the Holocaust sacred'.³⁸ However, asserting the fact of his survival and his enduring voice through the Shema's aesthetic framework, Levi assumes mastery of the identity that – in the Lager – was his death sentence. In this intertextual moment, Levi integrates himself into a Jewish tradition that becomes valuable on a cultural level, providing him with a history of persecution into which Auschwitz can be integrated, and a textual precedent to appropriate for the narration of his own experience. Furthermore, the reworking evident in Levi's use of biblical intertextuality allows him to take possession of a cultural Jewish identity without the need to internalise a theological element. The result is a unique rendering of a paradigmatically religious text that permits Levi to ultimately argue that 'it is *man* who kills man, *man* who creates or suffers injustice'³⁹ – an assertion of culpability and call to introspection that itself testifies to his endurance and his retention of humanity. Whilst Harrowitz claims that the poem represents one of the most 'compelling ways in which Levi [...] negotiates his Jewish identity',⁴⁰ Levi's rejection of fideism complicates the critical suggestion that Levi's *Shema* is theologically subversive. Instead, I argue that Levi uses the Shema here as an ironic narrative model to actively claim Judaism as an identity whilst retaining his agnosticism – preserving his personhood through the ironic affirmation of the very identity meant to destroy it. Understood in this way, Levi's intertextual reference is symbolic not only of his physical endurance but of the resilient endurance of an agency that allows him self-definition even in the most improbable of circumstances.

Whilst Levi's invocation of the Shema is key to his negotiation of his Jewish identity, *The Canto of Ulysses* is the most demonstrative of his relationship to Italy and its culture. Most critical discussions surrounding Levi's intertextual invocation of Dante – identified by Jonathan Usher as 'the most famous

³⁸ Giuliani, p. 4.

³⁹ Levi, p. 177 – emphasis mine.

⁴⁰ Harrowitz, p. 27.

borrowing in Levi's work'⁴¹ – concur with Gillian Banner's statement that 'in 'The Canto of Ulysses' he [Levi] remembers himself as an educated Italian'.⁴² In fact, critical opinion is so heavily weighted towards the importance of Levi's Italian identity that David Ward claims that 'without placing him within this context it is hard for us to understand him fully as a writer, as a witness and as an individual'.⁴³ However, the insistence that this intertext represents Levi's statement of his national identity not only ignores the fact that the cultural tradition represented by Dante predates the foundation of Italy as a modern nation state, but also discounts the actuality of what Harrowitz describes as 'the reality of exclusion and betrayal that was Fascist Italy for Italian Jews after the mid-1930s'.⁴⁴ The 1938 introduction of the *Manifesto della razza* [Manifesto of Race]⁴⁵ legally excluded Jews from professional and cultural life. This was especially wounding for Levi, who, like many other Italian Jews of the period, identified with their Italian nationality far more than their Judaism. It is complicated, therefore, to read Levi's invocation of this iconic Italian text as a statement of belonging to a nation that both barred and betrayed him; a complication, I argue, that Levi's invocation of Dante demonstrates.

It is during a moment of brief respite that Levi, accompanying fellow prisoner Jean to fetch the day's soup, recalls a fragment of Dante's work. Speaking with Jean 'of our houses [...] of the books we had read',⁴⁶ Levi indicates the connectedness of home with the culture it produces. But the totality of Levi's national and cultural *unhoming* is evidenced by what Levi is confronted with in his attempt to remember the remainder of Dante's words – 'nothing. A hole in my memory'.⁴⁷ Instead of reading this admission of blankness as typifying the void theorised as inevitably created by the encounter with traumatising violence, this emptiness can be understood as reflective of Levi's national and cultural displacement. Since Levi has been scorned by his nation, this blankness comes to symbolise the inaccessibility of, and his disconnection from, its literary culture; a suggestion substantiated by the fragments Levi *is* able to recall. Invoking the concept of betrayal, Levi quotes Ulysses' admission that he went forth on the

⁴¹ Jonathan Usher, 'Primo Levi, the Canon and Italian Literature' in *The Cambridge Companion to Primo Levi*, ed. by Robert S. C. Gordon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 171-188 (p. 173).

⁴² Gillian Banner, *Holocaust Literature: Schulz, Levi, Spiegelman and the Memory of the Offence* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2000), p. 104.

⁴³ David Ward, 'Primo Levi's Turin' in *The Cambridge Companion to Primo Levi*, ed. by Robert S. C. Gordon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 3-16 (p. 3).

⁴⁴ Harrowitz, p. 27.

⁴⁵ For a copy of *Manifesto della razza* in both English and the original Italian, see http://www.andreaefedi.com/216/doku.php/216:manifesto_of_race [accessed 07/01/2018]

⁴⁶ Levi, p. 117

⁴⁷ Levi, p. 118.

search for knowledge disregarding 'piety / to my old father'.⁴⁸ Here, Levi employs this description of filial neglect to highlight Italy's – *his* fatherland's – neglect of him and moral values in pursuit of its twisted visions of racial purity. Thus, Levi's comment that his obscured cultural memory resembles 'a chain which has been broken'⁴⁹ becomes a profound image of the shattered links – the 'lacuna'⁵⁰ – not between victim and memory, but between nation and subject.

Levi's most extensive quotation of Dante extends this analysis. Levi's narration of the lines 'Think of your breed; for brutish ignorance / Your mettle was not made; you were made men, / To follow after knowledge and excellence'⁵¹ has traditionally been interpreted, as Risa Sodi writes, as Levi trying to 'inject a breath of humanity into his present condition'.⁵² My alternative reading, however, suggests that this exhortation to civility is directed not only to his present condition and those in his immediate context, but as a retributive call to introspection intended to challenge his fellow countrymen who surrendered their Jews to fascist brutality, thus sanctioning the existence of Auschwitz. Here, once again, Levi employs a cultural text to highlight the complexity of his relation to its context; an intertextually-enabled statement of culpability that not only asserts his voice and the fact of his survival, but that comments on culture even as he remembers the totality of its collapse. Juxtaposing 'knowledge' with the 'brutish ignorance' that has usurped its place, Levi indicates that the Holocaust's perpetrators have, by virtue of inhumane brutality and force, relinquished culture – a reality highlighted by the incompleteness of Dante's work in this context. Thus, Levi's inability to fully culturally engage in this instance testifies to the inaccessibility of culture in a historical moment that perverts the very civility it supposedly represents. Culture, here, fails to fulfil the aims it sets itself. Implicating Italian culture into this broken narration that ironically yields meaning through the cultural instability to which it testifies – a destabilisation of cultural identity that Florian Mussgnug explicitly identifies as being generated by the disillusion of the kind I identify here⁵³ – Levi holds Italy accountable for the pain it imposed upon its Jewish citizens in the cultural, legal and social exclusion it enacted. Whilst the act of writing *If This is a Man* is itself a testimony to Levi's resilience and refusal to submit to silence, the retributive tone with

⁴⁸ Levi, p. 118.

⁴⁹ Levi, p. 119.

⁵⁰ Levi, p. 120.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Risa B. Sodi, *A Dante of Our Time: Primo Levi and Auschwitz* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1990), p. 69.

⁵³ Florian Mussgnug, 'The Foreigner's Gaze: Constructions of National Identity and Alterity in Post-War Italian Literature' in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (2002), pp. 198-212, pp. 198-199.

which this intertext can be read turns Levi's writing into an act of agency that not only challenges the idea of trauma's ineffability and the unspeakability of pain, but that also establishes a voice through that which he is denied.

Pain and Purpose in a World of Inversion

'Pain', claims Ann Jurecic, 'has long been understood to resist expression [...] At its worst, pain is unchosen, extreme, and without purpose; it obscures memory, thought, language, everything but itself.'⁵⁴ As indicated in this chapter's introduction, many pain and trauma theorists reflect the idea expressed here. Jurecic's statement, however, both confirms and contradicts Levi's experience of Auschwitz as it is literarily represented. Certainly, the violence of Holocaust was the some of 'worst' of which Jurecic speaks; it was indeed unchosen and extreme. *If This is a Man*, however, suggests that not only does pain *have* a purpose in the inverted world of the Lager, but that pain can also *sharpen* memory, thought and language. Aiming to illuminate an aspect of Levi's writing that has not been thoroughly critically explored, the following analysis will demonstrate how and why *If This is a Man* highlights the physical pain that both Levi and his fellow prisoners experienced.

It is compelling that despite its clinical tone, to read *If This is a Man* is to be drawn into Levi's experience in a profoundly sensory way. Auschwitz as described by Levi is an experience of 'never-ending hunger';⁵⁵ composed of 'scores of prisoners driven desperate by hunger'⁵⁶ – a 'chronic hunger [...] which makes one dream at night, and settles in all the limbs of one's body'.⁵⁷ So horrifically consuming is this hunger, in fact, that Levi states that '[t]he Lager *is* hunger: we ourselves are hunger, living hunger'.⁵⁸ Thirst, too, is overpowering. After describing 'the parching thirst of the journey'⁵⁹ to Auschwitz that compels him to reach, '[d]riven by thirst',⁶⁰ for an icicle that he is sadistically denied, Levi comments at several points that 'what torments me [...] is my thirst'.⁶¹ Levi also makes frequent reference to the

⁵⁴ Ann Jurecic, *Illness and Narrative* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), p. 43.

⁵⁵ Levi, p. 76.

⁵⁶ Levi, p. 84.

⁵⁷ Levi, p. 43.

⁵⁸ Levi, p. 80.

⁵⁹ Levi, p. 35.

⁶⁰ Levi, p. 35.

⁶¹ Levi, p. 37.

torturous 'exhaustion and lack of sleep'⁶² he experiences; the prisoners and himself, he writes, are 'a human mass [...] sluggish and aching, rising here and there in sudden convulsions and immediately collapsing again in exhaustion.'⁶³ Encapsulated by the description of 'the suffering of the day, composed of hunger, blows, cold, exhaustion, fear,'⁶⁴ Levi's textual inscription of Auschwitz highlights physical pain; descriptions of which themselves challenge the dominant trauma narrative that champions repression in the context of post-traumatic recall. The question of why Levi chooses to emphasise these decidedly corporeal elements of life at Auschwitz – an environment intended to psychologically dehumanise and destroy him – initially appears puzzling. In his preface to *If This is a Man*, however, Levi states that:

as an account of atrocities [...] this book of mine adds nothing to what is already known to readers [...] It has not been written in order to formulate new accusations; it should be able, rather, to furnish documentation for a quiet study of certain aspects of the human mind.⁶⁵

Whilst Levi's call to scientific introspection reflects his clinical approach to memory, this statement suggests that *If This is a Man* is not intended to enrage or provoke readers; mirroring the instructive tone of Levi's Shema, there is a deliberately pedagogic intent behind his decision to testify. In bringing the physical element of his experience to the fore, however, Levi appears cognisant of the obstacle facing his call to action posed by the testimonial genre itself. Despite insisting that Holocaust testimony represents 'a new genre of writing',⁶⁶ Robert Eaglestone concedes that testimony may defy generic classification as 'testimony stems from the reader's experience of identification'⁶⁷ – an identification which, paradoxically, is 'prohibit[ed] [...] on epistemological grounds (a reader really cannot become, or become identified with, the narrator of a testimony) and on ethical grounds (a reader should not become identified with a narrator of a testimony, as it reduces and 'normalises' or consumes the otherness of a narrator's experience)'.⁶⁸ The uniqueness of the catastrophes that produce testimony appear by nature to refuse the identification and relatability that Levi's insistence on his readers' introspection relies upon; and it is here that his representations of physical pain assume their crucial

⁶² Levi, p. 24.

⁶³ Levi, p. 24.

⁶⁴ Levi, p. 68.

⁶⁵ Levi, p. 15.

⁶⁶ Robert Eaglestone, 'Identification and the Genre of Testimony' in *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol. 21, No. 1-2 (2002), pp. 117-140, p. 117.

⁶⁷ Eaglestone, p. 117.

⁶⁸ Eaglestone, p. 118.

importance. By highlighting, in detail, the sensations of cold, fear, hunger, thirst and exhaustion, Levi emphasises the elements of his experience of Auschwitz that are the most relatable. Whilst total identification is curtailed by the exceptional extremity of this moment, the familiarity of these corporeal deprivations allow Levi's readers to gain some insight – however small – into his experience; and, thus, to meditate on the fact of Auschwitz as Levi demands. Whilst the pain inflicted by the Nazis was intended to extinguish the possibility of human relation, pain here ironically becomes the condition on which identifications and relations are created; intersubjective connections that not only testify to Levi's endurance beyond Auschwitz, but serve as a point of origin for dialogue and communication that defy the expectations of silence and submission to memory that characterise current thinking around trauma.

In the antithetical world that Levi's depiction of Auschwitz represents, however, pain is not only a point of connection between Levi and his readers, but a crucial determinant of his own survival. Describing a day of hard labour, Levi recalls the following:

I bite deeply into my lips; we know well that to gain a small, extraneous pain serves as a stimulant to mobilize our last reserves of energy. The Kapos also know it: some of them beat us from pure bestiality and violence, but others beat us when we are under a load almost lovingly, accompanying the blows with exhortations, as cart-drivers do with willing horses. When we reach the cylinder we unload the sleeper on the ground and I remain stiff, with empty eyes, open mouth and hanging arms, sunk in the ephemeral and negative ecstasy of the cessation of pain.⁶⁹

This extraordinary passage confirms the totality of the inversion characterising Auschwitz. Whilst the workhorse simile Levi employs implies both the menial nature of the labour and Nazi perceptions of those undertaking it, the most compelling dynamic in this passage is that between pain and love. In the Lager, the infliction of pain is both sadistic and benevolent: the blows with which some mean to end life are dealt by others as acts of an aberrant kindness as a means to extend it. Similarly striking is Levi's decision to inflict pain on himself. A natural human instinct is to preserve life through the avoidance of pain; the perverse existence induced by the environment of Auschwitz, however, forces Levi to safeguard his life through its self-infliction. Whilst Levi's use of the word 'deeply' indicates the depth of pain necessary in this moment, the fact of its life-affirming presence by his own hand is representative of an agency that ironically relies upon, and is created by, his suffering; an act of self-determination that is a threat to his wellbeing even as it seeks to protect it. For Levi, to impose pain is an act of resilience

⁶⁹ Levi, p. 73.

in the face of a violence that seeks to deaden, dehumanise and desensitize; for Levi, to feel pain is to know that he is still alive, to refuse to submit to the death that Auschwitz demands. In fact, Levi presents himself as being most empty of life in the moment that pain is not present. It is when he is relieved of his painful burden that he describes himself as 'still, with empty eyes, open mouth and hanging arms'. Free of pain, his project of self-representation finds possibility only in corpse-like imagery – without pain, these words suggest, Levi is more dead than alive. The 'ecstasy of the cessation of pain' is therefore described as 'negative' – although respite is welcome, the absence of pain highlights the emptiness that exists in its place. Presenting pain as a condition of life in *If This is a Man* is therefore Levi's testament to both the anomalous demands of Auschwitz and his refusal to submit to them; a refusal that once again allows this narrative to stand as a challenge to dominant understandings of trauma that insist upon the erasure of the victim's capacity for agency.

Anguish, Language and the Recognition of Brokenness

In light of Levi's description of Auschwitz as a multilingual Babel,⁷⁰ it is curious that *If This is a Man* simultaneously depicts Auschwitz as realm of verbal reticence. Existing 'in silence'⁷¹ and living 'without a word',⁷² the Lager is a place where 'no-one [...] speaks willingly.'⁷³ Much has been written about the encounter between Auschwitz and language.⁷⁴ This is a meeting that has largely been characterised as destructive; an idea signalled by Levi's now-famous statement that 'our language lacks words to express this offence, the demolition of a man.'⁷⁵ The implications of this statement are far-reaching, informing both Adorno's notion of the barbarity of poetry after Auschwitz and the idea of trauma's unspeakability that currently dominates trauma theory. What must be considered, however, is that Levi makes this statement whilst performing the very act that both he and many trauma theorists designate as impossible. Writing *If This is a Man*, Levi uses words to express the very offence he claims is indescribable. But whilst this incongruity appears paradoxical at first, it can also be read as symbolic of

⁷⁰ Levi, p. 44.

⁷¹ Levi, p. 26.

⁷² Levi, p. 26.

⁷³ Levi, p. 35.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Alvin H. Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980) and Lawrence Langer, 'In the Beginning Was the Silence' in *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 1-30.

⁷⁵ Levi, p. 32.

Levi's endurance, agency and resilience. 'If the Lagers had lasted longer', Levi writes, 'a new, harsh language would have been born.'⁷⁶ The implication here is that Auschwitz requires a language stripped of artifice; a language without poetry, art or allusion. But in employing a narrative tone primarily stripped of emotion and characterised by factual description, it can well be argued that Levi produces just that; he himself can be seen as having birthed the stark language he deems necessary for the Lager's textual representation. In choosing to write – and selecting this blunt mode of narration – Levi not only testifies to his own survival, but refuses silence; creating, himself, the very tools required to reject it. Levi, however, does not only reject silence; he challenges the theoretical assumptions defining it in relation to trauma. In the chapter 'Our Nights', Levi dreams of a scene in which he is granted the opportunity to tell his story:

It is an intense pleasure, physical, inexpressible [...] to have so many things to recount: but I cannot help noticing that my listeners do not follow me. In fact, they are completely indifferent [...] as if I was not there. My sister looks at me, gets up and goes away without a word. A desolating grief is now born in me [...] It is pain in its pure state [...] Why is the pain of every day translated so constantly into our dreams, in the ever-repeated scene of the unlistened-to story?⁷⁷

Sharply juxtaposed with the exhilarating relief of telling his story is the rhetorical question that signals the raw, primitive pain resultant of its rejection; a rebuff that represents not only the continued failure of intersubjective relationships outside Auschwitz, but the agonising extension of an isolating silence that, crucially, Levi does not choose. *If This is a Man* is a text that complicates conceptions of survivor silence in its suggestion that the absence of testimony may be rooted not in the reticence or incapacity of survivors, but in the indifference or fear of unwilling listeners.

Whilst Levi's recognition of the destruction of language is a crucial factor in his self-preservation and assertion of agency, his recognition of the destruction of others is equally crucial to his survival. Ruminating on the men around him, Levi observes 'two particularly well-differentiated categories among men – the saved and the drowned.'⁷⁸ Levi meditates on 'the musselmans, the men in decay'⁷⁹ as follows:

⁷⁶ Levi, p. 129.

⁷⁷ Levi, p. 66.

⁷⁸ Levi, p. 93.

⁷⁹ Levi, p. 95.

To sink is the easiest of matters [...] All the musselmans who finished in the gas chambers have the same story, or more exactly, have no story [...] they are overcome before they can adapt themselves; they are beaten by time [...] their body is already in decay, and nothing can save them [...] Their life is short, but their number is endless; they, the *Muselmänner*, the drowned, form the backbone of the camp, an anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical, of non-men who march and labour in silence, the divine spark dead within them, already too empty to really suffer. One hesitates to call them living: one hesitates to call their death death, in the face of which they have no fear, as they are too tired to understand [...] If I could enclose all the evil of our time in one image, I would choose this [...] an emaciated man, with head dropped and shoulders curved, on whose face and in whose eyes not a trace of a thought is to be seen.⁸⁰

Whilst much has been written about the figure of the Muselmann as defined in this passage,⁸¹ what is significant for this chapter is the process of intersubjective recognition and differentiation that takes place within it. In characterising the Muselmänner as those without stories – in a narrative that Levi uses to tell his own – Levi differentiates himself from those who could not ‘adapt’. Diana Fuss defines self-identification as ‘the psychical mechanism that produces self-recognition [...] the play of difference and similitude in self-other relations [...] the detour through the other that defines a self.’⁸² Fuss’s model of identification implies that self-definition is not a static process; rather, this definition implies, identifying oneself requires an active cognisance of familiarity and alterity. In describing the Muselmänner, Levi here defines himself by what he is not; a conscious act of agency that not only differentiates him from the men on whose faces and eyes ‘not a trace of a thought is to be seen’, but that affirms his retention of some vitality as he identifies it as missing in others. Establishing the difference between himself and the Muselmänner, however, becomes more than just a statement of Levi’s own enduring identity. Representing the existence of both agency *and* powerlessness, resilience *and* defeat in *If This is a Man*, Levi’s text emphasises the fact that traumatic violence does not, in fact, homogenise in the way that the theory surrounding it often does. Silenced, broken and without memory, the Muselmänner are models of traumatic victimhood in the way that Caruth and her contemporaries define that state of being. But in presenting himself as a model of differentiation and resilience in the face of the same violence that destroyed his now-anonymous, deadened counterparts, *If This is a Man* becomes its own statement of the complexity, variation and deviation that future theories of trauma must take account of.

⁸⁰ Levi, p. 96.

⁸¹ See, for example, Lissa Skitolsky, ‘Tracing Theory on the Body of the “Walking Dead”’: *Der Muselmann* and the Course of Holocaust Studies’ in *Shofar*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2012), pp. 74-90 and Peter Kuon, “Chi potrebbe dire che cosa sono?” Questioning Humanism in Concentration Camp Survivor Texts and the Category of the “Muselmann” in *Annali d’Italianistica*, Vol. 26 (2008), pp. 203-221.

⁸² Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers: Readings on Psychoanalysis, Sexuality and Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 2.

Levi's allusions to shame extend this idea. Shame is an undoubted presence in Auschwitz; 'without hair, without honour, without names',⁸³ Levi writes, 'we do not dare [...] look at one another'⁸⁴ – 'we are oppressed by shame'.⁸⁵ Suggesting that '[s]hame [...] becomes the dominant sentiment of survivors',⁸⁶ Giorgio Agamben identifies a shame borne out of two sources. He suggests first that survivor shame is borne out of survivor guilt; in the words of Bruno Bettelheim, the survivor is shamed by 'feeling guilty that one was so incredibly lucky when millions perished [...] feeling guilty for having often felt glad that it was not oneself who perished.'⁸⁷ But 'the other face of the survivor's shame', Agamben continues, 'is the exaltation of simple survival'⁸⁸ – shame, here, is found in the survivor 'who cannot feel guilty for his own survival'.⁸⁹ Whilst these opposing positions, and much of the other fascinating critical writing on shame,⁹⁰ indicate the often-harrowing price of survival, their focus is on exactly that – survival. Levi, at this point in his narrative, has not yet transcended Auschwitz physically or mentally; he is not in the position to ruminate on his luck or his relationship to guilt. What is needed, then, is a model of shame that can account for Levi's experience at the moment he is subjected to it – a model that can be found in the work of Emmanuel Levinas. In *De l'évasion*, Levinas writes that shame is 'precisely the fact of being riveted to oneself, the radical impossibility of fleeing oneself to hide from oneself, the unalterably binding presence of the I to itself'.⁹¹ The applicability of Levinas's model to Levi is highlighted by his interaction with the female staff in the camp laboratory where he and two fellow inmates are selected to work. 'Faced with the girls of the laboratory', he writes, 'we three feel ourselves sink into the ground from shame and embarrassment.'⁹² Levi's shame in this moment is created by his acknowledgement of his naked, inescapably abject state; a realisation thrown into sharp relief by intersubjective interaction. Reflecting the process of identification induced by his encounter with the *Muselmänner*,

⁸³ Levi, p. 127.

⁸⁴ Levi, p. 32.

⁸⁵ Levi, p. 156.

⁸⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 2012), p. 88.

⁸⁷ Bruno Bettelheim, *Surviving and Other Essays* (New York: Knopf, 1979), pp. 297-298.

⁸⁸ Agamben, p. 92.

⁸⁹ Agamben, p. 94.

⁹⁰ The relationship between survival and shame has engendered much theoretical discussion. See for example, Michael Nutkiewicz's 'Shame, Guilt and Anguish in Holocaust Survivor Testimony' in *The Oral History Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2003), pp. 1-22, Elizabeth Probyn's *Blush* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005) and Ruth Leys's fascinating monograph *From Guilt to Shame: Auschwitz and After* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁹¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape*, trans. by Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 64.

⁹² Levi, p. 148.

Levi once again defines himself by what he is not. What is crucial, however, is the fact that this definition and recognition is taking place. Much like pain, to feel shame in this moment is to be aware of one's own subjectivity; to possess it, still, and not to have sunk like the Muselmann into a state of numb, unfeeling emptiness. Demonstrative of a perversion that could only exist in the antithetical world of Auschwitz, shame is a necessary factor in the retention of identity even as it threatens it from the outside. Literarily inscribing this inversion, however, Levi signals his movement and survival beyond this point – a movement that is made possible by the retention of agency and self-generated resilience that *If This is a Man* testifies to.

Mark Mathabane: *Kaffir Boy*

The exceptional banality of trauma

Kaffir Boy makes clear that to live in apartheid South Africa is not only to encounter traumatic violence, but to live alongside it. Thus, the shift between the initially horrifying nature of violence and its eventual quotidian presence in Mathabane's life is a subtle, but important, element of his narrative. Describing his earliest years, Mathabane recalls his original reactions to the violent police raids on his home. 'I was instantly seized by a feeling of terror',⁹³ he writes. 'I felt something warm soak my groin and trickle down my legs [...] my mind had suddenly gone blank [...] I could not rid my mind of the sinister force that had suddenly blotted out all memory'.⁹⁴ Describing, too, the feeling of being 'rooted to the spot by a terrifying fear of the unknown',⁹⁵ the extreme physical and psychological effects of witnessing violence are proof of its unexpected, shockingly disruptive imposition on his young life. What is remarkable, however, is the speed with which this violence becomes habitual. Mathabane notes how the police 'moved permanently into my consciousness [...] I came to accept, and to dread, their presence as a way of life';⁹⁶ that at 'barely six years old I was called upon to deal with constant terror'.⁹⁷ 'That the police would come', he recalls wryly, 'was as certain a fact as the sun rising in the morning; what black people didn't

⁹³ Mathabane, p. 7.

⁹⁴ Mathabane, p. 9.

⁹⁵ Mathabane, p. 10.

⁹⁶ Mathabane, p. 27.

⁹⁷ Mathabane, p. 28.

know [...] was when and with how strong a force.⁹⁸ The environment Mathabane describes here is one of constant terror; a terror that paradoxically becomes a normative state of being due to the anticipation of violence with which he is forced to live. Reinforcing the concern raised by South African trauma theorists and practitioners regarding the suitability of Euro/American trauma discourses in the South African context that this dissertation's introduction highlighted, *Kaffir Boy* makes clear that apartheid is not a single, limit event that produces trauma. Whilst lending credence to Don Foster's use of the term 'continuous traumatic stress syndrome'⁹⁹ in the South African context where trauma is not the exception but the rule, these words suggest that the traumas indicated in *Kaffir Boy* must be evaluated on their own terms – a fact that informs, and directs, this section's upcoming analysis of Mathabane's text.

The disorienting duality of trauma's exceptional and habitual presence is reflected in the disparate tones and vocabularies Mathabane uses to describe the particularity of this environment. At times employing the characteristic vocabulary of Euro/American trauma discourses, Mathabane recalls, for example, how the sights and sounds associated with the police:

haunted me in real life and in my dreams [...] I would often wake up screaming in the middle of the night [...] That brutal encounter with the police had left indelible scars. The mere sight of police vans now had the power of blanking my mind, making me forget all I had learned, making me rely on my instincts, which invariably told me to flee, to cower.¹⁰⁰

Referencing nightmares and repression whilst implying the victimhood and lack of agency that popular trends in trauma theory insist upon after encounters with violence, Mathabane's *Kaffir Boy* can be read as a paradigmatic trauma text. Going beyond this selective reading, however, there is much in this text – and Mathabane's linguistic choices – that attests to his resilience. Immediately following the passage above, Mathabane writes the following:

By witnessing raid after raid, week in and week out, month after month, I began learning from my parents ways of recognizing and interpreting specific cues about the movement of police once they had invaded the neighbourhood, so I could react swiftly and warn my parents [...] Other children – three, four, five and six years old – were being taught the same lessons by their parents [...] Whenever the police came other children would scamper homeward shouting, "Mama, Papa, the police are coming!"¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Mathabane, p. 28.

⁹⁹ But Even Bodies Never Speak Pure Languages – An Interview with Don Foster' in *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in South Africa: Interviews*, ed. by Ewald Mengel, Michela Borzaga and Karin Orantes (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2010), pp. 103-126, p. 106.

¹⁰⁰ Mathabane, pp. 27-28.

¹⁰¹ Mathabane, p. 28.

Whilst Levi's resilience is borne out of his rejection of the new world order in which he finds himself, Mathabane learns to navigate a life of precariousness by adapting to it; an adaptation that not only allows him to shield himself from violence, but to actively prepare for its imposition on his life. Indeed, Mathabane's continual witnessing of trauma – reflected by the repeated words at the passage's start – engenders the possibility of his resilience towards its paralysing effects. Whilst popular trends in trauma theory emphasise the lack of agency characterising victims of catastrophic limit events, this passage suggests that continual traumatic stressors might actually *create* the conditions for this very agency to exist. Noting that 'other children [...] were being taught the same lessons by their parents', Mathabane figures the tools of resilience as an inheritance; tools that strengthen the bonds of family even as the violence they respond to aims to destroy them. It is important to note, too, that like *If This is a Man*, *Kaffir Boy* does not present a homogenous picture of those affected by traumatic violence. Reflecting Levi's description of the Muselmänner, Mathabane textually depicts 'an assortment of people: old, ragged men and women drifting aimlessly about the fog like restless ghosts [...] grim- and blank-faced men and women'.¹⁰² Certainly, there are those who succumb to the identity-destroying discrimination and violence that apartheid inflicted on the black population of South Africa. However, simultaneously demonstrating that resilience is also possible within, and despite, a continually stressing environment, *Kaffir Boy* highlights both the reach and limitations of traumatic violence and the various abilities of groups of people to respond to it; a statement of variation that challenges the theoretical homogeneity surrounding the survivor and the aesthetic possibilities of their literary outputs implied by current trends in trauma theory.

Familial unfamiliarity

Despite Mathabane's capacity for resilience against the dehumanising effects of police violence, the tone pervading much of his text suggests a definite presence of anguish in his life; an anguish that has its roots not in Mathabane's direct experience of racial politics, but in the effects they have much closer to home. Levi's acts of intersubjective recognition served to strengthen – and thus retain – his sense of

¹⁰² Mathabane, p. 104.

self. Mathabane's recognition of his parents' lack of humanity in the eyes of the apartheid regime, however, comes to negatively influence his own perceptions of, and relationship to, his mother and father – and, by extension, himself. On the night of the brutal police raid that reveals the tensely complex, violent dynamics of his environment, Mathabane sees his mother hiding from the Peri-Urban police 'crouched like [...] an animal cowering in fear'¹⁰³ and 'knew she had to leave [...] to flee from the police and leave us children alone as she had done so many times before.'¹⁰⁴ Both the animalistic simile employed by Mathabane to describe his mother and the implication of her frequent desertion are significant. As a figure through which Mathabane seeks to define himself, his mother's absence – and his recognition of the fact that she is perceived as less than human by some – provokes an identity crisis of his own. Indeed, the estrangement between mother and son is indicated in Mathabane's description of his mother leaving to go into hiding:

I watched her disappear [...] swallowed up by the ominous darkness and ominous sounds, her figure like that of a black-cloaked ghost [...] less of the mother I knew and loved, and more of a desperate fugitive fleeing off to her secret lair somewhere in the inky blackness.¹⁰⁵

Whilst the passivity implied in the words 'swallowed up' show Mathabane to be cognisant of his mother's powerlessness, his description of her as a 'black-cloaked ghost' suggests both her lack of physical presence in the home and his retroactive understanding that she is cloaked, literally, in her blackness: a corporeal blackness that refuses both mother and son the light of possibility in apartheid South Africa. The insecurity that comes to cloud Mathabane's perception of his relationship to his mother is made clear in the juxtaposition of 'the mother I knew and loved' and the 'desperate fugitive fleeing off to her secret lair'. Marking a shift in his understanding of their positioning in relation to one another, the world to which Mathabane's mother flees is one that he cannot enter. Describing his mother as a 'fugitive', Mathabane connects his mother to a guilt and shame that inevitably come to bear on his perceptions of himself. The crises of identity that Mathabane encounters in *Kaffir Boy*, therefore, point to a trauma that is created by circumstances more complex than those engendered by racial politics alone; his anguish here, stems from existential questions and doubts regarding his own place in the world that originate from within his own home.

¹⁰³ Mathabane, p. 8.

¹⁰⁴ Mathabane, p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ Mathabane, p. 11.

Whilst Mathabane's perceptions of his mother complicate his perceptions of self, his notably vivid recollection of his father's encounter with the police reinforces his sense of confusion and familial estrangement:

My father became speechless. He parted his parched lips and tried to say something, but no sound came. He lowered his bony head and buried it in the palms of his gnarled hands [...] he seemed to age a thousand years, a pitiful sight. The policemen playfully prodded my father's penis with a truncheon [...] My father forced a fake smile [...] It was a begging smile, a passive acceptance of the policeman's authority [...] He seemed uncharacteristically powerless and contrite, a far cry from the tough, resolute and absolute ruler of the house I knew him to be, the father whose words were law. I felt sorry for him [...] The emotional and physical nakedness of my father somehow made me see him in a different light – he seemed a stranger, a total alien.¹⁰⁶

Here, Mathabane witnesses a seismic shift in a family dynamic that had previously seemed unalterable. Whilst Mathabane's mother is representative of a point of existential, biological origin, his father serves as a reference to how masculinity is performed in the context of Mathabane's cultural life. In this moment, however, the dismantling of Mathabane's father is swift, and complete. Rendered 'speechless', the voice that Mathabane has previously understood as wholly authoritative vanishes: and with it, the existence of a crucial equilibrium of paternal power. The imagery of the policeman's truncheon in contact with his father's penis – an obviously phallic battle of masculinity in which Mathabane's father is decidedly defeated – symbolises the total demolition of his father's manhood. Particularly interesting however, is the pity emerging as Mathabane's primary response to his father's degradation. Whilst superficially this emotional reaction appears appropriately empathetic, this response can be read as Mathabane's comprehension of the collapse of the relationship between himself and the father who is now a 'stranger'. Mathabane's identification of his father with the hyper-masculine qualities he clearly no longer possesses renders the retention of this identification impossible. Had it remained, it seems likely that Mathabane's response would have been passionate and angry, horrified and insulted. This quiet pity, however, suggests that Mathabane's father is now a father in name alone. Suddenly a 'total alien' in his son's eyes, the bonds of filial piety no longer apply. Reflecting the estrangement that Levi's invocation of Dante represents, Mathabane does not rush forward to protect his father's honour, but watches from afar, pityingly, as if this assault is being inflicted on a stranger. Compounded by Mathabane's implication of a physical aging also transforming his father

¹⁰⁶ Mathabane, pp. 21-22.

before his eyes, the father he knew no longer exists. When considered in conjunction with his changing perceptions of his mother, the text suggests that what is meant to be the most familiar and secure of social units suddenly becomes the most unfamiliar and strange. Mathabane, as a result, is no longer able to identify himself through the now unstable figures of his mother and father, contributing to a crisis of identity rooted in familial uncertainty. Whilst the instability of the family unit is created in no small part because of the humiliations and restrictions of the apartheid system, Mathabane's recollection of his past in these familial terms is indicative of the specificity of this violence as understood through a child's eyes. Pointing to the way in which the national trauma of apartheid bears its own consequential individual and familial traumas, *Kaffir Boy* challenges the discourses of trauma that evaluate apartheid solely through the lens of race relations.

Race: destructive from the inside out

Mathabane's anguish peaks at the tender of age of ten, when, 'a strange feeling that I should end my own life suddenly came over me [...] all the memories of my childhood suffering came back and multiplied to a lifetime of continuous suffering, and I felt I could take no more.'¹⁰⁷ Whilst the motivating factors behind his suicidal thoughts reinforce the traumatic consequences of the instability of his parental figures, it is important to note that the event preceding this moment in the text is Mathabane witnessing a group of *tsotsis*¹⁰⁸ brutally murder another black man from his township. Perceptions of apartheid violence most frequently conjure up the fractious relationship between black and white South Africans. *Kaffir Boy*, however, emphasises the prevalence of interethnic violence – an endemic presence in the townships that has significant ramifications for Mathabane's already-precarious sense of identity, belonging and blackness. Of course, it is apartheid that creates the conditions that lead to black-on-black violence. The perspective that *Kaffir Boy* affords its readers, though, is important precisely because of the way it indicates how a child – who, by virtue of so being, cannot comprehendingly locate themselves within a framework of complex race-relations – is affected by the immediacy of their environmental dynamics. The first indication of the complexity of interethnic relations

¹⁰⁷ Mathabane, p. 167.

¹⁰⁸ Young, urban criminals.

comes as Mathabane witnesses the Peri-Urban's terrorisation and humiliation of his father. Steeling himself, Mathabane resolves:

not [to] cry in front of these black beasts. For the first time in my life I felt hate and anger rage with furious intensity inside me [...] As I stood there watching, I could feel that hate and anger being branded into my five-year-old mind, branded to remain until I die [...] They weren't humans to me, neither were they black. Though I feared them as one would fear monsters [...] I hated them more than I feared them.¹⁰⁹

Indicated by the intensity of the language in this passage, the pity that Mathabane feels for his father pales in comparison to the rage he experiences towards the black policemen humiliating him. This rage is not, however, rooted in any sense of outrage connected to the demolition of his father's masculinity. In fact, Mathabane's burning anger is indicative of a wider, more complex process of identification and relation at play here. Particularly significant to the dynamic of this passage is Mathabane's claim that these men were not black. To a five-year-old Mathabane subsisting on a diet of terror, poverty and violence, blackness is an identity strongly associated with victimhood. Those inflicting these conditions cannot therefore – in his conception of blackness – lay claim to this identity. It is interesting, however, that despite claiming the impossibility of their blackness, Mathabane repeatedly emphasises in these pages that the perpetrators of this violence were 'black policemen'¹¹⁰ – a vacillation that signals childlike confusion and is itself testimony to the complexity of Mathabane's understanding of black identity. It is this confusion that leads him to describe the policemen as 'black beasts', to claim that they 'weren't humans', and compare them to 'monsters'. So removed are these men from his conceptions of black humanity, they can only be described in the discursive terms that separate them from the world, and the blackness, that Mathabane knows. Furthermore, his anger can be read as a reaction to his realisation that blackness is more complex than he had originally believed; to the realisation that black men could not only be victims, but architects, of black suffering. This is a watershed moment for Mathabane because it is here that his young self recognises the betrayal of his own, by his own. Complicating his understandings of blackness, this incident is crisis-inducing for Mathabane because of the uncertainty it casts on both his own sense of blackness and the now-multiple possibilities of this racial identity.

¹⁰⁹ Mathabane, pp. 22-23.

¹¹⁰ Mathabane, p. 23.

From a structural perspective, it is interesting to note that as the text progresses, Mathabane's encounter with interethnic violence and victimhood further confounds his understanding of what blackness is. Although his father's 'vindictive hatred for white people [...] was [...] the passion of his life [...] He never stopped accusing various neighbours of being witches responsible for his arrest.'¹¹¹ As Mathabane grows older, he too comes to realise the danger posed not only by white people but – far more immediately – by the various factions of the black community in which he lives. His encounter with the world of child prostitution¹¹² is a shocking example. Mathabane describes how a group of local men, promising starving young black boys food and money, lured him and several friends into a complex. After being ordered to undress, Mathabane looks around confusedly – before eventually running away – to see:

the boys, now completely naked [...] bent over and touch[ing] their toes, their black anuses high in the air [...] "Don't be afraid, boy", one of the men said softly, breathily, dreamily. "It's only a game we play".¹¹³

The man's use of the words 'game' and 'play' implies both the perverted performance of childhood leisure being enacted by this moment, and the levity with which the lives of these hungry black boys are regarded not only in the eyes of the white men a bus ride away, but also by the black men in Mathabane's immediate vicinity. Nearly a victim of black rapists before he ever encounters the white world, Mathabane's text complicates the categories of victim and oppressor in the context of apartheid. Although threatening in a markedly different way, the sexual predators Mathabane remembers here invoke Levi's references to the *Kapos* who enforced law and order – often through brute force – upon their fellow Jewish inmates at Auschwitz. Like the *Kapos*, the abuse these men inflict is facilitated by the broader context of violence and prejudice in which they exist. In laying bare both the extent of the violence they suffered – and, crucially, by whose hands this suffering is exacted – Levi and Mathabane emphasise the occasionally discomfiting need to consider the moral categories of victim and oppressor in the context of trauma. In a call to account that it is own statement of agency and resilience, Mathabane emphasises once again the complex and multi-faceted nature both of trauma itself and the extent to which violence of this kind blurs the lines of civility and ethics.

¹¹¹ Mathabane, p. 50.

¹¹² Mathabane, pp. 68-74.

¹¹³ Mathabane, p. 72.

It is not only black children, however, that are victimised by their elders. Mathabane also becomes aware of the social fissures between the adults of his community, witnessing hostile animosity between black men from the townships and those from the tribal reserves. Describing their tribal neighbours as 'leeches'¹¹⁴ and 'vermin'¹¹⁵ – animalistic terminology that has become a hallmark of discriminatory rhetoric and persecutory violence – a township man angrily complains to Mathabane that 'if all these years that vermin hadn't been licking the white man's ass [...] we would have long had political rights in this country'.¹¹⁶ Infused by blame, anger and resentment, these words go beyond a simple statement of grievance to become indicative of the divisive dynamics of victimhood in Alexandra. Coupled with the fact that throughout the text, 'black' is used a pejorative slur by members of the black community – Mathabane himself is termed a 'black swine'¹¹⁷ by his mother, and a 'black liar'¹¹⁸ by his grandmother – blackness is rendered an identity so complex and undefined that possessing it becomes the most significant source of Mathabane's distress; a distress that precedes any interaction he has with the white world. As indicated by the quote above, interethnic tensions are directly related to the complex dynamics of race in South Africa. However, this is a narrative that emphasises the youth and bewilderment of its author. Reminding readers of the layered nature of apartheid trauma, the interethnic tensions and denigration of blackness from within demonstrate that although these conflicts are *consequences* of apartheid, they manifest themselves in a communal context that is – up to a point – the only world that Mathabane knows. Pointing once again to the need to evaluate trauma on the terms of the person experiencing it, Mathabane's text becomes especially instructive precisely because his encounter with conflict and discrimination takes place not only within the context of black-white tension, but against the backdrop of community, family and selfhood.

This is not, however, to say that Mathabane totally escapes the overt racism and discrimination faced by black South Africans throughout the apartheid years. When he eventually encounters white environments, Mathabane certainly becomes aware of racial difference. Following his accidental boarding of a whites-only bus – a transgression that forces his grandmother to wipe the area he stood

¹¹⁴ Mathabane, p. 110.

¹¹⁵ Mathabane, p. 111.

¹¹⁶ Mathabane, p. 111.

¹¹⁷ Mathabane, p. 97.

¹¹⁸ Mathabane, p. 200.

with her dress and claim his mental illness – Mathabane is publicly humiliated, and recalls becoming ‘increasingly self-conscious with each step I took.’¹¹⁹ Here, Mathabane becomes acutely aware of what his skin signifies in the white world and the resultant complexity of his movement within it. It is his movement *between* black and white worlds, however, that remains the most charged process of navigation in the text. By his own admission, the racism Mathabane encounters from white South Africans pales in comparison to the rejection and ridicule he suffers at the hands of his own community. Embraced by the white family who employ, and genuinely care for, his grandmother, Mathabane is given books to improve his English and a tennis racquet that sparks his eventual professional career. His linguistic and sporting aspirations, however, only serve to further estrange him from his family and friends. ‘Many black people,’ Mathabane recalls, ‘interpreted my love for the English language, for poetry, for tennis, as a sign that I was trying to be white’.¹²⁰ He is threatened with death, called ‘a traitor to the struggle’¹²¹ and is met with ‘contemptuous stares and oaths from black tennis officials.’¹²² Adding to the fractures in his paternal relationship, Mathabane’s father accuses of him of ‘trying to become an imitation white man by playing this silly thing called tennis [...] One would think you were a woman who only happened to have a penis.’¹²³ The quotations I have cited here are significant because they demonstrate the forcible ejection of Mathabane from his entire cultural context; linguistically unhomed, politically displaced and viewed as contravening the conventions of his gender and its associated expectations, Mathabane is both nationally *and* communally isolated, mocked and rejected.

It is the totality of this exclusion and the untenability of this liminal state that renders South Africa an impossible site for Mathabane’s future. Despite learning English in order to escape the poverty and violence of his childhood, Mathabane is still *persona non grata*; a ‘filthy black boy’¹²⁴ in a world where, as he reminds his readers, ‘meaningful contact between the races was forbidden by law’.¹²⁵ The hybrid identity Mathabane attempts to carve out for himself cannot exist in Alexandra, and thus, the text ends with his decision to move to America. This is decision that could quite easily be read as evidence of his brokenness; a move prompted by his inability to exist in a landscape of trauma, loss, hunger and

¹¹⁹ Mathabane, p. 202.

¹²⁰ Mathabane, p. 255.

¹²¹ Mathabane, p. 280.

¹²² Mathabane, p. 306.

¹²³ Mathabane, p. 216.

¹²⁴ Mathabane, p. 185.

¹²⁵ Mathabane, p. 327.

tension. The frustration Mathabane is left with at the text's end would appear to support this position. Rhetorically asking 'why does apartheid do this to us? Why does it refuse us the right to lead normal lives?',¹²⁶ Mathabane signals the depth of his anger. However, although the text's conclusion is largely characterised by a tone of resentment, disappointment and hurt, *Kaffir Boy's* final pages simultaneously signal something quite different:

I was leaving [...] to venture into the unknown, to cast adrift my ship in search of freedom and liberty in a new land. A quest for a different life, different from the nightmare I had been living for eighteen years [...] By going to America I felt that I owed the duty to my race and country to use my life in a meaningful way [...] I turned my head for a last look at my family, standing in a row in front of the shack [...] I wanted to tell the man to turn back, but I didn't. I followed destiny.¹²⁷

What this passage makes clear is that Mathabane's journey to America is not a departure borne of submission. Rather, it is an act of determination to fulfil the potential of a life that cannot come to be in the particular toxicity of apartheid South Africa. Despite their rejection of him, it is particularly striking that Mathabane continues to feel a sense of responsibility towards his 'race and country'. It is precisely this enduring sense of linkage, however, that becomes testament to his resilience in the face of traumatic circumstances. Whilst the dominant trauma discourse insists on the repression of pain and the inevitable obscurity of its sources, Mathabane's continued recognition of himself – and his future aspirations – within these national and communal frameworks is evidence not only of his ability to confront pain, but of his willingness to further engage with its memory, perpetrators and associations. It is the variation of Mathabane's responses to violence and discrimination throughout *Kaffir Boy*, however, that make this text and its ending so noteworthy. Whilst Mathabane's capacity for self-preservation relied upon adaptation in anticipation of the inevitable police brutality discussed earlier in this chapter, resilience – in this distinct moment – relies on the decisive rejection of this hostile environment in favour of a place offering 'freedom and liberty'. In their respective depictions of the Musselmen and the broken black citizens of apartheid South Africa in opposition to their respective retentions of vitality, Levi and Mathabane make clear that responses to trauma are not as homogenous as dominant trends in trauma theory imply. Mathabane's text, however, extends this challenge to homogeneity with respect to resilience theory. Although the differing definitions of resilience outlined in this chapter's introduction champion adaptation or a refusal to change *Kaffir Boy* is demonstrative of

¹²⁶ Mathabane, p. 347.

¹²⁷ Mathabane, pp. 348-350.

how resilience might be achieved by a complex and dynamic relation between both; a constantly-changing symbiosis that is, in its movement between adaptation and refusal, itself indicative of Mathabane exercising the agency that contemporary trauma discourses theorise as eluding victims of violence. In addition, therefore, to providing crucial insight regarding the multi-layered density of apartheid-related trauma and the need to acknowledge the particularity of perspective, *Kaffir Boy* challenges the current, authoritative narratives surrounding trauma and resilience in its suggestion that neither victims of violence, nor their responses to violent events, are homogenous.

Yolande Mukagasana: *La Mort ne veut pas de moi*

Genocide in sights and sounds

Listening to a group of Hutu *genocidaires* boasting about the day's slaughters whilst hiding in a cramped, damp space beneath her neighbour Emmanuelle's sink, Mukagasana makes the following pronouncement:

May those who don't have the strength to read this, to read what I may one day write down [...] denounce themselves as complicit with the genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda. I, Yolande Mukagasana, declare before humanity that whoever doesn't want to know about the ordeal of the Rwandan people is complicit with the perpetrators. The world will not cease to be violent if it doesn't study its need for violence. I don't want to scare you or make you feel sorry for me. I want to bear witness.¹²⁸

With Mukagasana's emphasis on the world's obligation to 'study its need for violence' reflecting *If This is a Man's* intent to provoke 'study of certain aspects of the human mind',¹²⁹ *La Mort ne veut pas de moi* presents itself here as a text that poses, and invites consideration of, pressing moral and ethical questions. However, this passage also makes clear that its exhortation to introspection is not the narrative's singular focus. Written in a tone suggestive of a vengeful curse, what is compelling here is the connection that Mukagasana makes between a receptivity to knowledge regarding genocidal violence and complicity in the act itself. Like Mathabane, Mukagasana plays with the boundaries between victim, perpetrator, bystander and reader in her invocation of the dynamics between speech

¹²⁸ Mukagasana, p. 107.

¹²⁹ Levi, p. 15.

and silence; a relationship that that is emphasised by Mukagasana's direct address to 'whoever doesn't want to know' [emphasis mine]. Implying the existence of wilful, conscious ignorance in relation to the genocide, Mukagasana here demonstrates a resentment that is a common thread throughout Rwandan testimony: a bitterness towards what many Rwandans perceive as the global international apathy characterising responses to the violence of 1994. Later in the text, Mukagasana makes this clear by blasting those who are 'moved without acting'¹³⁰ and 'the cowardice of the international community who have abandoned us'.¹³¹ Representing far more than an unwillingness to help, the lack of intervention was a definitive silencing of voices that desperately needed to be heard; the refusal to recognise the humanity behind these cries for help. Mukagasana's testimony, therefore, becomes the means through which she reclaims the voice that the international community ignored, and the genocide intended to destroy – the re-establishment of an identity that requires the receptivity of others to the story it has to tell. Given the scale of the horror of this history, however, Mukagasana's call to reflection simultaneously requires the narrative's relatability to prevent its moral and ethical dimensions slipping into abstraction; a relatability that I argue her text works towards by highlighting the sounds, sights and smells of the genocide.

To read *La Mort ne veut pas de moi* is to be drawn into an intensely sensory text. Travelling to a Hutu colonel's house where she hides in plain sight by posing as his elderly aunt, Mukagasana describes the scene:

the car passes alongside ten or so corpses, abandoned on the road. From then on there's an almost unending line of bodies [...] Mostly men, half naked, and with red marks showing the place where they were hit: the forehead, the nape of the neck, the heels, the arms [...] foreheads, cut wide open [...] four or five young boys with their arms cut [...] Another woman, raped no doubt before being killed, because her knickers are around her ankles [...] A dog pulls at the cut-off head of an adolescent girl, one of her plaits in his mouth [...] you can see hands, arms, feet and legs scattered on the road.¹³²

This passage shocks with its vivid, gruesome descriptions of bodily mutilation, violation and injury, despite Mukagasana stating earlier that this is not the intended effect of her writing. The visceral imagery in Mukagasana's narrative has not gone unnoticed, with Norridge linking the emphasis on the visual in Rwandan survivor writing both to the lack of visual images from Rwanda during the genocide

¹³⁰ Mukagasana, p. 116.

¹³¹ Mukagasana, p. 92.

¹³² Mukagasana, pp. 175-176.

in the international media and to the efforts of survivors to demonstrate their relationships to the genocide's victims.¹³³ Certainly, this passage testifies to the scale of the violence that produced this 'unending line of bodies' and the undeniable sadism accompanying the killings. But in addition, the detailed and discomfiting sights described here turn what might stand as an abstract story of genocide into an experience of an individual grounded in physical, corporeal reality. The emphasis on visual representations of the genocide's consequences in this text is reflected by the commemorative strategies employed by Rwanda's memorial sites, many of which purposefully feature the skeletons and bones of the victims at the places, and in the positions, that they perished.¹³⁴ Commenting on this phenomenon, Susan E. Cook argues that 'the three dimensionality of a physical location, the sight of hastily dug pits and mass graves, and the smell and look of human remains make locations where genocide has taken place haunting reminders that genocide is an artefact of human society.'¹³⁵ The implication that physical tangibility is a conduit for post-violence reflection and ethical calibration is one that Mukagasana taps into by presenting death in its raw, uncensored form. Inviting readers not only to understand the physical and sexual brutality of the genocide, this passage also asks readers to visualize the violence and meditate on their own ethical stances in response. But in addition to the visual emphasis of this passage having crucial implications for the way that Mukagasana achieves her aim of post-conflict reflection, the clarity of the recall apparent in her words also directly challenges the dominant narrative of trauma theory that insists on the lacuna surrounding physical and emotional pain. Lending credence to McNally's ideas regarding the ability of traumatic moments to *sharpen* the capacity for accurate recall, Mukagasana's emphasis on the visual grounds this dissertation's argument for the need to broaden ideas surrounding the reception, and representative possibilities, of traumatic events.

Mukagasana's emphases on smell and sound further consolidate these ideas, with smell, in particular, marking Rwanda's shift from calm to chaos. Mukagasana recalls at the text's start, how '[a] strong sweet smell of bananas grips me, overpowering the scent of hibiscus flowers'.¹³⁶ The smell of nature, as Mukagasana explains it, is the smell of Rwanda itself – 'we don't like nature', she writes, 'we are

¹³³ Norridge, pp. 152-153.

¹³⁴ For an extended discussion of the corporeality of Rwanda's memorials and commemorative strategies, see Ayala Maurer-Prager, '(Re)Cognising the Corpse: Individuality, Identification and Multidirectional Memorialisation in Post-Genocide Rwanda' in *Human Remains in Society*, ed. by Jean-Marc Dreyfus and Élisabeth Anstett (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. 113-138.

¹³⁵ Susan E. Cook, 'The Politics of Preservation in Rwanda' in *Genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda*, ed. by S. E. Cook (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2007), pp. 281-311, p. 293.

¹³⁶ Mukagasana, p. 35.

nature.¹³⁷ As the genocide takes hold of Rwanda and prohibits Mukagasana from taking her place within it, it is smell that symbolises this change. The wind, once carrying wafts of fragrant flowers now circulates ‘an unbearable smell throughout Kigali’;¹³⁸ ‘the bodies [...] give off a strong smell’;¹³⁹ Mukagasana herself ‘smell[s] of rancid butter’¹⁴⁰ and the birds ‘seem to be commenting in their own language on the spectacle of the town and its unusual smell.’¹⁴¹ Presenting the conflict and her place within it in this sensory way, Mukagasana once again translates an unimaginable event into wholly imaginable, and relatable, terms. Sound, too, comes to aid Mukagasana’s efforts to translate the unimaginable into the real. It is under her sink that Mukagasana muses that ‘[k]illing must be thirsty work [...] I hear a noise like a large coconut being opened with a club’.¹⁴² It is only later, when Mukagasana watches a child being chased and murdered by Hutu militiamen – and watches as ‘[h]is skull explodes with the sound of a coconut’¹⁴³ – that she realises the horrific truth of what this sound represented. Supplementing her audial descriptions of death, Mukagasana also notes that ‘[w]hen the skull has broken the hammer blows have a lower pitch, more like an electric mincer checked by unexpected bones.’¹⁴⁴ Referencing quotidian sounds recognisable outside the context of extreme genocidal violence, Mukagasana renders the exceptional something that can be grasped by those that have not directly witnessed it. Despite Norridge’s caution that sensual emphases might ‘reduce the Rwandan experience solely to its physical reality’,¹⁴⁵ it is this very physical tangibility which creates an understanding that, in its sensory relatability, has the ability to make the connection between Mukagasana and her reader that she ardently strives for.

Being female: ruin and redemption

The unique way in which Mukagasana’s testimony simultaneously functions as the story of the erasure and reclamation of her identity is reflected in the text’s multiple references to, and meditations upon,

¹³⁷ Mukagasana, p. 35.

¹³⁸ Mukagasana, p. 139.

¹³⁹ Mukagasana, p. 177.

¹⁴⁰ Mukagasana, p. 206.

¹⁴¹ Mukagasana, p. 213.

¹⁴² Mukagasana, p. 137.

¹⁴³ Mukagasana, p. 169.

¹⁴⁴ Mukagasana, p. 169.

¹⁴⁵ Norridge, p. 158.

her femininity and form. At the text's start, Mukagasana's brand of womanhood is bold and unapologetic. Despite acknowledging that '[m]en don't like an emancipated woman, and they like her even less when she has money',¹⁴⁶ Mukagasana is – in her own words – 'a nurse who manages her own clinic [...] well off [...] proud'.¹⁴⁷ Declaring herself first and foremost as a 'Rwandan woman' in the preface to her text, Mukagasana's femininity is a central, definitive element of her identity. It is this identity, however, that comes under siege most acutely during the genocide – a siege that takes her physical body as one of its primary casualties. Observing the results of days with no food, Mukagasana notes that 'I am unrecognisable'¹⁴⁸ – 'the plumpness that held up my jeans before, has deserted me'.¹⁴⁹ Personifying the old proportions of her body as having betrayed her, Mukagasana implies the betrayal of her corporeal self in the battle she is waging to retain her identity. It is when she finds a brief moment to wash, however, that the changes in her body become most apparent. She instructs her husband Joseph to:

"Look at these spots on my arms. Look at my buttocks that no longer exist. Look at my thighs. I've become an old woman." Water runs along my stretch marks, they've turned into the deep cracks like those of a river bed. Joseph looks at me without desire.¹⁵⁰

Itemising her body parts in this way and employing a simile that implies drought, Mukagasana emphasises the physical assault of the genocide whilst simultaneously testifying to the overwhelming sense of self-estrangement induced by her physical change. Deprived of the buttocks and thighs so central to female sexuality, the fact that Joseph looks at her without desire implies that in addition to her feminine identity being erased on a physical level, she has also lost her identity as a lover and a wife. In this moment, Mukagasana realises that her capacity for sexual intimacy is lost. However, she remains very much aware that her body is at risk of a sexual encounter of a rather more sinister kind: rape. Mukagasana indicates that death is preferable to sexual violation at several points in the text; 'I'm resigned to death', she writes, 'but not to being raped [...] if I must die, may I at least die clean.'¹⁵¹ Suggesting that rape would represent an intolerable defilement, Mukagasana emphasises how women pay the price of war with the sacrifice of both their lives and their bodies. Indeed, whilst Mukagasana is

¹⁴⁶ Mukagasana, p. 21.

¹⁴⁷ Mukagasana, p. 17.

¹⁴⁸ Mukagasana, p. 51.

¹⁴⁹ Mukagasana, p. 67.

¹⁵⁰ Mukagasana, p. 72.

¹⁵¹ Mukagasana, p. 71.

selected to die by the Interahamwe, she is targeted in specifically bodily terms, with one – notably female – genocidaire declaring that ‘I’m going to cut off her breasts.’¹⁵² Mukagasana’s breasts, representative of both her femininity and capacity for nurturing life, become symbolic of the feminine power the Hutu militia are determined to terminate. What is interesting, however, is that Mukagasana does not only draw attention to the war declared on her own body. She recounts the fate of her friend Théophile’s wife, who:

was raped whilst she was pregnant [...] they slashed open her insides to see what a Tutsi baby looks like in his mother’s stomach. Then they cut the tendons on her feet. She died, at last, when someone decided to put a bullet in her head.¹⁵³

Just as Mukagasana details the damage done to her own body, she testifies to the horrific invasion of Hutu machetes and bullets inflicted upon Théophile’s wife’s stomach, feet and head. This woman – unnamed, perhaps, to become emblematic of the dangers posed by being female in the context of genocide – is the ultimate symbol of femininity in her pregnant state. Primed to give life, and cruelly cut down before having the chance to do so, this woman is a figurative representation of the total annihilation that genocide represents. In addition, however, to Mukagasana’s stark recollections of how bodies and violence meet challenging notions of trauma’s unrepresentability, her decision to present these images through the figure of the body is crucial in building the sense of relatability she is trying to create for her readers. Although complete identification is not possible – or, indeed, ethical – Mukagasana’s depiction of genocide through its corporeal consequences presents the horror of 1994 in its most tangible, understandable sense. Although the body is at its most vulnerable and attacked in the moment that Mukagasana presents it, it also comes to function as powerful point of connection and understanding between Mukagasana and those whom she desperately needs to hear her story.

It is important, however, to also acknowledge Mukagasana’s representation of her body as retaining and exerting power even as she laments its changing shape and her relationship towards it. Mukagasana’s body is undoubtedly in a state of vulnerable precarity; a state that Mukagasana acknowledges when she tilts her head only whilst holding on to it for fear ‘that it will come away by

¹⁵² Mukagasana, p. 49.

¹⁵³ Mukagasana, p. 84.

itself.¹⁵⁴ However, it is the very threat to her body that sustains her life. Despite often considering giving herself up to the Hutu militia, she decides against it. 'It's perhaps the fear of being raped', she ponders, 'that gives me strength'.¹⁵⁵ Mirroring the way that Levi harnesses his physical pain to prolong his physical life, Mukagasana's overwhelming fear of bodily violation keeps her alive. Similarly compelling is the way that Mukagasana's view of her own body causes her despair *and* provides her with resilient resolve. Although, as explained above, Mukagasana's acknowledgement of her changing body contributed to her resignation to death and the loss of identity, there comes a point where she realises that, despite her changed appearance:

I want to look at myself [...] I look at the hollow of my stomach. Three points emerge, two bones sticking out of my pelvis and my prominent pubic bone, covered in black hair. It looks like the Virunga volcanoes. I live for a moment in this refound intimacy. Although I've lost flesh, I'm still a woman. Hope spreads over me once more.¹⁵⁶

With Mukagasana's bodily landscape reflecting the landscape of Rwanda itself, she is reminded not only of her rightful place within her country but of her inextricable connection to it – a connection made clear by her statement that 'I am Rwanda'¹⁵⁷ elsewhere in the text. The intimacy that she feared she had lost resurfaces in the love she rediscovers between herself and her nation; a love that her own body – even in its starved, miserable state – testifies to. The statement that 'I'm still a woman' is a defiant rejection of the erasure with which she is threatened; a reinstatement of the femininity that is such an inextricable element of who she is. Ultimately, it is this rediscovery of her womanhood that facilitates her survival. Hiding in plain sight in the home of a Rwandan colonel, Mukagasana plots to seduce him and kill him with a grenade she hides in her underwear. Mukagasana's resolve to carry out this plan is clearly attributed to the fact that 'I've become a woman once more. *All* woman. A woman who likes to seduce'.¹⁵⁸ The image Mukagasana creates when she writes that 'I caress my stolen army grenade every now and again, under my cloth, like a pregnant woman caresses her stomach'¹⁵⁹ is powerful. In addition to signifying the return of the feminine power she feared lost, this weaponisation of her body and the simile of pregnancy that accompanies it creates her in the image of Théophile's wife. Now, however, she is a woman who will not be silenced or cut down; she is a woman that will yield

¹⁵⁴ Mukagasana, p. 73.

¹⁵⁵ Mukagasana, p. 134.

¹⁵⁶ Mukagasana, pp. 143-144.

¹⁵⁷ Mukagasana, p. 96.

¹⁵⁸ Mukagasana, p. 221.

¹⁵⁹ Mukagasana, p. 223.

the weapon instead of being forced to yield to the death it promises. By presenting the body as a site of a battle fought not only between herself and the Hutu, but between the resignation and resolve of her own mind, Mukagasana demonstrates that to be a woman in genocide is to walk a fine line between victory and violation. This point alone reinforces the need to expand the range and bounds of trauma theory to recognise the complexity of the traumas generated for women in the context of mass violence. In addition, however, Mukagasana's figuring of the body in these disparate ways points to an internal conflict that humanises her narrative; a humanisation that ultimately allows for the relatability and recognition both she and her story require.

Mirroring the way that Levi relies on pain to affirm his enduring vitality in the face of catastrophic violence, Mukagasana's retention of identity becomes similarly dependent on her experiencing her own – specifically female – pain. Hiding under Emmanuelle's sink, Mukagasana feels:

a tearing sensation in my stomach. As if I'm about to give birth. [...] I set out obsessively to remember my first birth. I feel myself detaching from this world [...] The labour is long. My son shows no desire to come and see the world, just as I, aching, contorted and curled up under my dear sink, have no desire to go and see how Rwanda is doing [...] I think I recognise the first cry of my son. I'm happy. I've given birth to my child for a second time [...] I want to shout that I'm able to give birth to the same child twice. That death doesn't exist.¹⁶⁰

Provoked by the physical pain of her aching body – a pain compounded by the anguished realisation of the erasure of her Rwandan identity – Mukagasana's revisiting of the pain of childbirth is the simultaneous resolution to reclaim both her feminine power and identity. Whilst the word 'obsessively' indicates the urgency of this memory for Mukagasana's present state of being, this specific recollection of pain allows Mukagasana to escape the physical confines of her hiding place and remember herself as a woman, a mother and a Rwandan. The successful recall of this memory culminates in Mukagasana's statement that 'death doesn't exist'. This is at once tragic and life-affirming; spoken against the backdrop of vividly-described murders and mutilations, it is clear that death is a very present part of the Rwandan landscape at this moment. Mukagasana's ability to remember herself in this life-giving role, however, is her own statement that the total death of identity can be averted despite the genocidal intent of her enemies; a demise that she refuses here through the recollection of a pain entirely unique to her. The pain and purpose associated with motherhood, however, is not confined to

¹⁶⁰ Mukagasana, pp. 104-106.

the memory of childbirth alone. Preceding Mukagasana's decision to separate herself from her children in the interest of safety, the text makes clear that they are the key to her resilience. Despite being gripped by her own fear, Mukagasana fights her own tears recognising that 'it's better that my children don't see my crying';¹⁶¹ despite feeling the futility of living, she catches her daughter's eye and states that '[n]ow I know why I'm getting dressed: for them.'¹⁶² It is the strength her children provide her that makes her parting from them so painful. Briefly meeting them once more before they separate, Mukagasana recalls the following:

We hug, we cry. Spérancie moans in a corner of the room. Her sobs cut me to the quick [...] she gets up, disappears into the garden, leaving me to the painful intimacy of being a mother surrounded by her unhappy children [...] When Nadine hugs me, I feel like I'm waking up from a nightmare [...] I look at her bleeding limbs, tattered pieces of skin hang like flags at half mast. Christian sits cross-legged opposite me. His head falls into my lap. Sandrine sits next me and puts her arms around my shoulders [...] I feel like one of those pictures of the Virgin Mary you find in religious books, but instead of one I have three children in pain [...] We remain in this state of intimacy for I don't know how long. From time to time, I caress the head of one child, or hold hands. Grenades explode from time to time in the distance.¹⁶³

The emphasis on physical touch and emotional anguish in this passage highlights the connectedness of this family unit, bound in this moment by pain, love and sadness. This is also a connectedness, however, that makes clear how central Mukagasana's children are to her conception of self. Implied by the imagery created by this description of their physical touching – Nadine's hug, Christian's head in her lap and Sandrine's arms around her shoulders – each child becomes an extension of Mukagasana's body. This intimacy, however, is 'painful' because of its impending suspension; a separation foreshadowed by the explosion of grenades that impose upon this touching moment. The overwhelming anguish of this separation is signalled by the refrain of 'where are my children?' that punctuates the text from this point until its end. The pain of uncertainty regarding the fate of her children is visceral; learning from Emmanuelle that her children have not yet been killed, Mukagasana 'breathe[s] again like a drowned man, saved just in time'.¹⁶⁴ 'If my children are dead', she asks, 'what would be the point in carrying on living?'¹⁶⁵ But whilst her anguish serves the purpose of providing her strength to persevere in the hopes of being reunited with her children, her pain also becomes essential to the text's function as testimony. The refrain of 'where are my children' frames the narrative in terms of a mother's love

¹⁶¹ Mukagasana, p. 67.

¹⁶² Mukagasana, p. 78.

¹⁶³ Mukagasana, pp. 92-95.

¹⁶⁴ Mukagasana, p. 101.

¹⁶⁵ Mukagasana, p. 147.

and anguish; an anguish that humanises the narrative and Mukagasana herself. Whilst the survivor is often figured as exceptional in critical writing – a characterisation discussed in detail in the following chapter – this is an exceptionality that can paradoxically further isolate them; an isolation that leads to the lack of relation that Mukagasana so fears. The pain associated with motherhood therefore comes to represent a powerful means by which she invites readers to gain insight into her experience on some level: a pain that invites connection even as it testifies to the potential of its loss.

Emotional questions, ambiguous answers

Figuring her body as a symbol of power in multiple ways, Mukagasana rebels against the Hutu denigration of Tutsi bodies and invites readers to relate to her testimony through her emphasis on the physical. It is important to note, however, that Mukagasana's demonstration of her emotional and philosophical complexity plays its own role in creating the reader identifications necessary for the creation of the dialogue Mukagasana aspires towards. One of the most compelling ways in which Mukagasana emphasises the complexity of her situation is through the existential questions she repeatedly asks herself. Despite successfully eliciting a declaration of love from the colonel she intends to kill, Mukagasana cannot help herself from feeling:

compassion for my enemy [...] I spend the night asking myself about the curious feelings a victim has for his torturer. Is it pity? Is it disgust? Is it a mixture of both? And why is it impossible to get away from the idea that the torturer is a human being?¹⁶⁶

Strikingly, Mukagasana is kept awake not only by the tension inherent in her current situation, but by the ethical quandary it produces – a dilemma that not only complicates the categories of persecutor and victim in a significant way, but that invites the reader to ruminate upon these same questions. At another point in the text, Mukagasana comes across a dying man in the road. She realises, however, that:

I don't have the courage to finish off this dying man [...] We abandon the man to his suffering. For the first time since the assassination of President Habyarimana it seems to me that the victim is no less of a coward than his executioner. Eh! What would I do if I was put in a situation where I had to kill or be killed? In Rwanda, in April 1994, the executioners are victims for being

¹⁶⁶ Mukagasana, p. 194.

executioners. But if they're victims, why do they torture before killing? Why this taste for blood?¹⁶⁷

This passage is extraordinary in the ethical complexity it compels its readers to consider. Despite the fact that an act of violence would represent a perverted kindness in this moment – a moment that recalls the 'loving' way in which Levi was beaten by the Kapos – Mukagasana cannot bring herself to enact it. She therefore allows the continuation of suffering despite having the means with which to end it. Does this make her similarly guilty to those who purposefully left their victims to suffer? In leaving this question unanswered, Mukagasana draws the reader into her experience by forcing them to confront the ethical murkiness created by genocidal violence. Her narrative is made all the more compelling by the questions it creates regarding the categories of perpetrator and victim that so many narratives employ to present history as a zero-sum game in which subject positions are clearly defined. With these questions, Mukagasana demands that her readers consider the benevolence and the violence of which human beings are capable. Norridge notes that 'Mukagasana is not afraid of the uglier sides of her personality and presents her shortcomings to the reader as evidence of both her humanity and her pain.'¹⁶⁸ Whilst this is certainly the case, it is particularly compelling that these questions and the ethical ambiguities they inspire invite consideration of individuals other than Mukagasana. With these questions, and the universal dilemmas they contain, Mukagasana humanises herself whilst inviting consideration of her persecutors and her narrative; a narrative that becomes all the more important and urgent for the ethical considerations it demands.

But whilst the ethical conundrums *La Mort ne veut pas de moi* poses force readers to consider the complexities of guilt in the context of genocide, the range of emotions that Mukagasana displays throughout the narrative imply that she, too, cannot be reduced to either the deadened, submissive figure prescribed by trauma theory or the abject figure defined by the Hutu. By her own admission, Mukagasana feels fear. 'I'm afraid',¹⁶⁹ she admits at once point; 'Fear has returned',¹⁷⁰ she confesses, at another. Countering this fear, however, is the remarkable courage and resilience she is simultaneously capable of. Whilst Joseph 'cried like a child, downcast, powerless, dazed,'¹⁷¹ it lies to

¹⁶⁷ Mukagasana, p. 90.

¹⁶⁸ Norridge, p. 161.

¹⁶⁹ Mukagasana, p. 147.

¹⁷⁰ Mukagasana, p. 147.

¹⁷¹ Mukagasana, p. 25.

Mukagasana 'to calm him down'¹⁷² – she exhorts her brother to 'not lose our courage',¹⁷³ and is incredulous when her cousin Hilde implies that she can be discouraged. 'Discourage me? Am I someone who can be discouraged?'¹⁷⁴ She feels, too, immense anger directed at various sources. She accuses Belgium of creating interethnic division,¹⁷⁵ the Christian church of complicity,¹⁷⁶ the Rwandan deity Imana of abandoning her,¹⁷⁷ the West for imposing standards of barbarity and civility,¹⁷⁸ her husband Joseph for showing cowardice,¹⁷⁹ Emmanuelle for her adherence to Christian faith¹⁸⁰ and, of course, the Hutu genocidaires. Supplementing this emotional range, however, is her unlikely capacity for happiness despite being surrounded by death, anguish and decay. Finding the humour in the rumour that she has been captured and murdered, Mukagasana 'bursts out laughing';¹⁸¹ when she and her children run to the bush unnoticed, '[w]e almost laugh. We are happy';¹⁸² she feels 'joyful'¹⁸³ at the unease induced in the Hutu militia when they learn of the impending arrival of the RPF, and 'laugh[s] inside'¹⁸⁴ at the failure of the militia to discover her in hiding. It is important to note, however, that her happiness is a complex one at times. Hiding under her sink, having just relived Christian's birth, Mukagasana writes that she is 'drunk with happiness and sadness at the same time [...] I'm so sad that I have the impression I'm going to have an orgasm of sadness.'¹⁸⁵ It is, however, the very multiplicity of Mukagasana's emotional states that renders them such an important element of her narrative. Including all of these emotions in the project of her self-representation, Mukagasana creates a multidimensional impression of who she is that runs directly counter to the singular characterisation of 'cockroach' applied to her by the Hutu to justify the genocide. Complicating her humanity in order to highlight its enduring presence in the face of catastrophe, Mukagasana's layered self-characterisation endows her with a complexity that makes this narrative believable, relatable and – as Norridge points out – peculiarly authentic.¹⁸⁶ In addition, however, to Mukagasana's emotional range functioning to humanise her

¹⁷² Mukagasana, p. 27.

¹⁷³ Mukagasana, p. 29.

¹⁷⁴ Mukagasana, p. 31.

¹⁷⁵ Mukagasana, p. 33.

¹⁷⁶ Mukagasana, p. 33.

¹⁷⁷ Mukagasana, p. 67.

¹⁷⁸ Mukagasana, p. 112.

¹⁷⁹ Mukagasana, p. 25.

¹⁸⁰ Mukagasana, p. 137.

¹⁸¹ Mukagasana, p. 45.

¹⁸² Mukagasana, p. 57.

¹⁸³ Mukagasana, p. 185.

¹⁸⁴ Mukagasana, p. 185.

¹⁸⁵ Mukagasana, p. 106.

¹⁸⁶ Norridge, p. 160.

narrative to invite external identifications, her experience of these various emotional sensations remind her of her *own* humanity in the moments when it is most under threat. Like Levi, who relies upon the presence of pain to affirm his vitality, Mukagasana's fear serves to remind her of her own: 'I'm afraid', she writes, 'so I'm still hopeful. [...] I'm afraid? So I'm alive!'¹⁸⁷ Defying discursive writing around pain and trauma's overwhelming, dominating character, it is precisely these elements of Mukagasana's experience that allow her to confront catastrophe and define herself both against, and within it. In addition, therefore, to expanding thinking about the relationship of gender to violence, *La Mort ne veut pas de moi's* vivid and varied representation of emotional capacity in the context of genocide is demonstrative of the need to expand the narrow possibilities of responses to violence as outlined by current trends in pain and trauma theory.

Conclusion

Writing from beyond the Holocaust, apartheid and the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda, Levi, Mathabane and Mukagasana are – from the perspective of contemporary trauma theory – traumatised individuals transcribing traumatic memories. These texts do, at points, corroborate the notion of trauma's mastery over those who encounter it that is so central to this particular discourse: whilst Levi recognises the 'interminable rhythm, which kills thought and deadens pain'¹⁸⁸ and Mathabane concedes that he and his brothers have no choice but to 'await, each, our violent end,'¹⁸⁹ there are times when Mukagasana declares that 'I see no hope'.¹⁹⁰ Delving into the nuances of these texts, however, this chapter has argued that these authors' representations of themselves in moments of extreme violence demonstrate that their responses to horror are far more nuanced and complex than popular notions of trauma suggest. Challenging the homogenising tendencies of the dominant trauma theory canon, these texts are important because of the specificity of the anguish each one points to. These authors are bound by the resilience inherent in each of their texts and lives. Expressing and representing this resilience in their own ways, however, these authors also point to way in which trauma

¹⁸⁷ Mukagasana, p. 150.

¹⁸⁸ Levi, p. 57.

¹⁸⁹ Mathabane, p. 162.

¹⁹⁰ Mukagasana, p. 30.

narratives demand a lens of specificity to counter the reductive homogeneity that popular trends in trauma theory so often insist upon.

Although trauma literature has employed various tropes and stylistic devices, the privileging of an experimental, modernist aesthetic has become more than a narrative trend; according to Stef Craps, in fact, this representative mode has become 'all but axiomatic within trauma theory'.¹⁹¹ Writers and literary critics alike have subscribed to what Andreas Huyssen has termed 'an ethics of nonrepresentability'¹⁹² – a commitment to aporia and fragmentation fuelled by the logic that experiential excess of such extreme proportions necessitates the failure of chronological, fully-realised narrative projects. Levi, Mathabane, and Mukagasana's prose, however, poses a distinct challenge to this specific mode of representation. Rational, evidentiary, factual and strikingly self-aware, these texts suggest that rather than obscuring recall, traumatic events can remain sharply and vividly embedded within an individual's memory. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Levi, Mathabane and Mukagasana admit the non-literary nature of their texts. As writers borne of compulsive necessity rather than choice, their narratives are not consciously styled. It is this narrative simplicity, however, that contributes to the authenticity of their testimonies. Writing within the genre of autobiography, each writer claims an authorial voice that relates their trauma in a manner reflective of who they are; in a manner that deserves to be taken no less seriously because their narrative does not adhere to traditional tropes of trauma literature. In fact, their deviations from these stylistic scripts are often their greatest strengths; these texts raise their questions and complicate theoretical orthodoxies without stylistic artifice in a way that allows us to hear their stories free from the potentially obscuring trappings of formal trauma aesthetics. As this chapter has demonstrated, the horrors of genocidal violence can be depicted in ways that are not reliant on literary allusions to lack, void and absence; ways that suggest the need for literary theory to move beyond these tropes and admit the diversity of the genre.

Each of these texts stands as a testimony to the agency their authors retained in the face of exterminatory violence. What is fascinating about reading them in comparison, however, are the similarities and differences in the way that selfhood is realised, mourned, maintained and born anew in

¹⁹¹ Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 38.

¹⁹² Andreas Huyssen, 'Resistance to Memory: The Uses and Abuses of Public Forgetting' in *Globalizing Critical Theory*, ed. by Max Pensky (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), pp. 165-84, p. 169.

the context of mass violence. For Levi, resilience is only possible through a decisive rejection of the dehumanising context of Auschwitz. Reworking Judaic and literary texts, he claims agency on his own terms; an agency that finds further possibility in his relationship to pain and his ability to recognise the brokenness of language and the cognitive decay of those around him. For Mathabane, it is the quotidian nature of trauma that forces him to adapt to his environment in order to survive. Emphasising the instability of his familial unit and the race-based fissures within his community, his text complicates ideas regarding the oppressor and the oppressed from the inside. Mukagasana's text places markedly more emphasis on the physical and corporeal conditions of the Genocide Against the Tutsi. Actively seeking to establish reader identifications and complicating understandings of survivor silence in the process, Mukagasana highlights the specifically female experience of mass violence by inserting herself in bodily terms into the narrative and demands that her readers confront ethically uncomfortable questions to draw them into her experience. Whilst *If This is a Man*, *Kaffir Boy* and *La Mort ne veut pas de moi* demonstrate survival both with, and without, adaptation to their changed circumstances, it is this multiplicity within their experiences that renders them such valuable records of experience; records that testify to the numerous, complex and specific ways in which people respond, and refuse to submit to violence even as it threatens to destroy them.

Chapter Two

Trauma and Testimony: Whose Life is it Anyway?

Following Chapter One's examination of representations of violent moments, I now ask how Otto Dov Kulka's *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death*, Ellen Kuzwayo's *Call Me Woman* and Révérien Rurangwa's *Génocidé* address the experience of surviving and remembering them. Theoretical discussion around life writing¹ – of which literary testimony is a part – is extensive, and has developed particularly in relation to questions of its veracity² and various forms³. This chapter, however, focuses on the dynamics of voice in written testimony. Implying a certain singularity of voice and experience, each of these texts falls within the genre of autobiography: Kulka's text is branded as memoir, Kuzwayo's is labelled as autobiography, and Rurangwa's is assigned to *récit*. However, these are not straightforward categorisations. Kulka's *Landscapes*, as implied by the index of historical dates that accompanies it, has a documentary function; Kuzwayo's publishers also generically assign her text to Politics; and although Rurangwa's text is uncategorised in its English translation, it is tellingly published by Reportage Press. Whilst this implies the public relevance of these individual stories, it is also noticeable that Kulka, Kuzwayo and Rurangwa often displace themselves from the centre of their narratives to describe the lives, and deaths, of others. Whose stories, I therefore ask in this chapter, are being told in these texts? What does literature tell us about how the self regenerates in the aftermath of existential threat? And what might the complicated dynamics of voice in these narratives suggest about the way that the experience of trauma complicates the boundary between self and other?

The complexity of these questions is underscored by the often-paradoxical theoretical arguments that situate the survivor in relation to testimony. The act of bearing witness demands what Verónica Tozzi

¹ As defined by Paul John Eakin in *The Ethics of Life Writing*, ed. by Paul John Eakin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004) life writing is 'an umbrella term [...] to cover the protean forms of contemporary personal narrative', p. 1.

² Discussions around truth and life writing have been provoked by several controversial texts, notably James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces*, Rigoberta Menchú's *I, Rigoberta Menchú* and Benjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments*. An excellent article regarding the Frey debate and the nature of truth in life writing is Nancy K. Miller's 'The Entangled Self: Genre Bondage in the Age of the Memoir' in *PMLA*, Vol. 122, No. 2 (2007), pp. 537-548.

³ A comprehensive discussion of life writing's history, character and structure is Laura Marcus's 'Life Writing' in *The Edinburgh Introduction to Studying English Literature*, edited by Dermot Cavanagh et al., 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp. 148-158.

calls the survivor's 'privileged voice'⁴ – a privilege stemming from the survivor's proximity to, and knowledge of, the limit event. However, trauma theory's current emphasis on void, lack and haunting largely positions the survivor as deprived of the agency to confront trauma – memories of which, Cathy Caruth argues, they have yet to process in full. How, I therefore ask, do these texts navigate the tension between the theoretical argument for subjective negation and testimony's demand for accurate, reliable recall? It is particularly compelling that although survivors characterise their experiences through their testimonies, these testimonies – and, indeed, the act of testifying – come to characterise the survivor in turn. Discussing what he calls 'the *survivor identity*', Jovan Byford notes that survivor status 'brings with it certain expectations'⁵ regarding the public voicing of private suffering; expectations bound up with his definition of testimony as a representative, verifiable account of a horrific experience, and a morally didactic narrative that frames the survivor as an ethically instructive individual.⁶ The insistence on the survivor's ethical quality substantiates what Henry Greenspan identifies as the 'ceremonial rhetoric' often surrounding survivors: rhetoric that 'honours survivors as "celebrants and heroes" [...] and seeks redemptive, life-affirming meaning in the fate of survivors.'⁷ Countering this celebratory narrative, however, is the equally pervasive 'psychiatric rhetoric': an evaluative discourse in which 'the same survivors are ghosts and wrecks'.⁸ These discussions suggest that critical conceptions of survivors are as homogenising as the trends in trauma theory that inspire the psychiatric rhetoric Greenspan identifies. Originating primarily in relation to Holocaust survivors and the extensive, global debates around the sacralisation of the Holocaust, these prescriptive characterisations ignore the complexity of the survivor experience that this chapter aims to demonstrate.

Much like the survivors themselves, testimony's function and content are often discussed in one-dimensional terms. James Young notes that 'when witnesses share the same *Weltanschauung*, their respective grasps of experience are relatively similar [...] disparate events told in the same figure [of

⁴ Verónica Tozzi, 'The Epistemic and Moral Role of Testimony' in *History and Theory*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (2012), pp. 1-17, p. 3.

⁵ Jovan Byford, 'Remembering Jasenovac: Survivor Testimonies and the Cultural Dimension of Bearing Witness' in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2014), pp. 58-84, p. 65.

⁶ Jovan Byford, 'Testimony' in *Research Methods for Memory Studies*, ed. by Emily Keightley, Michael Pickering (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 200-214, pp. 200-201.

⁷ Henry Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Recounting and Life History*, 2nd ed. (St Paul: Paragon House, 2010), pp. 64-65.

⁸ Greenspan, p. 65.

speech or understanding] are unified in their expression, united by a common vision of experience.⁹ Terrence Des Pres concurs: 'the world survivors speak of', he writes, 'has been [...] so completely shared [...] that from one report to another the degree of consistency is unusually high [...] [this is] the nature of existence when life is circumscribed by death.'¹⁰ Although Young and Des Pres make their comments in reference to the Holocaust, Des Pres's assertion of this experiential uniformity as the 'nature of existence' in the face of limit events links this assumption to catastrophes of similar kinds; a suggestion that this chapter tests in its comparative study of three very different contexts. These theorists' observations imply that the content of testimonies is theoretically homogenised in the same way as their authors. If, as Byford argues, the sole function of testimony is to establish a verifiable account of atrocity, this tendency to experiential conflation appears logical, if ethically suspect. Interrogating, however, the *multiple* ways in which these testimonies function, this chapter seeks to question Byford's singular conception of testimony and the often-homogenising critical discussion around its content.

Although widely recognised in academic circles, the name Otto Dov Kulka is relatively unknown in the context of Holocaust autobiographers. Kulka, born in Czechoslovakia in 1933, responded to his deportations to Theresienstadt and Auschwitz-Birkenau as a nine-year-old by dedicating his adult years to the historical study of Nazism, anti-Semitism and fascist ideology. Climbing the ranks at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem after completing his thesis in 1975, Kulka was selected as the Sol Rosenblum Chair in Jewish History in 1988 before being made a Professor in the Department of the History of the Jewish People in 1991. Working as Visiting Professor at Harvard and sitting on the board of directors of Yad Vashem, Kulka's career is representative of his choice to approach the Holocaust from an objective and impersonal, perspective – a determination that seemed unwavering, until recently. In 2013, decades after the publication of the well-known Holocaust narratives that have since defined the genre of testimony and strongly influenced trauma theory – and despite Kulka's self-admitted ambivalence towards Holocaust literature¹¹ – an eighty-year-old Kulka published *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death*; a literary transcription of tape recordings within which Kulka had explored 'what in

⁹ James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 159.

¹⁰ Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 29.

¹¹ Otto Dov Kulka, *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death*, trans. by Ralph Mandel (London: Penguin Books, 2014), p. 80.

my private mythology is called 'The Metropolis of Death'.¹² In *The Art of Memoir*, Mary Karr claims that memoir's structure is 'dopily episodic [...] one event follows another [...] [t]he books are held together by happenstance, theme, and (most powerfully) the sheer, convincing poetry of a single person trying to make sense of the past.'¹³ Kulka's text, however, challenges this statement on several counts. There is little holding this text together; constantly moving between temporalities and recollections, photographs, drawings and musical scores are interspersed with text in a way that signals the non-linearity of human memory. Tracking the tentative emergence of Kulka's personal voice as it breaches both the bounds of the impersonal historiographic approach of his past and the conventions of memoir, this section examines the stories Kulka tells about his past and others to interrogate how he engages with the memories he previously tried to evade.

The roles that Ellen Kuzwayo played in her lifetime – woman, mother, wife, social worker, political prisoner, women's right activist, teacher, civil servant, award-winning writer – are as encompassing as the medium of autobiography through which her story is told. Discussing the genre's boundless nature, Claire Lynch comments that autobiography is 'the most underhand of all literary genres, consistently avoiding the definitions fashioned for it and eluding the genre boundaries expected of it' – autobiography, she concludes, 'mocks the concept of genre'.¹⁴ Although these words are intended to highlight the instability of the genre, characterising autobiography in this way seems particularly fitting for the testimony of a woman who similarly eluded and defied the expectations that sought to define and contain her as a black woman in apartheid South Africa. 'I was born', writes Kuzwayo, 'on 29 June 1914, the only child of Phillip Serasengwe and Emma Mutsi Merafe, born Makgothi. My place of birth was the farm of my maternal grandfather, Jeremiah Makoloi Makgothi, in Thaba Patchoa in the district of Thaba'Nchu in the Orange Free State.'¹⁵ Providing Ellen's name, date of birth, family tree and place of origin, these statements appear paradigmatically autobiographical. But despite reading like the opening of a relatively uncomplicated narrative, these personal statements only appear on page fifty-five of *Call Me Woman*, following the conclusion of the text's Part One; a Part One constituted by a thoroughly detailed, historiographic account of Soweto, its population and the human rights abuses that

¹² Kulka, p. xi.

¹³ Mary Karr, *The Art of Memoir* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2016), pp. xiii-xiv.

¹⁴ Claire Lynch, 'Trans-Genre Confusion: What Does Autobiography Think It Is?' in *Life Writing: Essays on Autobiography, Biography and Literature*, ed. by Richard Bradford (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 209-218, p. 209.

¹⁵ Ellen Kuzwayo, *Call Me Woman* (London: The Women's Press, 1985), p. 55.

took place there. How, then, are readers meant to approach a text that has the face of an individual on its cover and a historical account of a population inside it? In her preface to Kuzwayo's text, Nadine Gordimer states that 'Ellen Kuzwayo is history in the person of one woman [...] she has the memory and the gift of unselfconscious expression that enable her to tell her story as no-one else could.'¹⁶ Conflating the historical with the personal, Gordimer gestures towards what this chapter aims to explore: the way that Kuzwayo's story both intersects with, and highlights, the stories and histories of family, friends and nation.

At just fifteen years old, Révérien Rurangwa lay in Kabgayi hospital shocked to be alive. As his amputated left arm, missing left eye and horrifically scarred face attested, Rurangwa's survival was not what his Hutu assailants intended when they brutally massacred forty-three members of his family on 20th April 1994. Reflecting upon one hundred of Rwanda's, and his own, darkest days, there is only one thing of which Rurangwa is certain: '[t]he only revenge available to me is to bear witness.'¹⁷ In 2006, *Génocidé* was published to this end. Markedly different from Kulka's reflective, retroactive musings and Kuzwayo's impassioned defence of femininity and community, Rurangwa's testimony – detailing the massacres and its aftermath – is characterised by its tone of anger, pain, and frustration: a consequence of his writing in the immediate aftershock of the horrific violence to which he bears witness. His is a young voice that struggles to comprehend his losses, even as he transcribes them. Probing how his identifications with, and representation of, himself and others might reveal how testimony functions within a certain temporal *and* geographical proximity to violence that neither Kulka nor Kuzwayo's texts feature, Rurangwa's text offers a fresh perspective on the ways in which identity asserts or subverts itself in relation to others in the wake of disaster.

The question of what it means to survive and bear witness has consistently been linked to the question of who the survivor speaks for. For Terrence Des Pres and Primo Levi, to survive is to shoulder the burden of speaking for the dead.¹⁸ Giorgio Agamben, however, argues that this sense of duty is a hollow one, insisting that 'the drowned have nothing to say, nor do they have instructions or memories to be

¹⁶ Kuzwayo, p. xi.

¹⁷ Révérien Rurangwa, *Genocide : My Stolen Rwanda*, trans. by Anna Brown (London: Reportage Press, 2009). The original French text of the quotations can be found in this dissertation's Appendix, taken from the original French version: Révérien Rurangwa, *Génocidé* (Paris: J'ai Lu, 2009).

¹⁸ Des Pres, p. 38.

transmitted'.¹⁹ Extending beyond the survivor's representative responsibility to those who have perished are discussions of collective memory that connect them to the living. Although Hartman states emphatically that 'the deeply personal nature of testimony is of the essence',²⁰ Geoffrey M. White points out that 'the voice of "survivors" plays a key role in [...] entextualizing [...] national memory';²¹ a suggested substantiated by testimony's central role in, amongst others, the Eichmann Trials, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and Rwanda's local and national judicial processes. Whilst White's use of quotation marks indicates the constructed nature of survivor identity, his statement points to the ways that bearing witness has become a representative act. Indeed, the idea of collective memory has become so influential that today, claims Michael Kenny, 'individual and collective experience imply each other.'²² Acknowledging the tremendous amount of theoretical work around the notion of collective memory,²³ this chapter aims to examine a slightly different, more immediate set of self-other relations: that between the survivor and the family, friends and communities that feature in these narratives. Asking how these texts might address this question of speaking for, and about, the lives of others, this chapter analyses the particular way that, as Leigh Gilmore writes:

testimony tests [...] the limits of representativeness, with its compulsory inflation of the self to stand for others, the peculiar way it operates both to expand and to constrict testimonial speech, and the way it makes it hard to clarify without falsifying what is strictly and unambiguously "my" experience when "our" experience is also at stake.²⁴

This comment features in Gilmore's critical text as a brief observation in her wider project of analysing how trauma forces representations of self to come into being at the generic limits of autobiography. This chapter aims to expand this discussion by interrogating the intersubjective relationship between self and other in the context of trauma and testimony. What follows in these pages is an enquiry into the experience of survival as represented within literary testimony: an analysis not only of *how* the

¹⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), pp. 34-35.

²⁰ Hartman, p. 254.

²¹ Geoffrey M. White, 'Emotional Remembering: The Pragmatics of National Memory' in *Ethos*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (1999), pp. 505-529, p. 507.

²² Michael G. Kenny, 'A Place for Memory: The Interface Between Individual and Collective History' in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (1999), pp. 420-437, p. 426.

²³ See for example, Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). A comprehensive selection of writing around the concept can be found in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. by Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁴ Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 5.

survivor speaks, and who they may or may not speak for, but of the crucial roles that post-violence writing plays in negotiating memory, selfhood and intersubjective relation after existential threat.

Otto Dov Kulka, *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death*

Between the public and the personal: breaching genre's bounds

The singularity of voice that Karr emphasises in her definition of memoir is challenged almost immediately by Kulka's admission of his text's narrative duality. In his introduction to *Landscapes*, Kulka states the following:

I assume that readers of my historical publications will have identified me unequivocally with an attitude of strict and impersonally remote research. [...] But few are aware of the existence [...] of a choice I made to sever the biographical from the historical past. [...] I am aware that, beyond the dichotomy that looms between my scholarly work and my reflective memory, this present book in itself reveals immanent tensions: a confrontation between images of memory and the representation of historical research.²⁵

Pervading this passage is Kulka's emphasis on the division between the biographical and the historical. Employing words such as 'sever', 'dichotomy', 'tensions' and 'confrontation', it is clear that to Kulka's mind, the objective and reflective elements of his voice are diametrically opposed. Despite this declaration of duality, however, there is ample evidence to suggest that *Landscapes* is a biographical alternative to the academic treatises that precede it. Recalling his vision of the camp barracks on a return visit to Auschwitz, Kulka writes that '[m]aybe I didn't recognise them and only imagined that I did, but that is of no significance.'²⁶ Allowing imagination and uncertainty into his representation of history, Kulka defects from the tone of authoritative veracity that historiography requires; and in so doing, appears to bring the personal voice theorised as so central to the project of memoir to the fore. Reminiscing about the masochistic decision of the camp choirmaster to designate *Ode to Joy* as the children's choir music selection, Kulka writes that 'I often come back to all that [...] even though I never mention the episode directly.'²⁷ Implying that he is selecting and rejecting episodes and scenes of subjective note to represent his personal memories of Auschwitz, Kulka's statement here reflects Judith

²⁵ Kulka, p. xi

²⁶ Kulka, p. 6.

²⁷ Kulka, p. 28.

Barrington's distinction between autobiography and memoir: 'autobiography', she writes, 'is the story of a life; memoir is a story *from* a life.'²⁸ Indeed, as the text progresses, Kulka's impulse towards experiential selectivity becomes increasingly clear. Recounting the moment a guard intentionally overlooked Kulka's obvious lie regarding his age to avoid being sent to the crematoria, Kulka states that 'I have no idea what his reasons were – maybe something moved inside him, maybe he wanted to avoid the bother of a recount – it is certainly not relevant to my inner experience.'²⁹ Whilst the repetition of 'maybe' generates a speculative tone that further distances *Landscapes* from the definitive historiography of Kulka's past, Kulka's emphatic emphasis on his 'inner experience' and the selectivity of his prose is demonstrative of the personal nature of his narrative. Electing to examine his memories through the lens of what Kulka terms his private mythology – a term that itself implies the personal, in addition to a mode of subjective storytelling – *Landscapes* appears to herald a new dawn in Kulka's confrontation of the past.

The apparent clarity of *Landscapes*' generic character, however, is complicated by Kulka's categorical statement that in writing his text, he is 'engaged in probing the memory, not writing memoirs'.³⁰ In addition to decisively rejecting the claims and demands of the genre, Kulka's use of the word 'probing' invokes the clinical methodology underpinning his historiographic work; a methodology that, as *Landscapes* makes clear, cannot help but assert itself even within this supposedly differentiated, personally-inflected narrative. Peppered throughout with distinctly impersonal statements of historical fact³¹ and terminology,³² Kulka's historiographic voice is an undeniably strong presence in the text. In fact, *Landscapes* is couched in historical terms: whilst the narrative's introduction contextualises Kulka's favoured historiographic approach, the text ends with an appendix entitled 'Ghetto in an Annihilation Camp: Jewish Social History in the Holocaust Period'.³³ Giving history the final word in a narrative that elsewhere professes to provide insight into 'a private mythology [...] that I forged, that I created',³⁴ *Landscapes* appears to defect from memoir even as its publisher and parts of its content place the text within its bounds. However, as Kulka's writing sets up the question of the interplay between the personal

²⁸ Judith Barrington, 'Writing the Memoir' in *The Handbook of Creative Writing*, ed. by Steven Earnshaw (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp. 109-115, p. 109.

²⁹ Kulka, p. 37.

³⁰ Kulka, p. 41.

³¹ Kulka, p. 105.

³² Kulka, p. 109.

³³ Kulka, p. 105.

³⁴ Kulka, p. 78.

and historiographical voices in *Landscapes*, the text itself comes to answer this very question. Acknowledging 'the paradoxical duality of my study of that period, with its systematic, total avoidance of integrating any detail of biographical involvement into the arena of the events of that history',³⁵ Kulka observes the following:

the truth, as it seems to me now, is that I only tried to bypass here the barrier of that gate, to enter it with the whole force of my being, in the guise of, or in the metamorphosis of, perhaps, a Trojan horse, intended, finally, to smash the gate and shatter the invisible wall of the city forbidden to me, outside whose domain I had decreed that I would remain. For that rigorous 'pure scientific' writing is fraught with [...] baggage and tensions, which are somehow time-transcendent. Here, in this safe and well-paved way of scientific discipline, I [escaped] memory and its imagining, from which I flinched and which I feared, perhaps subconsciously, to confront head-on.³⁶

The halting quality of this passage generated by its multiple commas suggest Kulka's uncertainty regarding his venture into the personal dimension of memory. However, as this passage makes clear, this is a biographical journey into the past that is made possible *by* the historiography that Kulka figures here as the Trojan horse breaching the bounds of the 'forbidden city' that metaphorically represents the memories that Kulka insisted on avoiding – until now. Most intriguing here, though – and most pertinent to this chapter's discussion of testimony and Kulka's engagement with the genre of memoir – are the single quotation marks enveloping the words 'pure scientific'. With the implication that the scientific quality of his historiographic work was not completely clinical and weighed down with 'baggage and tensions', Kulka admits here that history and memory do, in fact, occupy the same sphere. By acknowledging the intersecting relationship between what Kulka previously stated were the opposing voices of history and memory, Kulka simultaneously does two things: he renders his historical voice autobiographical, and thus confirms himself as witness, and his writing – in its totality – as testimony. Implying that this historiographic voice is inflected by the fear and anxieties of surviving, I suggest that Kulka's historical writing is a form of autobiographical expression. Evidencing Kulka's fears regarding survivor responsibility and the transmission of memory, his avoidance of the biographical and subsequent recourse to the historical renders his historical writing an indelible part of his personal narrative; a narrative that testifies, by implication, to the way that Kulka is affected by his memories. Despite Kulka previously insisting on his non-biographical engagement with the past as *evidenced* by his extensive historical engagement with German history and policy, this historiography actually

³⁵ Kulka, p. 82.

³⁶ Kulka, pp. 82.

becomes a form of life writing when considered in this way. *Landscapes*, therefore, offers a new perspective on the relationship between history and memory. Instead of reinforcing the critical stance taken by historical writing, quoted by Anna Green, that seeks to 'reject the significance of individual memory altogether'³⁷ – a position which assumes the absolute separation between individual and collective memory – Kulka's text, and the admissions it makes regarding the potential presence of the self within what appears to be the objective sphere of historical writing, forces a reconsideration of where personal memory may, in fact, be located. Whilst much discussion around trauma and literature focuses on how testimony defeats genres,³⁸ Kulka's *Landscapes* suggests that testimony might also force an elision of the boundaries between them.

Between the "I" and the other

Writing memoir, Barrington argues, requires an author 'to wear at least three different hats: that of the narrator who tells the story, that of the interpreter who tries to make sense of the story, and that of the protagonist or hero of the story.'³⁹ Employing a personal and historiographic voice in the exploration of his memories, Kulka is decidedly his text's narrator; and with his own private mythology as the narrative's focus, Kulka can certainly be understood as attempting to interpret his experiences. It is with regard to Barrington's third condition of memoir authorship, however, that Kulka once again appears to break with the conventions of the genre. Often displacing himself as the protagonist of his own story, Kulka's *Landscapes* compellingly undermines traditional memoir practices due to the stories of the lives and deaths of others that often come to the fore of this narrative. Reinforcing what Gilmore and Des Pres make clear, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, Sharon Marquart observes that '[s]peaking for others is both a necessary and a problematic practice in witness literature.'⁴⁰ The compulsion for the survivor to speak for the dead is suggested by Jorge Semprun's statement that 'it is no doubt [...] necessary to speak in the name of the drowned. Speak in their name, in their silence, to

³⁷ Anna Green, 'Individual Remembering and 'Collective Memory': Theoretical Suppositions and Contemporary Debates' in *Oral History*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2004), pp. 35-44, p. 37.

³⁸ See, for example, Aleida Assman 'History, Memory, and the Genre of Testimony' in *Poetics Today*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2006), pp. 261-273.

³⁹ Barrington, p. 111.

⁴⁰ Sharon Marquart, *On The Defensive: Reading the Ethical in Nazi Camp Testimonies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), p. 59.

give their words back to them.⁴¹ Primo Levi, however, problematises the possibility of this vocabulaic return by arguing that:

we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses [...] we are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch the bottom. Those who did so, those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it [...] they are [...] the complete witnesses [...] They are the rule, we are the exception [...] We speak in their stead, by proxy. I could not say whether we did so or do so because of a kind of moral obligation towards those who were silenced, or rather in order to free ourselves of their memory; certainly we do it because of a strong and durable impulse.⁴²

Confirming the impulse to representation whilst simultaneously underscoring its futility, Levi highlights the complexity of speaking for others after extreme violence. The implication that telling the stories of others are not those individual's stories at all is significant for a discussion of memoir in its ethically complex suggestion that writers who do tell such stories might do so in pursuit of their own comprehension of these limit events. Implied further by Levi's admission that the stories of others might be told as a liberation from the suffocating demands of memory, this position flatly contradicts the altruistic nature of Semprun's words and forces the question – that following section will explore – of how a survivor's "I" is implicated in these stories and why they might choose to tell them. Like Levi, Kulka takes no responsibility for having survived; echoing the above passage, Kulka states emphatically that he survived '[n]ot for any merit of mine, but because of some inexorable fate'.⁴³ Despite Levi's statement that survivors are the 'exception', both Levi and Kulka reject exceptionality in a way that also defies memoir; a genre that, as Cynthia Franklin defines it, is 'an index of [...] lives and why they matter'.⁴⁴

Particularly striking about this text is Kulka's connection of his personal history to a wider network of traumatic experiences. Despite repeatedly returning to his own mythology, Kulka also intimates that limit events cannot be confined to the moment of their happening; the moments of violence to which he was witness, his text states, 'though anchored in concrete historical events, transcend the sphere of history'.⁴⁵ Uprooting his testimony and narrative perspective from time and place, Kulka implies that the

⁴¹ Jorge Semprun, *La escritura o la vida* (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1994), p. 154.

⁴² Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. by Raymond Rosenthal (London: Abacus, 2013), pp. 89-90.

⁴³ Kulka, p. 11.

⁴⁴ Cynthia G. Franklin, *Academic Lives: Memoir, Cultural Theory and the University Today* (London: The University of Georgia Press, 2009), p. 2.

⁴⁵ Kulka, p. xii.

evil of the Holocaust is somehow temporally transcendent – obscuring the specificity of this event in favour of a specificity of horror to which many can be linked. Is Kulka's narration therefore a telling of other stories? Is his "I" that of many others'? The notion of death as an interpersonal binder is not without theoretical precedent. Following his definition of the survivor as 'one who has come into contact with death in some bodily or psychic fashion and has himself remained alive', Robert Jay Lifton connects survivors of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima to Holocaust survivors and multiple others.⁴⁶ In understanding the commonalities between them, he argues, 'we find ourselves dealing with universal psychological tendencies; the survivor becomes Everyman.'⁴⁷ Whilst the homogenising implications of this statement are undoubtedly problematic, there is a sense in which the cyclicity of human brutality and the death that results from it is, somehow, historically transcendent by virtue of its recurrence in every era. Kulka's pronouncement of his experiential transcendence also invokes Michael Rothberg's notion of multidirectional memory; a theory of remembering that insists on '[m]emory's anachronistic quality'⁴⁸ through which victims and survivors of transhistorical, transcontextual and transnational moments of violence come to be connected. Stating the transcendence of his experience, Kulka further complicates the generic status of his narrative, suggesting that any claim to his "I" as a singular entity is not straightforward; whilst he knows that the experience of Auschwitz was his, he simultaneously knows and cannot know the way that his story is connected with those of others both within the context of the Holocaust and within the broader special hell of the limit event that is genocide.

In addition, however, to the individual nature of Kulka's narrative being complicated by his statement of experiential transcendence, the question of voice and representation also surfaces in Kulka's allusion to those in his more immediate context – Auschwitz's dead. Reflecting on the crematoria on his return to Auschwitz, Kulka writes the following:

I was never there [...] my foot never stepped into those courtyards, inside those buildings. I circled them as a moth circles a flame, knowing that falling into it was inevitable, yet I kept circling outside, willingly or unwillingly – it was not up to me – all my friends, the butterflies, not all of them, but almost all of them, were there and did not come out of there.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Robert Jay Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina University Press, 1991), p. 479.

⁴⁷ Lifton, p. 479.

⁴⁸ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 5.

⁴⁹ Kulka, p. 9.

Stressing the fact of his absence from Auschwitz's most deadly site and his consequent survival, Kulka's words are accompanied by an unmistakeable tone of shame and guilt; a guilt that explains Kulka's insistence that his fate 'was not up to me'.⁵⁰ It is his burdened conscience, I suggest, that contributes to the specific presentation of those who did not survive in this passage. Whilst Kulka figures as a 'moth' in the statement above, his friends are figured as 'butterflies'. In making this distinction, and invoking the image of the butterfly with its connotations of freedom and beauty, Kulka eulogises as he remembers; in this moment, the story he tells is that of those who 'did not come out'.⁵¹ Reminding the reader that this history is not only that of his own survival, but of those who did not live, Kulka recalls the 'myriads upon myriads – whom I had seen being swallowed up in endless rows',⁵² the 'tens of thousands of deportees in the cattle cars',⁵³ the 'heaps of bodies',⁵⁴ the 'mass liquidation'⁵⁵ and 'the shoes of the murdered, of those who perished'.⁵⁶ Functioning both elegiacally and in an absolatory fashion, Kulka's mournful recall – a recall that, in its vividness, challenges the idea that trauma obscures memory – occupies a strange place between representation and personal reflection. Whilst these visceral descriptions encourage readers to meditate on the lives lost, and thus turn their attention away from Kulka, the placement of these descriptions within his memory and the guilt Kulka associates with them bind these lives tightly to Kulka's own; the stories of his friends' deaths and Kulka's life appear mutually reinforcing. Blurring the boundaries between the personal and the representative, *Landscapes* thus moves within the genre of memoir whilst simultaneously challenging its conventions and parameters.

Kulka's reference to his own family, however, raises the most interesting questions regarding the self-referentiality of his narrative. Kulka's mother figures prominently in *Landscapes*: she travels with ten-year-old Kulka to Auschwitz, sleeps next to him, and encourages him not to lose hope. But Kulka's mother comes to represent more than a heartening voice as the text progresses. Approximately halfway through *Landscapes*, Kulka reveals the existence of a 'farewell letter my mother wrote on the night of

⁵⁰ Kulka, p. 9.

⁵¹ Kulka, p. 9.

⁵² Kulka, p. 11.

⁵³ Kulka, p. 14.

⁵⁴ Kulka, p. 22.

⁵⁵ Kulka, p. 24.

⁵⁶ Kulka, p. 67.

30 June 1944, when we thought we would not survive the final liquidation of that camp.⁵⁷ This letter,

Kulka writes:

expresses outrage at the cruelty of the ordeal: why must the life of an innocent child end by this brutal hand?! The next sentence resonates with a demand to avenge the guiltless blood, the blood of the innocents that was shed [...] this sentence resonates with the sense of a call for justice [...] which cannot be coped with directly. Only by personifying this reality in reference to me – a little boy condemned by that implacable decree to die that night – could she come out with that statement of the call for revenge, for a just reckoning.⁵⁸

Emphasising how testimony invites and incorporates the stories of multiple lives, this passage reveals that Kulka's mother's voice – and the vengeful justice it calls for – depended on her invocation of his young self. Here, his mother's "I" must attach itself to his in order to speak the truth of her history, her anger and her fear. Equally fascinating, however, is the suggestion that Kulka requires his mother's story to adequately tell his own; their "I"s and lives, in my reading of Kulka's *Landscapes*, demand and require one another. It is July 1944, and Kulka is recalling the stinging bewilderment of watching his mother walk away from him, never to return. It is a memory that plagues him, and it is only years after the war ends that an old friend of his mother tells Kulka the truth about her disappearance:

Mother was carrying the embryo of my brother, an Auschwitz embryo, from her meeting with father there [...] [she] resolve[d] to try to leave at least with him if we two were to remain and perish [...] miraculously [...] she arrived at the hour of birth [...] her friends, or the women who worked in the hospital, promised to preserve the newborn if no emergency arose and if no one entered [...] The infant was healthy and screamed like a healthy infant, and SS men who were about to approach brought about his end: those same women friends terminated his life.⁵⁹

The effect of telling his mother's story is relieving; after years of doubt surrounding of his mother's movements, 'here', Kulka writes, 'the circle was closed'.⁶⁰ This comment implies that Kulka's "I", speaking in the context of survival, is intimately bound up with his mother's life and death. Whilst biology connects Kulka and his mother, her unexplained absence becomes a distinct, painful question attending his survival; indeed, not knowing her story made it impossible for him to tell his own. When he finally discovers the truth about her end, his peace is also, in a sense, hers – his eventual telling of her story, his provision of context and detail to the story of her life, can be read as elegiac. But her life isn't the

⁵⁷ Kulka, p. 49.

⁵⁸ Kulka, pp. 49-50.

⁵⁹ Kulka, pp. 58-59.

⁶⁰ Kulka, p. 61.

only one narrated in this episode; in the project of representing his own history, Kulka has also spoken the short life of his brother whose textually inscribed scream is another voice that insists on being heard in *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death*. One of the most tragic elements of this story is this life that never came to be; in this moment, what is *not* becomes a central part of the experience of what *is* in Kulka's recollections of Auschwitz. Kulka's "I", therefore, in wishing to authentically express his life within the confines of that hell, is intimately intertwined with the "I" of his brother who never was, in addition to Kulka's ten-year-old "I" being tightly bound to his mother's life, disappearance and death. This section began with Barrington's claim that memoir requires its author to be the protagonist or hero of their own story. Rejecting any notion of heroism and deferring to fate as the reason for his survival, Kulka's narrative is decidedly non-heroic. In many ways, however, Kulka is also not *Landscapes'* protagonist. Emphasising the voices and stories of those who did not live, Kulka's voice is inherently inflected by histories that are not his own; and yet, in his role as the bearer of these stories, they *do* somehow become part of both his life and voice. It is the ambivalence between self and other that renders *Landscapes* such a valuable text; suggesting the complex way in which testimony reinforces and challenges the conventions of memoir, *Landscapes* points to the way that trauma and loss encourage the binding of self to other in life, death, and the stories that are told about both.

Voices Past and Present

Traditionally, life writing is a study in retrospect. In the context of trauma, however, testimonies have a different story to tell. For whilst many survivors – Kulka included – feel obligated to tell the story of *what happened*, the question of *what happens* to life after the event itself is a crucial part of the narrative. Opposing the purely retrospective, the presence of Auschwitz in Kulka's life decades after he leaves it raises an important question regarding the intersection of memory and survivor agency; a question generated by *Landscapes'* jarring presentation of chronicity, place, and memory. En route to the gates of Auschwitz, returning as a survivor, Kulka ignores the chatter of his taxi driver. 'I took in that road', he writes. 'I suddenly had the feeling of having already been in these places. I knew these signs, these houses.'⁶¹ As the landscape fills his vision, the narrative changes; instead of accompanying Kulka on

⁶¹ Kulka, p. 4.

his *return* to Auschwitz, the readers find themselves immersed in his initial march to ‘a complex no one ever came out of’:⁶²

As the journey dragged on my strength increasingly waned and I found myself ever closer to the last rows, and in those last rows anyone who faltered, anyone who lagged behind, was shot and became a black stain by the roadside. The shots grew more frequent and the stains proliferated [...] the convoy stopped [...] I am not going to describe this death march now.⁶³

Whilst the emphasis on sights and sounds draws the reader into this memory in a way that makes it seem present, the abrupt, unflagged shift in narrative tense at the passage’s end is a jarring reminder of its placement in the past. Whilst potentially disorientating for the reader, the fluidity of movement between these temporal states is reflective of the way that the past returns unpredictably for Kulka, prompted by external, transportive cues. Kulka’s experience of time is presented here as disordered; whilst he occupies his present entirely, this is a present that is inflected with memory. Although this passage appears to depict Kulka as a victim of traumatic memory, the authority in the passage’s final words suggests that he is, in fact, in control of these memories despite their involuntary return. For Gilmore, life writing is the chance to ‘emerge through writing as an agent of self-representation, a figure [...] who can claim “I was there” or “I am here.”’⁶⁴ Kulka’s narrative, however, is compelling because it places him ‘here’ and ‘there’ in equal measure – *Landscapes*, therefore, is an intriguing example of how the project of self-representation functions outside of the definitive temporalities Gilmore describes.

Although the fact of the past’s return in the present is so often theorised in terms of haunting, this text suggests that its presence is also potentially empowering. It is suddenly the late 1960s in Jerusalem, and Kulka is on the Temple Mount. ‘*In this place I have been before!*’ he explains himself as thinking. Yet, ‘that was absurd, of course. Of course I had not been to this place, not ever, could not have been, but the certainty was total, unmistakeable.’⁶⁵ How? Kulka readily provides the answer:

That place was charged like no other with the unfolding of a historical trauma, with death and end-time, with everything that came out of it or flowed into it, and walking across it was to make one’s way through the mute ruins [...] amid the rusting barbed wire that links this place to that [...] When I understood this I returned to Auschwitz. Not immediately. I left the Temple

⁶² Kulka, p. 4.

⁶³ Kulka, p. 5.

⁶⁴ Gilmore, p. 9.

⁶⁵ Kulka, p. 73.

Mount, physically, but in my consciousness returned to Auschwitz [...] It was [...] then that I decided [...] to return.⁶⁶

Despite Kulka's labelling of the ruins of the Temple Mount as 'mute', they are anything but. By his own admission, the image of the barbed wire is transportive; in addition to awakening his consciousness and inducing a mental return to Auschwitz that preceded his physical return, his ability to place the Holocaust within a larger history of trauma provided by the context of the ancient, ruined site of the Temple Mount is powerful. As a result of this identification, and, thus, a fuller understanding and appreciation of his place in world history, Kulka is able to resolve to return to Auschwitz and embark upon a journey of personal remembrance – the possibility of which was previously unavailable to him. Thus, whilst survival can carry the burden of the imperative to transmit history, the experiences and images that Kulka is able to acquire by virtue of still being alive hold the key to his mastery of his own story; instead of being held hostage by his memories, he is able to use his own agency to contextualise and confer meaning to his past. The jumps in time and place as evident in *Landscapes* defy the linearity that is demanded by the requirements of veracity so often linked to testimony. However, it is arguably the very lack of chronicity in *Landscapes* through which the reader and Kulka come to some understanding of Auschwitz and survival. Although the slippage between past, present and place can be read as undermining the authorial reliability associated with memoir,⁶⁷ the shifting chronicity and locations in *Landscapes* become their own testimony to the specific way that a self comes to self-knowledge in the context of survival.

Ellen Kuzwayo, *Call Me Woman*

Questions, Answers, Actions

Why does the compulsion to narrate the story of one's life exist? According to Donna Perreault, writing about one's past is ultimately an expression of what the author does not know; 'questions', she writes, 'are ultimately what the texts express.'⁶⁸ Despite differing from James Olney's conviction that

⁶⁶ Kulka, p. 74.

⁶⁷ Vivian Gornick, 'Why Memoir Now?' in *The Women's Review of Books*, Vol. 13, No. 10 (1996), p. 5.

⁶⁸ Donna Perreault, 'What Makes Autobiography Interrogative?' in *Biography*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1990), pp. 130-142, p. 130.

autobiography responds to the primal human need for recognition,⁶⁹ what both of these theoretical stances have in common is the singularity of their thought; for both of these theorists, autobiography is borne from a singular impulse. One of the most striking features of *Call Me Woman*, however, is the wide-ranging sense of purpose that attends it: it is part race-based manifesto, part autobiography, part homage to South African femininity and part testimony to violence. As Perreault suggests, questions do play a role in Kuzwayo's text. But Kuzwayo's questions, despite their uniformity as a group as such, have multiple implications and motivations – and, crucially, are intended to extend the scope of this text beyond her individual self. Amongst the numerous questions pervading the narrative, Kuzwayo asks the following:

As the Group Areas legislation took its course in the 1950s, the authorities became so relentlessly committed to its implementation that they disregarded [...] basic human rights. Where then were the 'western' standards which the rulers of this country claim to uphold. Where were the Christian principles which are propounded from pulpits every Sunday?⁷⁰

How do people live with the knowledge that they killed another human being for such a trivial offence as trespass or thieving?⁷¹

How did black women and men become so [...] vulnerable to legislation by the white rulers?⁷²

How could the black community ever believe some of the explanations given about the blacks who died in detention?⁷³

Taking aim at religion, culture, racial inequality and police corruption, these questions are a call to action. Where Kulka avoids the past, Kuzwayo demands its interrogation; where Kulka – to some extent – lays the past to rest, Kuzwayo petitions for its re-examination. Writing in London, removed from a place and system within which she is powerless to hold apartheid's perpetrators to account, these questions can be read as a reclamation of self and voice; in a sense, these questions – and the fact of her asking them – are themselves testimony to the silencing, dispossessing environment from which she has escaped. Defying the apartheid power dynamics that relied on black silence and black submission, her questions are representative of her identity as survivor as opposed to victim. But whilst these questions are asked in a manner that comes to be definitive of selfhood, Kuzwayo implicates external voices into this process. The final two questions quoted above are the most revealing. Querying

⁶⁹ James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 20-21.

⁷⁰ Kuzwayo, p. 7.

⁷¹ Kuzwayo, p. 193.

⁷² Kuzwayo, p. 11.

⁷³ Kuzwayo, p. 44.

how apartheid claimed the lives and deaths of 'black women and men' and the 'black community' at large, Kuzwayo situates her individual identity within national and racial frameworks. In her representation of her community in this moment, Kuzwayo becomes a mouthpiece for a struggle despite her geographical remove from its centre. In speaking for her community, therefore, Kuzwayo moves her text beyond the purely autobiographical; whilst these questions gesture towards a rebuilding of her individual identity and are symbolic of a reclaimed agency, this is a process of reconstitution that is facilitated by speaking for, and about, the pain of others.

Although her questions demand an interrogation of the political structures that discriminated against those she comes to speak for, Kuzwayo also directs questions to herself in a manner that suggests her narrative's importance for her project of self-definition. Coming from a system where one's very identity rendered one a target, self-doubt and insecurity appear inevitable. Deciding to leave an abusive marriage in which she found herself at risk because of her femininity, and barred from legal assistance because of her blackness – a paradigmatic example of the double bind of black femininity outlined in this dissertation's Introduction – Kuzwayo agonises: '[w]hat if the boys [her sons] were being neglected and tortured like I had been? How could I be certain that that I had made the correct decision to leave them behind? Was I a coward?'⁷⁴ With these questions, Kuzwayo not only emphasises the crippling insecurity and self-doubt that apartheid engendered, but points to the way in which writing about trauma necessitates questions about an individual's identity, guilt and actions. What is interesting, however, is the way in which Kuzwayo's questions invite an audience; the way in which the strength of her voice comes to rely on being heard by others. Speaking of the rising crime rate within the black community, Kuzwayo asks the following:

Who is robbing whom in this country? Take a mother in domestic service from 6:00am to 6:00pm, or even later, earning barely R80 a month. Is not this a case of exploitation? Would it be surprising if such a mother, with full family responsibilities and the best intentions in the world, should be tempted to make good her needs by stealing from the employer? [...] I wish to invite the readers of this book to look without prejudice beyond such acts as rape, theft, murder and others [...] I would like us to ask ourselves in all sincerity whether hereditary tendencies in individuals are the only explanation for degenerate human behaviour.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Kuzwayo, p. 132.

⁷⁵ Kuzwayo, pp. 19-20.

Famously explored in Primo Levi's 'The Grey Zone',⁷⁶ ethical and moral ambiguities relating to human behaviour in extreme situations of violence are not unusual presences in the context of testimony. Important here, however, is the function that this ethical quandary performs. Kuzwayo's direct address to the reader takes her text from the purely reflective to the actively dialogic; echoing Mukagasana in the previous chapter, the demands her questions make require her readers to wrestle with their own moral compasses. It is notable, however, that Kuzwayo does not frame this moral conundrum in personal terms; despite her text revealing many moments of personal difficulty, Kuzwayo poses this question in reference to 'a mother' – a generic, anonymous figure that becomes representative of black female hardship. In so doing, Kuzwayo's exhortation asks her reader to consider circumstances outside of those pertaining solely to her; widening, once again, the parameters of her autobiography to accommodate the suffering of others.

Kuzwayo's multiple motivations for writing *Call Me Woman* are reflected in the diversity of intent that is present within the questions she asks alone. But in addition to asking questions that stress what she perceives as the unique evil of the apartheid state, Kuzwayo's testimony – produced at a time when the injustice of apartheid was still a reality – can also be read as a decisive call for justice. Kuzwayo is clear in her description of colonialism's effects. 'It is not easy', she writes, 'to live and to bring up children in a community deprived of its traditional moral code and values – a community lost between its old heritage and that of its colonisers'.⁷⁷ Identifying the trauma of loss and violence as inherent within the apartheid regime, Kuzwayo's text also clearly aims to educate readers regarding the specific brand of identity-based violence that apartheid represented. Kuzwayo speaks damningly of racist legislation 'which has uprooted communities, separated families, estranged siblings and left the black nation landless, homeless, stateless and dispossessed of all its heritage'⁷⁸ and left her personally bereft - '[t]hrough iniquitous and inhuman legislation', she explains, 'my family was rendered homeless and wanderers in the land of our birth'.⁷⁹ There is a sense in which Kuzwayo is trying to write an alternative historical record to challenge the master narrative that sought to both dispossess and disenfranchise the black community. Invoking an almost biblical reference to the loss of place and tradition which

⁷⁶ Primo Levi, 'The Grey Zone' in *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. by Paul Bailey (London: Abacus, 2013), pp. 31-71.

⁷⁷ Kuzwayo, p. 16.

⁷⁸ Kuzwayo, p. 17.

⁷⁹ Kuzwayo, p. 56.

apartheid provoked, Kuzwayo speaks both for her family and her nation in describing the dispossessing effects of the apartheid regime. But Kuzwayo's text is not simply written to describe the past; rather, *Call Me Woman* is a rallying cry for the future of South Africa. 'The black people of South Africa have been evicted', she states, 'and to this day have still not attained their rightful homes.'⁸⁰ Her individual identity is bound up with communal membership; although, therefore, it may seem that these are two halves of her identity, the extent to which they can be separated is a question generated by the text itself. Kuzwayo herself affirms the cohesion of her personal and communal selves; '*motho ke motho ka motho yo mongoe*', she explains; 'no man is an island. The communal way of life of the black people of this region is based upon this saying. In the black community a neighbour is seen as very important [...] This is us as a people, as a community.'⁸¹ Asserting her identity through language as well as through community, Kuzwayo's choice to include the stories of others, including the 'great mothers of South Africa who have brought up and nurtured children of all communities'⁸² in a text with her own face on the cover is unsurprising; the black community which has continually sacrificed, and been sacrificed, during the apartheid years are, the text suggests, an intrinsic part of who she is.

Call Me Woman

In titling her text *Call Me Woman*, Kuzwayo points to the very particular way in which her "I" is divided between her individual self and the wider community of women of which she is part. The multiplicity of her "I" is directly related to the trauma context to which she refers; having experienced the trauma of dispossession and loss on a national, as well as an individual scale, Kuzwayo's identification with this period of her life necessarily extends to the communal. Whilst this explains Kuzwayo's emphasis on lives not her own, the reflective, retroactive tone that traditionally characterises autobiographic writing is supplanted here by Kuzwayo's active rewriting of gender scripts in the present. The text pays homage throughout to the black women who, despite encountering extreme material hardship and physical brutality, 'have emerged like tested steel, their character and courage somehow untouched by bitterness and deep-seated frustration.'⁸³ Whilst the simile here attests to the unmatched strength of these women, Kuzwayo emphasises the historic misrecognition of:

⁸⁰ Kuzwayo, p. 15.

⁸¹ Kuzwayo, pp. 16-17.

⁸² Kuzwayo, p. 23.

⁸³ Kuzwayo, p. 5.

The black woman, who through centuries had been viewed by the white state as unproductive in industry, as totally dependent on her male counterpart, as helpless, unintelligent to the point of being useless and stupid – the woman who much against her will had resigned herself to being labelled a ‘minor’ by the state.⁸⁴

In this passage, Kuzwayo purposefully emphasises derogatory pejoratives such as ‘unproductive’, ‘helpless’, ‘useless and ‘stupid’ to contrast with the entrepreneurial beer-brewing and washing businesses these women set up against a backdrop of extreme poverty, racial adversity and gender-based discrimination. Offering a counter to the dominant historical image of her race and gender, this narrative becomes a space of transformation not only in terms of Kuzwayo’s move from victim to survivor, but for wider perceptions of gender and femininity in South Africa.

In addition, however, to *Call Me Woman* rewriting gender rules and norms for black South African women countrywide, Kuzwayo includes personal, detailed biographies of specific women as a central feature of her text. ‘Darling Mama’, *Call Me Woman* begins. ‘It was so wonderful to see that familiar handwriting.’⁸⁵ Given the assumptions of self-referentiality Linda Anderson associates with autobiography,⁸⁶ the author of this letter is assumed to be Kuzwayo. It is only a page and half later, however, that Debra Nikiwe Matshoba is revealed as the speaker. Kuzwayo dedicates four pages to the story of Debra’s imprisonment and subsequent political activity⁸⁷ before continuing to describe the life of Charlotte Maxeke who ‘played a prominent part in establishing the American Methodist Episcopal Church’ and who, after ‘obtaining a degree from Wilberforce University’ in 1902 was ‘the first black woman graduate in South Africa’.⁸⁸ Kuzwayo’s narrative therefore becomes a shared space; a platform from which the lives of not only her community, but specific contemporaries, are spoken. Representing a community defined by the white administration as one underserving of status or place, Kuzwayo’s text – motivated by its aim to educate and inspire change – appears to necessitate the representation of others within her individual testimony. But Kuzwayo does not only limit herself to biographies of exceptional women; rather, she insists that the stories of the many women who ‘will never be heard of or seen on any record [...] should be more widely known.’⁸⁹ It is this conviction that explains the

⁸⁴ Kuzwayo, pp. 12-13.

⁸⁵ Kuzwayo, p. 3.

⁸⁶ Linda Anderson, *Autobiography*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 12.

⁸⁷ Kuzwayo, p. 4.

⁸⁸ Kuzwayo, p. 102.

⁸⁹ Kuzwayo, p. 176.

narration of the lives of women such as Marcia Pumla Finca, who 'establish[ed] the first Day Care Centre for retarded children in Soweto'⁹⁰ and 'Annie Silinga, one of the greatest political figures resident in the Cape, who steadfastly refused to carry a pass throughout her life and died in 1983 in her eighties'.⁹¹ These are but brief excerpts of the extensive information readers are provided with about these women; nevertheless, they demonstrate with clarity the scope and reach of Kuzwayo's attempt to tell the stories of Soweto under apartheid. These stories, however, go beyond statements of solidarity alone. Whilst Kuzwayo's move to representation stretches the boundaries of autobiography to their subjective limits, these biographies emphasise once again testimony elides the boundaries of genre; where Kulka's historiography comes to be significantly personally inflected, the expansiveness and ethnopolitical detail of Kuzwayo's autobiography – whilst justifying its polygeneric status as *Autobiography and Politics* – is inflected with concerns of human rights and historicity that go beyond one woman's story.

The multiplicity of voice created by Kuzwayo's role as national biographer within her own autobiography is further extended as she becomes Soweto's historiographer and legal historian. Before her narrative begins, Kuzwayo lists the principle legislative decisions affecting the black community in South Africa, alongside a chronology of events that led to the creation of the apartheid state. The entire text is pervaded by the minutiae of historic, legal and geographic detail; be it the explanation of 'the 1913 Native Land Act [...] that designates 87% of the land for whites'⁹² the precise information that 'My father's house was 1092 Merafe Street in Pimville, Johannesburg',⁹³ the description of Kuzwayo's grandparent's farm as '2560 morgen (60,000 acres)' large,⁹⁴ or the clarification that 'Section 10 means being put away in prison, cut off from your family, friends, neighbourhood, community, work and worship; it means denial of all your freedom of movement and, to some extent, your freedom of speech',⁹⁵ every episode Kuzwayo relates is accompanied by intricate detail about its socio-political context. Soweto is described in particularly detailed terms:

Soweto is a huge complex, spread over 32 square miles of endless, monotonous rows of predominantly three-roomed, matchbox-like houses [...] It is situated approximately 18 miles

⁹⁰ Kuzwayo, p. 159.

⁹¹ Kuzwayo, p. 241.

⁹² Kuzwayo, p. 20.

⁹³ Kuzwayo, p. 27.

⁹⁴ Kuzwayo, p. 55.

⁹⁵ Kuzwayo, p. 202.

south-west of the glittering centre of Johannesburg [...] It is made up of at least 20 townships, each divided by just a street.⁹⁶

The contrast between 'glittering' Johannesburg and the 'endless, monotonous' character of Soweto points to a residential inequality matched only by the racial inequality creating and maintaining this distinction. Kuzwayo's preoccupation with detail is a direct consequence of her experience under apartheid. Entrapped in a discriminatory system in which black voices were frequently silenced, Kuzwayo displays an obsession with evidentiary detail common to many survivor accounts of limit-event traumas – not least Kulka's own. The survivor's concern with being heard and believed is represented by Primo Levi, who, as Chapter One describes, has recurrent nightmares in which those who hear his story either stop listening or doubt the authenticity of his words.⁹⁷ This concern is reflected by Kuzwayo's preoccupation with accuracy, detail and history; where Kulka's turn to historiography represented his attempt at circumventing the personal, Kuzwayo's historiographic voice becomes an essential element of her autobiographical project as it is testimony to the specificity of the brutality she endured. Primed against the potential for denial and silence that Kuzwayo witnessed under the apartheid regime, *Call Me Woman* is a story of a self that fiercely ties itself to a history that refuses to be denied.

Me, Myself and I

Kuzwayo's text is indeed heavily concerned with the lives of others and the intricate details of their historical, political and geographic contexts. But this is not to say that Kuzwayo's personal voice and experiences are entirely absent from the text. Her own autobiographical facts are included too: 'when I became aware of myself at the age of six or seven years in the early 1920s', she explains, 'I learned that I was one of four grandchildren of Jeremiah Makoloi and Magdeline Segogoane Makgothi, born Masisi.'⁹⁸ Later, she informs readers of her professional development; 'In 1938, I was elected secretary of the local branch of the NCAW, in Thaba'Nchu.'⁹⁹ In a similarly comprehensive vein, Kuzwayo details her marriage, the birth of her two sons, her divorce and her subsequent remarriage. Particularly striking, however, is the complex, multi-faceted nature of the identity Kuzwayo comes to inhabit as the text

⁹⁶ Kuzwayo, p. 6.

⁹⁷ Primo Levi, *If This is a Man* (London: Abacus, 1987), p. 66.

⁹⁸ Kuzwayo, p. 55.

⁹⁹ Kuzwayo, p. 103.

progresses; a complexity that is gestured towards in the statement she makes about her own name.

Regarding her various monikers, Kuzwayo explains the following:

My parents named me Ellen Kate. My mother's favourite name was however Cholofelo, which means hope. Later in life when I met my father and his family, I was introduced by yet another name, unknown to me, Nnoseng, the literal meaning being 'Give me water'. Among my mother's people I was popularly known as Motlalepule, meaning 'The one who arrives on a rainy day'. Ellen Kate Cholofelo Nnoseng Motlalepule are all names I answer to. Please do not ask me why so many. I can only guess that both my paternal and maternal grandparents wanted to have a share in giving me a name to make their mark.¹⁰⁰

In the context of traditional theories of autobiography such as Karl Weintraub's that place a unitary, self-referential narrator at their centre,¹⁰¹ the multiple inferences and origins associated with these names – names that situate Kuzwayo in multiple contexts with various meanings in each – would render her an unreliable speaker. In Kuzwayo's project of self-representation, however, her story can only be adequately told by referencing her identity in its totality regardless of the occasionally competing nature of its elements. Rather than functioning as a site of instability, Kuzwayo's various names and the sources from which they emerge reveal a richness of identity, a selfhood that has multiple moorings and numerous significances in various contexts. With this passage emphasising the contribution of her mother, father, grandparents and wider community to the naming process, Kuzwayo represents herself as the product of certain legacies, and as an individual bound up with the hopes of a community. Specifying that she answers to them all, Kuzwayo makes clear that each one is a valid and truthful part of who she is. It is the juxtaposition of the anglicised and traditionally African names, however, that points to the way that identity is formed, maintained and evolved in relation to others in the context of trauma. Emphasising the opposing expectations of subservience to white culture and the demands of blackness, the contrast of these names become representative of the complex navigation of black and white culture in apartheid South Africa. It is the centrality of this paradox to Kuzwayo's story, however, that renders this identificatory multiplicity such a crucial element of the narrative. Signalling her past, others' hopes for her future, and the complexity of existing in the liminal space between them, Kuzwayo's many names afford a sense of fullness to the self *Call Me Woman* represents; a self that, in its expansiveness, defies the self-referential singularity so closely associated with autobiography.

¹⁰⁰ Kuzwayo, p. 55.

¹⁰¹ Karl Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. xiii.

Despite the strength drawn from the multiple sources and influences that produce it, Kuzwayo's autobiographical "I" does seem threatened at certain points in the narrative; whilst Kuzwayo is assured in her representation of others, it is her representation of self that often emerges as the most precarious within her testimony. After the death of her mother, Kuzwayo is summoned before her aunt. 'There is no home for you any more here' she is told. 'You should go and look for your father and your people in Johannesburg.'¹⁰² The effect of these words is profound:

My whole childhood had tumbled away. The place which had been my dear home for all my life was now alien and empty. The people I had looked upon as my parents became strangers and remote [...] It dawned on me for the first time that I was a stranger, an intruder, that I was imposing myself where I was unwanted and perhaps did not belong. I lost all sense of personal direction and identity. I felt so rejected by the people and surroundings I had once cherished as part of my very own being [...] I became paranoid [...] I told myself that I did not really belong.¹⁰³

Contrasting words such as 'dear' and 'cherished' with 'alien and empty', 'strangers' and 'remote', Kuzwayo signals the extremity of this rejection; and it is here that a significant complexity asserts itself with regard to Kuzwayo's representation of self and community. Despite Kuzwayo's emphatic declarations of a broader social belonging, this outcasting by those closest to her undermines the strong sense of community that she venerates elsewhere in the text. Coupled with her decision to leave South Africa and her community behind, Kuzwayo undermines the strength of the social ties she describes, and the durability of her own connection to the communities of women she connects herself to. Whilst this may be argued to affect the authority of her narrative voice, I argue that in the context of trauma, the instability of voice becomes its own testimony to pain; and, in so doing, communicates an experience regardless of its self-referential quality. It is telling, however, that Kuzwayo ties her story to others in the context of rejection as well as protest. Specifying that 'I felt so rejected by the people and surroundings I had once cherished as part of my very own being', Kuzwayo testifies to the newly-created fissures in her sense of self, and holds accountable those who are responsible for them. Although Kuzwayo's experience of rejection undermines the communal ties she has been so determined to showcase, these ties do not dissolve in the moment of rebuff; rather, their character changes. Whilst the connections to others that Kuzwayo previously alludes to are declarations of strength, Kuzwayo also directly ties the story of her weakness to those outside of herself. Although the notion of community

¹⁰² Kuzwayo, p. 105.

¹⁰³ Kuzwayo, p. 107.

is undermined in the sense that it no longer provides the support that it has previously given, Kuzwayo's implication of 'people' into her pain not only complicates the question of who inflicts trauma in the context of apartheid but confirms that intersubjective relationships are core, foundational elements of both suffering and joy; that the lives of others, whether they inflict trauma or protest against it, are bound in a significant way to her own.

Révérien Rurangwa, *Génocidé*

The Elegy

'How', Rurangwa asks, 'do you explain the inexplicable?'¹⁰⁴ Gesturing towards the impossibility of linguistic referentiality in the context of violence and trauma emphasised by contemporary trends in trauma theory, the genre of *récit* – described by Daniel Just as 'elusive – at once too broad and too specific [...] indefinite'¹⁰⁵ – seems a fitting medium for the transmission of an experience mired in doubt regarding its viability. However, despite *récit*'s desire to recreate the extremity it describes, Rurangwa's text initially defies the genre in the way that it clearly *reacts* to the violence that *récit* would ideally place at its centre. Whilst Kulka aims to probe his memory and Kuzwayo is motivated by her desire to educate the world about the reality of apartheid and praise the women of Soweto for their resilience, Rurangwa's text is driven by different intentions: one of which is his compulsion to eulogy. The early pages of *Génocidé* see Rurangwa describing a family photograph, taken on the day of a close relative's wedding:

Appolinalie takes centre stage in the photo, slender and graceful beneath her tulle veil and long white dress [...] My aunt is graceful, in a wooden kind of way [...] It is my Uncle Jean, Appolinalie's big brother [...] my uncle Faustin Mahigigi [...] my grandmother, Berancilla Nyirafari [...] She is called Pascasie, Jean's wife.¹⁰⁶

Later, Rurangwa lists the names of more family members who died around him:

¹⁰⁴ Rurangwa, p. 11.

¹⁰⁵ Daniel Just, 'The Politics of the Novel and Maurice Blanchot's Theory of the *Récit*, 1954-1964' in *French Forum*, Vol. 33 No. 1 (2008), pp. 121-139, p. 121.

¹⁰⁶ Rurangwa, pp. 17-19.

Sylvélie Nyirabicuba, thirteen years old [...] Olive, eleven years old; Pierre Célestin Bukuba, nine [...] Marie Ntakiruntinka [...] seven; and my little sister Claudette Byukusenge, five.¹⁰⁷

These are just two examples of Rurangwa's invocation of his murdered relatives; references to the names, ages and characteristics of his loved ones crop up throughout the text. Whilst signalling the sobering tragedy of the brutality of their murders, the elegiac tone of these passages performs a specific function. Although it is important to recognise the ways in which Rwanda has moved past the genocide, the events of 1994 remain a palpable presence in modern-day Rwanda due to the fact that closure still eludes many survivors. In addition to the fact that a large number of the genocide's victims remain in unidentified mass graves,¹⁰⁸ the governmental emphasis on moving past the genocide and the social presence of its Hutu perpetrators complicate the process of healing. Significantly, too, Rwanda's memorial strategy emphasises what Sara Guyer terms 'death in general'.¹⁰⁹ Aiming to highlight the enormous scale of death to visitors at sites such as Nyamata and Nyarubuye, the skeletons at these memorials are largely deindividuated – a depersonalisation of the dead that I argue Rurangwa responds to with these detailed references to his slaughtered family members. Deeply marked by their loss, the stories of their deaths and memories of their lives are an integral element of Rurangwa's project of self-representation, undertaken as it is in such close proximity to the genocide of 1994. Beyond this, however, Rurangwa remembers his family in a publicly commemorative, as well as personal capacity in this text – delineating the particularities of these lives against a backdrop of memorial practices that, as will be discussed in the following section, mandate the parameters of mourning and emphasise scale over individual stories. Providing a compelling counter-argument to Byford's contention that testimony is driven solely by the need to establish an account of atrocity, Rurangwa's text resists this homogenising view in its suggestion that the dynamics of representation and narrative are contingent on the distinct and varied subtleties of individual political and social contexts. Whilst Kulka's mention of his mother is framed largely in relation to his own unanswered questions, Rurangwa's proximity to the killings and awareness of Rwanda's restrictive politics of remembrance compels him to speak for the dead not only to commemorate them, but to advocate for the public memorialisation of their lives; a role that, in addition to blurring the boundaries between the personal and the public in ways that complicate

¹⁰⁷ Rurangwa, p. 36.

¹⁰⁸ Even in 2018, 24 years after the genocide's end, new mass graves are still being unearthed. In April 2018, four mass graves containing approximately 200 victims' bodies were discovered in the Gasabo district.

¹⁰⁹ Sara Guyer, 'Rwanda's Bones' in *Boundary 2*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (2009), pp. 155-175, p. 163.

the generic status of this text, is a reminder of the particularity required in evaluating the dynamics of narrative representation in the post-traumatic context.

Reflecting Kulka's text, Rurangwa's recounting of his mother's death is particularly striking, for Rurangwa views and describes himself particularly in relation to her loss. Her primacy in this context is suggested by the fact that in the midst of describing the auditory horror of the genocide,¹¹⁰ Rurangwa emphasises that 'my mother's murder was the worst atrocity I was forced to witness.'¹¹¹ Before describing the manner in which she was murdered, Rurangwa transports his readers to a scene in his memory about his mother and her devout religious practises.¹¹² And suddenly, once again, the scene is the hut in which they are hiding, surrounded by Hutu. Echoing the lack of chronicity featured in Kulka's *Landscapes*, Rurangwa's frequent slippage between tenses both reinforces the pain of his losses and emphasises the presence of the past in his present. The following sight, though, is perhaps the most painful of all: 'I see my mother, she who has given me life, in a way I have never seen her before, completely naked.'¹¹³ This description, I suggest, raises important questions about the ways that we conceive of our lives as being purely our own. What Rurangwa makes clear – and, perhaps, what becomes clear to him in the dynamic of this moment in which death touches life – is that our lives are inevitably interconnected with those of others. In the context of a genocidal trauma in which bloodlines are being severed with alarming speed, Rurangwa's emphasis on relationality is both testimony to life lost and an effort to preserve and narrate the history of an individual whose identity is inextricably bound up with his own; his mother's death is, therefore, not only the end of one life, but the devastating disruption of another.

In addition to Rurangwa's elegiac writing and reference to the loss of his mother deviating from the non-referential focus on violence *récit* traditionally demands, *Génocidé's* calls for retribution and accountability further defy the parameters of the genre. Whilst there are many aspects of the genocide that infuriate Rurangwa, the most grating source of his anger is that many genocidaires 'remain at large, unpunished, and they impose a law of silence on any survivors.'¹¹⁴ Refusing both the silence and

¹¹⁰ Rurangwa, p. 40.

¹¹¹ Rurangwa, p. 43.

¹¹² Rurangwa, p. 42.

¹¹³ Rurangwa, p. 44.

¹¹⁴ Rurangwa, p. 64.

anonymity he views the Hutu predators as enjoying, Rurangwa makes it a personal mission to identify, and bring to justice, Simon Sibomana – the mastermind of the operation that burned forty-three members of his family alive. Sibomana, however, is not the only target of Rurangwa's rage; viewing the international community's failure to intervene as equally inhumane as the Hutu massacres, Rurangwa's text also places enormous emphasis on the world leaders who stood by as Rwanda was plunged into horror:

The butchery of nine out of ten Tutsis – or, one Rwandan in seven – took place against a background of deafening silence. At the very moment it was happening, the Holocaust Museum in Washington was inaugurated and the heads of states of the main western powers marked the fiftieth anniversary of the D-Day Landings, proclaiming unanimously, "Never Again!"¹¹⁵

Statistically emphasising the national scale of death whilst individually eulogising various members of his family, Rurangwa's text once again demands consideration of him in both a familial and national context; he is connected, this passage reminds us, to personal and national loss. The obvious hypocrisy of the proclamation of "Never Again" on the anniversary of D-Day is presented here as a call to account. Rurangwa is equally condemnatory towards the female Hutu in the family wedding photo who showed no compassion to their Tutsi neighbours despite their closeness: 'I accuse these women of 'deliberately failing to provide assistance to a person in danger' as French law would have it. They did not even deign to hide one of the children of our family during the genocide.'¹¹⁶ These are just some of the institutions and individuals that Rurangwa singles out for retribution and blame in *Génocidé*; there are many more. In detailing the crimes of Sibomana, the international community and specific passive bystanders and dedicating so much of his narrative to doing so, Rurangwa displaces himself as the central character in the story of his life. In making his call for retribution and justice such a central feature of his text, *Génocidé* comes to be as much about the identities, actions and moral failings of the genocide's perpetrators and facilitators as it is about Rurangwa's own survival. Interestingly, this is in stark contrast with many other survivor texts. As the previous Chapter demonstrated, Yolande Mukagasana's text has its own accusatory character. She, however, remains at the centre of her narrative at all times. In addition to pointing to the variances within Rwandan survivor writing, the suggestion that one's life story can be told without constant focus on the individual at its centre tests

¹¹⁵ Rurangwa, p. 14.

¹¹⁶ Rurangwa, p. 21.

the bounds of life writing through questions of the specific dynamics of self-other relations in the aftermath of traumatic violence.

The Fraternity of Pain

'It is neither pleasant nor easy to delve into these depths of blackness, and yet, I think we must do it.'¹¹⁷

In addition to confirming the necessity of his testimony, Rurangwa's epigraphic quoting of Primo Levi is indicative of another crucial way in which *Génocidé* reaches outside the bounds of selfhood in pursuit of self-knowledge. Despite claiming '[h]ere is not the place to study the invisible red thread connecting these successive 'circles of hell'',¹¹⁸ Rurangwa's text does exactly that. Although these words are excluded from the English translation, the original text of *Génocidé* makes the following statement:

After that of the Armenians in Tukey, in 1915-1916, and that of the Jews in Europe, in 1941-1944, the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda, in 1994, is the third genocide of the twenty-first century. Or the fourth? Certain purists deny the use of the word "genocide" to the crimes that the Khmer Rouge perpetrated in Cambodia.¹¹⁹

This passage suggests that Rurangwa both expresses pain and finds comfort in integrating Rwanda's history into a wider network of genocidal violence. Situating the massacres within a chain of death that includes the Holocaust, the Cambodian genocide and the Armenian genocide, Rurangwa alleviates the sense of isolation engendered by extreme persecution and structures his experience within a framework that is not entirely his own. The connections, parallels and differences between the Holocaust and the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda have been substantially discussed.¹²⁰ Rurangwa, however, makes clear that the Holocaust is an indispensable guide to his own past: '[t]he genocide', he claims, 'is engraved in my skin, like the tattoos on the forearms of Auschwitz survivors'.¹²¹ Creating a direct relation between himself and the victims of the Holocaust – two parties that have been physically marked by the brutality to which they were witness – Rurangwa does two things: he implies that the

¹¹⁷ Rurangwa, p. 11.

¹¹⁸ Rurangwa, p. 13.

¹¹⁹ Rurangwa, *Génocidé*, p. 11 (translation my own – this passage is not included in the English translation).

¹²⁰ See, for example, Nigel Eltringham, *Accounting for Horror: Post-Genocide Debates in Rwanda* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), p. 63, Robert Eaglestone, "'You would not add to my suffering if you knew what I had seen": Holocaust Testimony and Contemporary African Trauma Literature' in *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (2008), pp. 72-85 and Zoe Norridge, 'Writing Against Genocide: Genres of Opposition in Narratives from and about Rwanda' in *Postcolonial Poetics*, ed. by P. Crowley and J. Hiddleston (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), pp. 240-261, pp. 246-249.

¹²¹ Rurangwa, p. 82.

violence he has been exposed to is part of a historical tradition, and appeals to his readers' recognition of one moment of violence to illuminate their understanding of another. Writing from within the shockwaves of the aftermath of the genocide – violence that severed connection and denied intersubjective recognition – Rurangwa's search for, and appeal to, identification becomes its own testimony to the precarious constitution of his self in this moment. Reaching out to history not only for understanding but for solidarity, Rurangwa's insistence on the connection of violent histories demonstrates the way in which history that is not one's own might make the project of self-representation possible.

The identification he feels with Holocaust survivors explains why, on a visit to Auschwitz, his narration almost appears to become that *of* a Holocaust survivor. It is not hard, Rurangwa insists, to imagine the scenes of years ago:

[t]he train halts at its stop with a screeching of steel and jets of steam engulfing the platform. It's the end of the journey, everyone gets out. Some doors close, others open. Armed men bark guttural orders, dogs strain at their leashes. Hundreds of dazed-looking people emerge from the cattle trucks [...] Wives are torn from husbands, children from parents [...] To the left [...] the old, the not yet pubescent, fragile-looking women, little children, the sick. And straight away, for many of these, the putting to death.¹²²

This reads almost like an appropriated scene within memory; it is as if the network of genocidal history that Rurangwa creates allows him access to the experiences, memories and emotions of those who have suffered similar violence, albeit in very different geographical and temporal contexts. Rurangwa's recitation of the above scene suggests that Rurangwa feels that this history *is* somehow his own; that in addition to his own experience of genocide familiarising him with these sights and sounds, the Holocaust *is* engraved upon him because Rwanda is now included in the realm of genocidal trauma of which the Holocaust – in Rurangwa's own words – is 'the symbol of genocide, the paradigm of a Crime Against Humanity.'¹²³ Equally compelling is Rurangwa's claim that Auschwitz is a place 'where all survivors find themselves at home in some way', and his description of the 'strange fraternity' he shares 'with [...] other genocide survivors'.¹²⁴ Commenting on this bond, Rurangwa states the following:

¹²² Rurangwa, p. 108.

¹²³ Rurangwa, p. 109.

¹²⁴ Rurangwa, p. 108.

a survivor has no real age. Our languages may be different, but when we encounter the mounds of shoes, the piles of shorn-off hair, the rows of portraits, the traces of bare feet in the frozen earth, there is a complicity between us which goes beyond words.¹²⁵

Particularly compelling about this passage is the way that silence is figured within it. Although much critical discourse theorises silence as evidence of the muting haunting created by trauma, silence in this instance becomes the means through which identifications are created. Instead of representing an isolated state of submission to the past, silence is figured here as a means of meaningful connection. Stating that ‘it feels like I’ve slipped under the skin of these old people, these women, these children who trooped into the fake showers where they were to be gassed by Zyklon B’¹²⁶ there is a sense in which Rurangwa’s portraiture of the survivor – and the easy way that Rurangwa connects, and claims, other genocides and survivors as mirrors of his own experience – is potentially homogenising and ethically complex. With that cautionary note acknowledged, however, what is important in this passage is how Rurangwa reaches beyond his own history and people in the attempt to transcribe the violence of his past and negotiate his place in its aftermath. In the connections he makes between disparate times and places and creating a sense of mutuality in spite of these differences, *Génocidé* comes to reflect Kulka’s statements regarding the transcendence of extreme violence – and, in so doing, suggests the particular way in which self-other relations function and find realisation in the aftermath of genocide.

Rurangwa’s connection to survivors however, is not limited to that between himself and survivors of other, transhistorical, transnational and trans-conflictual catastrophes: this relationship is also realised much closer to home. The dedication that prefaces his text is telling; in addition to offering his testimony in memory of the forty-three members of his family who were murdered in the massacres, his text is also devoted ‘To all the survivors who cannot weep nor speak. Let my tears be their tears, my words be their cries.’¹²⁷ With the implications of representation that this statement conveys, Rurangwa’s text is transformed from a purely personal account into the telling of a story of a trauma with collective significance and multiple resonances to multiple people. The wider implications of representation

¹²⁵ Rurangwa, p. 108.

¹²⁶ Rurangwa, p. 113.

¹²⁷ Rurangwa, p. 9.

explain why, once again, Rurangwa displaces himself from the centre of his narrative to tell the stories of others; the story, for example, of:

Gratia Musabende [...] [who] just gave birth to twin boys the night before. These little innocents are lying on the church altar, in the chancel, with their mother, who has been hacked and laid out on the sacrificial stone. Survivors will later testify that the killers, after smashing the skulls of the two babies against the great pink wall of the building, rubbed the mother's face in the infants' blood, before sacrificing her.¹²⁸

Whilst the present tense of this passage is indicative of the way that memories of violence are still very much with Rwanda in the present, the vivid description Rurangwa employs emphasises the tragedy and savagery that inhere in this moment. Most compelling, however, is the inclusion of this episode for Rurangwa's positioning as *Génocidé's* author. The choice to narrate the life and death of this woman and her children echo Kuzwayo's similar narrative practice that made her both autobiographic subject and biographer, simultaneously. In electing to testify to the experiences of others, this part of the text not only takes on a somewhat historiographic tone but extends the source of his writing outwards once again. This is the third degree of Rurangwa's narration; in addition to describing his own experience and that of his murdered relatives, Rurangwa reaches beyond the bounds of kin here to remember his wider community. Although these words displace him from the narrative's centre once again, the simultaneous and varied degrees of Rurangwa's commemorative impulse suggests the way that trauma extends, rather than inhibits, the need and ability to remember in the aftermath of atrocity.

Who Am I?

Although Rurangwa reaches beyond himself to better understand and process the genocide, one of the most striking elements of this text is the complex process of recognition that Rurangwa engages in when confronted by his own face. The scars that Rurangwa bears are not only psychological; directly attacked by Sibomana's machete, Rurangwa is left with horrific facial injuries and a stump for an arm that has a profound impact on his self-perception. Planning to return to Rwanda after a brief absence in Switzerland, Rurangwa is seized by insecurity:

I am secretly obsessed by one question: will people recognise me with these medical glasses which cover my missing eye, with these scars which puff up my face, with this limping gait

¹²⁸ Rurangwa, p. 55.

which disturbs my smashed shoulder, with this stump of an arm? [...] I just feel embarrassment and shame. Disfigured, for sure, but have I become another man for all that? A foreigner, unequivocally? Or have I become invisible?¹²⁹

With his references to ‘embarrassment and shame’, Rurangwa once again taps into a global network of survivors for whom – as both their testimonies and critical discourses discuss – shame is often a fact of survival; ‘shame’, in fact, argues Marc Nichanian, ‘is its own testimony’¹³⁰ in post-violence contexts. With the depth of his fear and anxiety signalled by the repeated use of questions, Rurangwa’s concern here is an existential one; he worries not only about the effect his physical appearance will have on the way in which he is or is not recognised when he returns home, but about what the enormous change in his face means for his identity, and his ability to recognise and relate to himself. As this passage makes clear through its reference to various elements of his corporeality, few parts of his physical self remain unmarked by the past. The visibility of his physical injuries threatens to brand him in the eyes of himself and others as a victim forevermore; to render his body an eternal symbol of the violence he is trying to work through, confining him to a terrifying temporal liminality between past and present. The possibility that he is ‘another man’, a ‘foreigner’ or indeed, ‘invisible’ also has significant implications for his narrative voice. Raising questions about the authority of his speech, the implication that the self is an unstable – and indeed, an unrecognisable – entity not only forces a consideration of his representative capabilities but directly contradicts the definitive inhabitation of self that Tozzi’s ‘privileged voice’ demands; thus appearing to undermine the viability of his autobiographical project. The text makes clear that Rurangwa’s sense of self refuses unification; although he has moved past this point, he writes that ‘I often feel that part of me stopped forever at the age of fifteen, like a watch-hand which stops ticking in an earthquake; and that another part of me grew up too fast and too soon. I live out of sync with myself.’¹³¹ However, rather than precluding the possibility of autobiographical representation, this admission of schism is a valuable insight into the reality of post-violence selfhood. Admitting to uncertainty and feelings of detachment, Rurangwa’s insecurity becomes its own testimony to the destabilisation caused by deeply depersonalising brutality and the fractured sense of self that remains in its aftermath. Understood in this way, Rurangwa’s testimony assumes a double function; in addition to testifying to the specific way that violence induces self-estrangement, the fact of its writing is an act

¹²⁹ Rurangwa, p. 68.

¹³⁰ Marc Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 118.

¹³¹ Rurangwa, pp. 83.

by which the self addresses its own otherness – this testimony, whilst stating the fact of Rurangwa's fundamental destabilisation, contributes to the process of reconciling his shattered self with its sense of subjectivity; a process that gestures towards a complex interplay between wound and resilience.

Rurangwa's emotions towards his face intensify as his narrative progresses. Going through '[t]he torture of the mirror' every morning and referring to himself as 'a living corpse'¹³², he reflects as follows:

What I see is horrible, but I cannot avoid this confrontation: a face that is no longer my face [...] Every mirror is an enemy [...] I have only one desire and that is to smash the mirror. But do I want to destroy myself or my new face? Or just the wounds that are bored into me [...] How do you accept yourself when it is so difficult to love yourself? Each morning, I must dare to look myself in the face, and I don't always have the courage. It is not easy to learn to coexist, more or less peacefully, with what I have dubbed my 'waking nightmares'.¹³³

Personifying the mirror as an enemy, Rurangwa makes clear how imperilled his own perception of self is; further suggested by the strong connotations of the word 'smash', this passage highlights the temptation towards self-destruction. The questions Rurangwa poses here are themselves indicative of his complex sense of subjectivity: to live peacefully with his face is to live with the reminder of the negation of his humanity that made his disfiguration possible – an unthinkable prospect. And yet, Rurangwa states that he unthinkingly rejected offers of plastic surgery:

I've always refused, without even weighing up the pros and cons. Even if it has been ravaged, my face is the only one that my mother gave to me. And even if I struggle to cope with my own image, I want to keep the hallmarks of this evil scored into my body.¹³⁴

Although Rurangwa's face is figured in the last passage as a symbol of violence, this passage suggests its referential duality: whilst his scars are marks of the violence of the past, the canvas on which they are drawn is an equally significant reminder of the time before it. In this moment, Rurangwa not only renders his physical self as a site of connection between himself and his mother and between past and present, but also as a definitive determinant of who he is – his face is tied to a family, a legacy and a history that refuses to allow itself to be forgotten despite the impulse Rurangwa feels to destroy it. Although the scars are linked with memories of violence, this passage implies that the need to remember that violence trumps the difficulty Rurangwa faces in coming to terms with it; a suggestion

¹³² Rurangwa, p. 60.

¹³³ Rurangwa, pp. 79-80.

¹³⁴ Rurangwa, p. 82.

that is another indicator of Rurangwa's resilience. According to Rurangwa, memory is designated as a dangerous thing in Rwanda; with an emphasis on reconciliation, 'shut your feelings in the cupboard and throw away the key'¹³⁵ is the theme of the official national discourse. This discourse, however, is not one that Rurangwa accepts: 'Let me be understood: it's not my own life which I'm anxious to preserve, but that of the sole survivor of my people's lineage. Through me, my family must survive.'¹³⁶ 'I cannot strip myself of the duty to remember and to pass on our line', he continues. 'That would make me complicit in our own genocide [...] The Hutus have cleaned up the churches, the fields, all the sites of the genocide, but they cannot take my scars from me.'¹³⁷ In addition to refiguring his corporeal self as a site of memory, Rurangwa testifies to the necessity, and imperative, that is attached to his duty to remember. Here, Rurangwa appoints himself as representative – a survivor who not only embodies the struggles of the living, but who, through his very person, testifies to the absence and murder of the dead. Memory, in *Génocidé*, is created through a process of dynamic dialogue: something live, which must not only be nurtured by the one who houses it, but shared and transmitted. Read together, these passages indicate that Rurangwa is caught between affirmation and negation; reflecting the multiplicity and occasional instability of Kuzwayo's autobiographical "I", Rurangwa concurrently knows, and does not know, who he is in the aftermath of the genocide. But although this uncertainty would undermine the authority of Rurangwa's narrative in the eyes of traditional autobiographical theory, this ambivalence becomes its own testimony to the self Rurangwa inhabits in this moment; a self that comes into being because of – and in spite of – the conflicts from which it tentatively attempts to emerge.

Conclusion

This chapter began with the question of what autobiographical writing might offer to understandings of how the self re-forms in relation to, or independent of others in the aftermath of existential threat. The answer to this question, as demonstrated by Kulka's *Landscapes*, Kuzwayo's *Call Me Woman* and Rurangwa's *Génocidé*, is largely informed by the arguments these texts have made regarding what these literary testimonies do. Challenging Byford's assertion that testimonies serve the sole purpose of

¹³⁵ Rurangwa, p. 77.

¹³⁶ Rurangwa, p. 77.

¹³⁷ Rurangwa, pp. 81-82.

establishing historical record, these narratives are evidence of the multiple ways that written testimonies function. For Rurangwa, writing in close proximity to genocide and aware of the political dynamics of mourning in Rwanda, testimony is a space for elegy and an opportunity for the open expression of loss; his narrative becomes a site of memory that transcends the personal, allowing him to commemorate lives outside of his immediate familial circle. In addition, Rurangwa uses this text to apportion culpability, express his rage and admit his uncertainty regarding the constitution of his selfhood; his text is a viscerally and significantly emotional space that humanises the experience of survival which – as this chapter’s introduction argued – is so often theorised in one-dimensional terms. Kulka’s references to his mother, brother and those who perished at Auschwitz function in a similarly elegiac way to Rurangwa’s. But whilst Rurangwa’s delineation of the lives and deaths of his family are catalysts for the expression of anger, Kulka’s references to the dead elicit shame and guilt, whilst his writing about his mother and brother are accompanied by a sense of relief at having answers to the questions he has held onto for so long. Whilst both men attach their stories to those of the dead, it is important to acknowledge the suggestion that the emotional responses these references elicit shift in temporal relation to events themselves; a recognition that resists the elision of survivors and their testimonies that this chapter argues against. In addition to using her narrative as a literary call to action and demand for racial justice, Kuzwayo’s passionate and interrogative text also functions informatively; calling upon history to substantiate her cries for reform, hers is a testimony that invites engagement even as it describes separation, discrimination and death. Reflecting the experiences of their authors, these texts are not uniform. Demonstrating vast emotional registers and demanding various ethical considerations that humanise these voices as they remind readers of the humanity of those who have been silenced around them, these texts challenge the notion that the survivor’s voice can be defined by singularity – even as they are filtered through the mode of autobiography.

These texts strongly suggest that to survive and bear witness is necessarily to reach out to the dead and the living. In the connections they make between their personal experiences of violence and alternate moments of human catastrophe, both Kulka and Rurangwa integrate themselves into a historical chain of events and link themselves to a wider community of victims. Curiously, the recognition of other people’s pain somehow empowers both of these writers; whilst Kulka’s sense of historical trauma on the Temple Mount is the motivation for his return to, and confrontation of, Auschwitz, the

multidirectional memory implied by Rurangwa's connection of himself to Holocaust victims is presented as a source of comfort – a sense of solidarity and community that underpins the multiple functions of his testimonial project. Thus, it is not only he who represents them by incorporating their experiences into his narrative, but they who come to represent him. In contrast, Kuzwayo connects herself to a temporally and geographically much closer group: the black women of her local community. The communality ingrained within her perception of selfhood makes this text a shared testimonial space, which complicates the distinction between “her” stories and “theirs”. Like Kulka and Rurangwa, she too refuses the specificity of her suffering: ‘[!]et it be known’, she states emphatically, ‘that the trauma I went through [...] is nothing unique. It is the torture and suffering of hundreds.’¹³⁸ It is interesting that the anxieties around uniqueness that are so prominent in discussions of comparative studies are dismissed by these survivors; rather than other moments of violence representing a threat to the specificity of their experiences of violence and victimhood, Kulka, Kuzwayo and Rurangwa reach out to the suffering of others to take strength from their own encounters with horror. Beyond its facilitation of comfort, however, these connections provide key insights into the reformation of post-violence selves. The Holocaust, apartheid and the genocide in Rwanda were predicated on the intent to exterminate or seriously harm distinct groups. However, with Kulka using violence as a contextual point of self-reference, Rurangwa connecting himself to Holocaust survivors and Kuzwayo linking herself to the black women whose resilience she describes alongside their denigration, these writers place themselves within communities of those who have endured; transforming suffering into empowerment, they assert their post-violence identities by establishing group belonging whose foundation is survival and resilience. Although these identifications can suggest questions of elision, the fact of their establishment implies that for these survivors, the reconstruction of self requires acknowledgement of, and engagement with, the suffering of others.

It is particularly compelling these writers' acknowledgements and statements of self emerge as the most precarious and complicated in these autobiographical narratives. Despite Kulka's belief that his biographic and historiographic voices are diametrically opposed, the ultimately dialogic relationship between them – the way that one always, somehow, permeates the other – transforms both of these generic narratives into forms of life writing despite the fact that Kulka, insisting on their separation, fails

¹³⁸ Kuzwayo, p. 193.

to recognise the traces of the personal in his public writing. Whilst Kuzwayo's testimony is confident in its questioning of inequality as it relates to her community, the familial rejection she suffers is something that she does not quite recover from; and although Rurangwa boldly confronts the genocide perpetrator who murdered his family, the enemy of which he is truly afraid is his own reflection. Defying the self-referentiality traditionally demanded by autobiography, these are selves which vacillate between assurance and insecurity; an instability that, I contend, makes the reach towards the stories of others increasingly crucial. On the one hand, it is precisely the stable anchoring of the self in the present that makes the journey to the past possible; in exploring their memories and confronting the darkest of times, these writers defy the theoretical orthodoxies of trauma which insist on the haunting, overwhelming quality of memory. As I have demonstrated, however, the complexity of survival lies in the way that the past is both past and present; although temporally removed from these writers' lives, they are still affected – not, necessarily, traumatised – by the experience of violence in ways that induces a specific insecurity of self. In these moments, links to others become essential to the project not only of self-representation, but of self re-formation in the aftermath of disaster. Surviving violent experiences that specifically intended to destroy identity, the rebuilding of identity comes to rely on the intersubjective recognition so central to the process of self-identification.

Despite being united in the sense that they are all survivors, Kulka, Kuzwayo and Rurangwa's texts are evidence of the variations both within testimony and between survivors themselves. Their narratives are not homogenous; in addition to pointing to their own experiential specificities, *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death*, *Call Me Woman*, and *Génocidé* refuse to adhere to the scripts that popular theories of testimony and the survivor outlined in this chapter's introduction advocate for. The moments of violence that these texts testify to are events that materialise at the limits of humanity, rationality and ethics; it seems appropriate, therefore, that these writers' selves come into being through their engagement with the generic limits of memoir, autobiography and *récit*. Despite defecting from the transparent referentiality traditionally demanded from narrators in the context of life writing, these texts reflect the sense of precarity *and* possibility that inhere in the experience of survival. These narratives emphasise that in the context of trauma and testimony, the story of an individual's life is the story of the multiple connections, voices, lives and deaths with which it comes into contact. Constructing selves even as their narratives challenge the boundaries of the literary genres within which this process usually

takes place, *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death*, *Call Me Woman*, and *Génocidé* demonstrate the complex, yet productive intersection of self, other, memory and history.

Chapter Three

Fiction After Trauma: Writing Around Redemption

The DSM-IV criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) states that in the wake of trauma, survivors are likely to display ‘markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities’, experience a ‘feeling of detachment or estrangement from others’ and – significantly – are capable only of a ‘restricted range of affect (e.g., unable to have loving feelings)’.¹ The protagonists of the texts considered in this chapter do not entirely resist this characterisation: Imre Kertész’s protagonist B. ‘avoided participation of any kind’², Zakes Mda’s Toloki remembers his old schoolmate Noria as a ‘stuck-up bitch’,³ and Gilbert Gatore’s protagonist Isaro, for a time, ‘immersed herself in complete solitude’.⁴ And yet, the urge to isolation is accompanied by an irresistible draw to the outside. Kingbitter ‘catch[es] himself at the window looking at the down-and-outs’⁵, Toloki often finds himself ‘at the waterfront among the tourists’,⁶ and Isaro returns to the Rwanda she left as an orphaned refugee ‘not to see landscapes and animals, but people.’⁷ Despite inhabiting different landscapes marked by distinct traumas, these characters are united by a fascination with others. Acknowledging the tension between the seclusion theorised as inherently linked to trauma and the centrality of relationships in these texts, this chapter asks: in their attempts to address trauma through fiction – as opposed to the autobiographical approach examined in the previous chapter – why do these writers emphasise the interpersonal bonds theorised as eluding survivors of traumatic events? And what might the fictional depiction of certain bonds and their various dynamics offer to thinking around the representation of trauma and its aftermath?

Debates surrounding the meeting of fiction and trauma are divisive; debates that, much like discussions of trauma itself, have their roots in the question of the Holocaust’s representation. ‘A novel about

¹ <https://www.estss.org/learn-about-trauma/dsm-iv-definition/>

² Imre Kertész, *Liquidation*, trans. by Tim Wilkinson (London: Vintage, 2007), p. 19.

³ Mda, p. 11.

⁴ Gatore, p. 37.

⁵ Kertész, p. 6.

⁶ Zakes Mda, *Ways of Dying* (New York: Picador, 1995), p. 195.

⁷ Gilbert Gatore, *The Past Ahead*, trans. by Marjolin de Jager (Bloomington: Éditions Phébus, 2012), p. 67.

Treblinka', stated an emphatic Elie Wiesel, 'is either not a novel or not about Treblinka.'⁸ The *mysterium tremendum* school of thought denies the possibility of metaphor after catastrophe: be it Lawrence Langer's statement of the suitability of oral testimony alone to adequately represent the Holocaust,⁹ David Patterson's statement of the Holocaust's fiction-denying banality¹⁰ or Berel Lang's arguments for historical writing as the singularly appropriate mode of Holocaust representation,¹¹ there is a strong critical resistance to writing about the limits of human experience in the language of the imaginary. For these theorists, Holocaust fiction is a contradiction in terms; fiction's aesthetics, they argue, shape survivors' stories in a way that would not only compromise their authenticity, but also fail to represent what they perceive as the trauma-induced incomprehensibility at the core of survivors' memories. And yet, trauma fiction exists. Substantiating Laurie Vickroy's claim that fiction 'makes accessible the interconnections of society, culture, and human psychology'¹² in a productive, meaningful way, fictional representations of the Holocaust, apartheid and the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda have come to represent some of the most theoretically analysed and commercially successful texts in each respective context.¹³ In *Trauma Fiction*, Anne Whitehead poses the question of whether 'trauma [...] is a content or a form.'¹⁴ As she observes, many texts within the genre suggest that it is both. Mimicking contemporary understandings of trauma's symptomatology through the postmodern aesthetic of fragmentary, disjointed writing in which 'temporality and chronology collapse [and] narratives are characterised by repetition and indirection,'¹⁵ death and the chaos of its circumstance are overt characteristics of much trauma fiction. Shifting the focus of the conversation between trauma and fiction beyond aesthetics alone, this chapter asks what the following texts' representations of fictional bonds might offer to understandings of responses to trauma in their intersections with, and departures from, this now-conventional postmodern aesthetic.

⁸ Elie Wiesel et al., *Dimensions of the Holocaust* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1977), p. 7.

⁹ Lawrence Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 16-18.

¹⁰ David Patterson, Alan L. Berger and Sarita Cargas, 'Introduction' in *Encyclopedia of Holocaust Literature*, ed. by David Patterson, Alan L. Berger and Sarita Cargas (Westport: Oryx Press, 2002), pp. xiii-xviii, p. xiii.

¹¹ Berel Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 124.

¹² Laurie Vickroy, *Reading Trauma Narratives: The Contemporary Novel and the Psychology of Oppression* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), p. 179.

¹³ Recent examples of bestselling Holocaust fiction are Heather Morris's *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* and Jodie Picoult's *The Storyteller*. J. M. Coetzee's oeuvre is a paradigmatic example of commercially and critically successful apartheid fiction, and Rwandan novelist Scholastique Mukasonga's *Notre-Dame du Nil* was awarded the prestigious Prix Renaudot.

¹⁴ Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 161.

¹⁵ Whitehead, p. 3

Born in 1929, Budapest-born Imre Kertész is a curiously enigmatic author. Despite surviving Auschwitz and Buchenwald, none of his work is testimony in the conventional sense. Although Kertész admits his discomfort with the labelling of his work as fiction, claiming that he 'wouldn't draw such a sharp distinction between the two [reality and fiction]',¹⁶ Kertész acquiesces to the categorisation 'if only to stop me from adding yet another book to what already back in the Sixties had swollen into a library of [...] Lager literature'.¹⁷ Going on to vocally admonish the sentimentality and rigid expectations of Holocaust testimony, as will be discussed in the coming pages, Kertész's writing is often as obscure as the man himself. Although he has achieved significant commercial success, particularly after being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2002, Kertész's writing has not permeated public or theoretical consciousnesses in the same way as that of survivors such as Primo Levi or Elie Wiesel – a critical neglect that has motivated this chapter's selection of his text *Liquidation*. Following *Fateless* (1975) and *Kaddish for an Unborn Child* (1990), *Liquidation* (2003) is the final instalment of Kertész's Holocaust trilogy. Set in a Hungary violently and chaotically sliding into communist rule, the story follows Kingbitter, a friend and colleague of Auschwitz survivor B. (sometimes referred to as Bee) who has recently committed suicide. Profoundly impacted by his interactions with B. and existentially destabilised by his own brush with communist dictatorship, Kingbitter is determined to track down the book he believes B. must have written to explain how to live in a world marked by totalitarian violence. What is remarkable about this text is B.'s absence from it, and Kingbitter's attempts to connect with a dead man; an imagined connection whose implications this chapter analyses to question the relationship between trauma, fiction and intersubjective interaction.

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) came into being amongst promises of the productive relationship between speech and healing. And for some, testifying to the human rights abuses they had endured under the apartheid regime delivered the catharsis of which they were assured.¹⁸ For others, however, the new rainbow nation narrative was somewhat more suspect; 'many', as Paul Gready notes, 'remained wary of replacing one historical narrative (that of the apartheid state) with another (that of the new ANC-dominated dispensation) [...] The TRC itself never resolved the

¹⁶ Imre Kertész, *Dossier K.*, trans. by Tim Wilkinson (New York: Melville House, 2013), p. 5.

¹⁷ Kertész, *Dossier K.*, p. 7.

¹⁸ In Antjie Krog's documentary-style compilation of responses to the TRC, one individual writes that 'With me having gone to the TRC with my story [...] It's as if I have been freed from a prison [...] we are no longer living under the tyranny of silence.' Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull* (London: Vintage Books, 1999), pp. 219-220.

tension between facilitating closure and encouraging ongoing debate.¹⁹ With its exclusive focus on harmony, the sweeping authoritative voice of the TRC largely excluded dialogue pertaining to the enduring anger, continued political violence and persistent calls for retribution on both sides of a still-present racial divide. The literature that aimed to represent a South Africa in transition was thus caught between competing voices, ideologies and claims of the present-day's nature. Writers and cultural theorists such as Guy Butler, Andries Walter Oliphant, Njabulo Ndebele, Elleke Boehmer and Es'kia Mphahlele have contributed immensely to apartheid's after-words. Their work has been invaluable in 'providing alternative grammars of transition, picking away at "uncomfortable truths" and "unfinished business"' – their texts, as Gready writes, defy 'rigid certainties, stereotypes, and characterizations.'²⁰ Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*, however – seamlessly intertwining sharp magic realism and the mundane rhythms of ordinary life – achieves this avoidance of absolutes in other ways. In an interview with Maureen Isaacson, Mda is clear that 'the only way to real reconciliation is through memory [...] we must make sure that the liberators do not become the new oppressors.'²¹ Mda's words indicate his conviction in the need for South Africa's future to take account of, and recognise, the emotional resonances of the past – not efface them entirely in favour of an idealised narrative of rainbow-related harmony. *Ways of Dying*, published as the TRC's proceedings began in 1996, is a faithful reflection of this belief. The novel follows Professional Mourner Toloki as he rebuilds his relationship with Noria, a girl from his childhood village. Despite having been separated by time and circumstance, the two meet again at her son's funeral and begin a complex process of healing that, as I will argue, becomes representative of South Africa's reconciliatory efforts whilst raising important questions about memory, pain and approaches to the future.

The space between speech and silence is especially charged in Rwanda. The silence of the UN and international media are considered by many Rwandans as partly responsible for the genocide's occurrence; a silencing of victims that has not entirely been broken in its aftermath. With genocide perpetrators continuing to live amongst their victims' families, Rwanda's ethno-politics have complicated processes of reconciliation and remembrance. 'Recognizing', as Nicki Hitchcott points out, 'the

¹⁹ Paul Gready, 'Novel Truths: Literature and Truth Commissions' in *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (2009), pp. 156-176, p. 159.

²⁰ Gready, p. 174.

²¹ Maureen Isaacson, 'The Free State Madonnas Prevail in Mda's Novel', <http://www.theconnection.org/features/zakesarticle.asp> [accessed 31/02/2018]

potentially divisive nature of commemorating the genocide, the Rwandan government has attempted to restrict acts of remembering to particular places and particular times.²² This is not the only silencing that national discourses intended to promote reconciliation enforce: explaining what she calls *chosen amnesia*, Susanne Buckley-Zistel notes that historical tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi 'are eclipsed from the discourse'²³ in ways that not only harm efforts towards reconciliation, but fail to address resentments that might engender further violence. Writing offers the opportunity to remember in a space unpoliced by politically-demarcated parameters of speech and silence; an opportunity that Gilbert Gatore – producing 'the first work of fiction by a Rwandan with firsthand experience of the 1994 genocide'²⁴ – seizes with his novel *Le Passé devant soi*. Considering how future generations might literarily engage with the genocide of 1994, Zoe Norridge speculates in a 2011 book chapter that the writers of tomorrow might do three things: explore perpetrator testimony, produce 'aesthetic narrative fiction that [...] is founded in a concern with imaginative character development and literary plot', and represent the genocide in the language of Kinyarwanda.²⁵ Gatore's text, published in 2008, does all of these. Although, admittedly, only one line of this novel is written in Kinyarwanda – an untranslated line that is present in the original French text and retained in its English translation – Gatore's fictional representation of the genocide's violence and its reverberations are indicators of a text that was, perhaps, ahead of its time. By his own admission, Gatore is keen to distance himself from the testimonial genre: 'People always expect me to talk about it', he states. 'But in no way do I want to be the umpteenth little Rwandan testifying about the genocide.'²⁶ The complex relationship Gatore has with his Rwandan identity is reflected in the absence of the word Rwanda in his text; although it can be discerned, nowhere in *Le Passé devant soi* is it made clear that the events being described are those of Rwanda's past. But even more fascinating are the relationships and personalities that this text presents. The novel follows Isaro, who, after returning to Rwanda to discover the history of the violence that orphaned her, writes her own fictional novel about a genocide perpetrator. Depicting points of

²² Nicki Hitchcott, 'Between Remembering and Forgetting: (In)Visible Rwanda in Gilbert Gatore's *Le Passé devant soi*' in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (2013), pp. 76-90, p. 77.

²³ Susanne Buckley-Zistel, 'Remembering to Forget: Amnesia Chosen as a Strategy for Local Coexistence in Post-Genocide Rwanda' in *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 76, No. 2 (2006), pp. 131-150, p. 131.

²⁴ Hitchcott, p. 78.

²⁵ Zoe Norridge, 'Writing Against Genocide: Genres of Opposition in Narratives from and about Rwanda' in *Postcolonial Politics: Genre and Form* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), p. 257.

²⁶ Jean-Claude Perrier, 'Gilbert Gatore, de l'enfer du Rwanda à HEC' in *Le Figaro*, 4th July 2008 <http://www.lefigaro.fr/livres/2008/07/04/03005-20080704ARTFIG00309-gilbert-gatorede-l-enfer-du-rwanda-a-hec.php> [accessed 13th September 2018].

human contact that are both untenable and crucial, Gatore's novel is a unique perspective on how negotiating traumatic memory is a dynamic process, raising crucial questions about how mourning the past relies on dialogue, exchange and intersubjective recognition.

Imre Kertész, *Liquidation*

Unrestrained complexity: the survivor in fiction

As noted in the previous chapter, testimonial writing has traditionally painted the survivor as tragic or triumphant; a totalising view that initially, *Liquidation* appears to share. Remembering B.'s declaration that 'we are all survivors',²⁷ Kingbitter reflects on their conversation and observes – inspired by B. – that:

We are living in an age of disaster; each of us is a carrier of the disaster [...] Disaster man has no fate, no qualities, no character [...] chaos becomes home to him. For him there can be no return to some center of the Self [...] he is *lost*, in the most authentic sense of the word.²⁸

In addition to viewing modernity as an eternal Auschwitz, Kertész presents the inhabitants of his era as a faceless, bewildered mass of victims. Particularly compelling, therefore, are the complex characterisations that are simultaneously present in the text, challenging this one-dimensional perspective on what it means to be human in this 'age of disaster'; characterisations that are thrown into sharp relief through the relationships that Kertész's protagonists have with one another.

As a character, B. is both absent and profoundly present within the text. Although his voice is never directly heard due to his suicide, his is a keenly felt presence because of the constancy with which he is remembered and discussed. Reflecting the implications of the passage above, Kertész presents B. as a tortured soul: in addition, for example, to Kingbitter's recollection of their many conversations in which B. sympathises with his view of the futility of life, B.'s ex-wife Judit tells her new husband Adam that 'Bee [...] lived Auschwitz [...] a voluntarily accepted, domesticated Auschwitz'.²⁹ B. is a character whose anguish is clear from the letters he leaves various characters throughout the text; he suffers from

²⁷ Kertész, p. 18.

²⁸ Kertész, p. 55.

²⁹ Kertész, p. 110.

a pain that characterises him almost completely, depicting him as a paradigmatic trauma victim. However, although B.'s melancholic disposition is a definitive element of his personality, *Liquidation* simultaneously presents many more. Whilst Kingbitter recalls that 'Bee was a strident, jolly figure, agreeably diverting and tremendously witty',³⁰ he notes just one page later that 'he was capable of giving a very nasty look'³¹ – whilst his colleague Kürti describes B. as 'a connoisseur of life, in his own way',³² he also remembers how B. 'avoided participation of any kind.'³³ Presented on the one hand as a man who 'could laugh uproariously, fit to burst'³⁴ and on the other as 'a person who eschewed action, sneered at dreams, had no faith',³⁵ Kertész's complex fictional representation of the survivor refuses the often one-dimensional characterisations that both trauma theory and traditional conceptions of the survivor emphasise; conceptions typified by David Aberbach's assertion that survivors 'present with rare clarity the characteristics of grief'³⁶ alone. With testimony's emphasis on making clear what happened – an account that requires a definitive voice – the survivor providing it must, to a large extent, have reclaimed the voice and understanding of self that mass violence targets. Given, however, Kertész's statement of the essential *decentering* of self that his age insists upon, the notion of an established self in relation to testimony is rendered suspect in this text; it is within fiction, Kertész suggests, that the self can assert its presence in all its complexity. In *Liquidation*, Kertész humanises the survivor by suggesting that in the wake of violence, there is no one aspect of self that functions exclusive to all others. Displaying happiness, sadness, anger, frustration, laughter and melancholy, B. demonstrates a roundedness that testifies to fiction's ability to construct complex characters that thus become relatable to real-life experiences. B. is a man who creates, and destroys, relationships; he is furious, he is sad; he loves and he hates. Turning to fiction to express the ambiguity and vacillation testimony often does not allow, Kertész permits human complexity to emerge as response to genocidal violence that, conversely, is predicated on one-dimensional, reductive perceptions of targeted groups.

B.'s complexity poignantly asserts itself through his relationship with Judit, *Liquidation*'s most tragic bond. The breakdown of their marriage is explained by Judit herself, who is afforded a sizeable chunk

³⁰ Kertész, p. 42.

³¹ Kertész, p. 43.

³² Kertész, p. 19.

³³ Kertész, p. 19.

³⁴ Kertész, p. 56.

³⁵ Kertész, p. 50.

³⁶ David Aberbach, *Surviving Trauma: Loss, Literature and Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) p. 1.

of the slim volume's narrative space. It is because of B.'s melancholic haze that the relationship ends; an ending that leaves Judit desolate with grief. 'I wanted to destroy my body,' she states, 'because by then Bee, my husband, the one I loved, wasn't so much as touching it [...] Bee, my husband was no longer beside me [...] All I saw of him most of the time was his back.'³⁷ Whilst the repetition of 'my husband' emphasises the role that B. fails to play, the images of withdrawal suggest B.'s inability to maintain relationships; thus demonstrating a classic response to trauma as outlined by the DSM-IV criteria mentioned above. However, there is a definite sense in which trauma binds these two people. 'Whether it was love or not', Judit explains to Adam, 'we were tied to each other by bonds of a different kind [...] You wouldn't understand any of them.'³⁸ Despite the dissolution of their legal and emotional union, their separation is neither total nor final. Judit facilitates B.'s suicide by purposefully leaving him drugs – and it is to Judit that B. turns to carry out the task of burning the manuscript Kingbitter has been so desperately searching for. 'You must incinerate the document in which I place our pitiful and fleeting story', B. instructs 'You, in whom, innocently and without your being acquainted with Auschwitz, Auschwitz scored the deepest wound [...] by virtue of the authority I have lived through and suffered for you, and for you alone, I revoke Auschwitz...'³⁹ B.'s final words in *Liquidation* thus become a testimony to the relationship that endures despite his existential melancholy; calling the narrative of his life 'our [...] story', B. acknowledges the depth of the bond between them even as he irrevocably withdraws from it. The DSM-IV criteria for PTSD measures the ability of an individual to form, and maintain, social and romantic bonds. What it does not account for, however – and what fiction, as harnessed by Kertész, offers – is the exploration of relationships that are formed outside of these categories. Tellingly, it is the burning of the manuscript of their story that goes to the heart of what Judit terms 'our secret compact, the consummation, this higher sense, the apotheosis of our relationship.'⁴⁰ United in some 'higher sense' by the destruction to which they have both been exposed, it is the mutual act of destruction – he of himself, and she of the manuscript – that is the strongest expression of the strange love they share. In his portrayal of this relationship, Kertész looks beyond the demarcations of the love and friendship these diagnostic criteria rely upon. Using fiction to probe the possibility of bonds that are constituted by more complex experiential elements, Kertész forces consideration of how – in the context of trauma and its

³⁷ Kertész, *Liquidation*, p. 100.

³⁸ Kertész, p. 102.

³⁹ Kertész, *Liquidation*, pp. 120-121.

⁴⁰ Kertész, p. 104.

aftermath – relationships might be formed or challenged by emotions and events outside the quotidian range.

Whilst B.'s life implies his complexity, his suicide – and the reactions of his contemporaries towards it – reinforces it. For B.'s colleagues at the publishing house, his death is devastating; openly displaying their grief, it becomes clear that B. was not only a solitary, melancholic personality but a person who invited social interaction. Accompanying their sadness, however, is shock – ‘the news of his death’, the text states, ‘is like jeering and unchallengeable rebuttal.’⁴¹ The question of what this jeering contradiction might refer to is answered several pages on, when Kingbitter reflects upon a conversation with B. in which B. explained his view on suicide – a view, as Kingbitter notes, that stood ‘in flat contradiction to the act that he carried out in the end all the same.’⁴² This view is not revealed until later in the text, when Kingbitter discovers some loose-leaf papers among B.'s literary effects. One of these pages states the following:

BEE:
Dying is easy
[...]
Taking one's own life amounts to
outwitting those who stand on guard
escaping deserting those who are left behind
[...]
to rebel is
TO STAY ALIVE
The great insubordination is
for us to live our lives to the end
and equally the big humiliation
that we owe ourselves
The sole method of suicide that is worthy
of respect is to live
to commit suicide amounts
to continuing life
starting anew every day
living anew every day
dying anew every day
I don't know how I should continue.⁴³

In this dense and often contradictory passage, life and death are simultaneously desirable and unbearable. For B., death – whilst potentially liberating – is linked with a guilt that curtails the possibility of the freedom to take that decision unencumbered, whilst life – demonstrative of a rebellious resilience

⁴¹ Kertész, p. 17.

⁴² Kertész, p. 42.

⁴³ Kertész, pp. 57-58.

against liquidation – is a torturous existence that, in its specific affliction, is a death in itself. The repetition of ‘every day’ in the passage’s last lines emphasises the relentlessness of the daily existential conflict raging inside B, the effects of which can be understood through the tone of defeat and uncertainty of the passage’s last line. Coupled with B.’s view of life as itself ‘absurd’,⁴⁴ there is no obviously preferable choice between life and death. It is this uncertainty, however, that makes this view of suicide – and B. himself – so important for a discussion of fiction and trauma. As this page suggests, uncertainty is a definitive element of survival; an uncertainty that pervades all thoughts and perceptions of self, other and circumstance. However, Kertész’s presentation of B. in this moment not only highlights the complex interplay of guilt and resilience but demonstrates the fragility of the lines that separate life and death in the context of survival. In *Liquidation*, survivors are both haunted and inspired by horror; both B. and Kingbitter, despite being victims of totalitarianism, look to creativity to express the pain of their pasts. Refuting the disparate characterisations that often arise from testimonial rhetoric as discussed in the previous chapter, they are neither wholly destroyed, nor entirely liberated, by the stories that result. Utilising the space of fiction, Kertész invites his readers to understand that to survive is not to make a choice between life and death, but to constantly negotiate between them; that happiness and despair are equally and simultaneously possible. The precarious nature of survival is most succinctly suggested by *Liquidation*’s final scene, in which Kingbitter, dispirited by his failure to find B.’s book and thus know how to carry on living, is standing in his office as:

Dusk was drawing in. Gloom was beginning to settle on his room, to which Kingbitter, standing at the window, had his back turned. Only the spectral glow of the computer screen glimmered [...] the machine was now urgently flashing towards Kingbitter’s back, in its own insufferably stubborn way, its futile interrogatives:

Next step
*Cancel*⁴⁵

Foreshadowed by the ominous pathetic fallacy of this moment, the image of Kingbitter with his back turned to the window through which he was so often drawn to others suggests his own desire to withdraw from existence. Describing the computer’s glow as ‘spectral’, Kertész suggests the trauma that, as this dissertation’s introduction made clear, has become synonymous with haunting. It is the final three words, however, that are most suggestive of Kertész’s thinking around the delicate line separating life and death in the context of survival. The computer metaphor is telling; with just one click of a mouse, progress or

⁴⁴ Kertész, p. 61.

⁴⁵ Kertész, p. 130.

obliteration are decided; the act is unremarkable, almost arbitrary. So too, Kertész, implies, is the complicated nature of existence for the survivor he creates. Throughout the text, B. dances on the line between delight and destruction; he loves, and destroys the possibility of love, in equal measure. In presenting this vacillation, Kertész makes clear that survival is an emotionally complex state in which life is simultaneously arbitrary and inspiring. The two choices facing Kingbitter here – existential continuation or abortion – are equally possible, with neither totally defining who he is or his response to his past. Removing any traces of the obvious from his characterisations, Kertész invites his readers to view life, and survivors, in all the shades of their various complexities.

Against “kitsch”: fiction and the unreal made real

The complexity of the relationships that Kertész invites his readers to encounter is not only restricted to those between people; it extends to those between genres. ‘Does Imre Kertész’, asks Robert Eaglestone, ‘write testimony or fiction?’⁴⁶ Despite its self-declaration as fiction, *Liquidation*’s particular aesthetics consistently demand consideration of the boundary between these generic categories; a boundary that is called into question by the novel’s opening lines.

Let us call our man, the hero of this story, Kingbitter. We imagine a man, and a name to go with him. Or conversely, let us imagine the name, and the man to go with it. Though this may all be avoided anyway since our man, the hero of this story, really is called Kingbitter.⁴⁷

If, as Coleridge states, the objective of fiction is to encourage the willing suspension of the reader’s disbelief, *Liquidation*’s opening does quite the opposite. Simultaneously signalling the man behind the story and insisting upon the fictional Kingbitter’s reality, the reader’s first encounter with this text is a disorienting one. Following *Fateless* and *Kaddish for an Unborn Child* – texts which have been critically theorised as unmistakably featuring Kertész’s voice⁴⁸ – it is perhaps unsurprising that *Liquidation*’s fiction is thinly-veiled. Analysing the aesthetics of *Fateless* and *Kaddish for an Unborn Child*, Eaglestone argues that the narrator’s simultaneous visibility and obscurity functions as a foil to the reader

⁴⁶ Robert Eaglestone, ‘The Aporia of Imre Kertész’ in *Imre Kertész and Holocaust Literature*, ed. By Louise O. Vasvári and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2005), pp. 38-50, p. 38.

⁴⁷ Kertész, p. 3.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Veronika Zangl, ‘Narratives of Destruction: Autobiographies and Autobiographical Writing After the Shoah’ in *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2002), pp. 121-142, p. 129.

identifications that are encouraged by fiction, but rendered unethical in the context of testimony.⁴⁹ In framing his analysis in this way, Eaglestone admits the testimonial presence in Kertész's fiction that – in addition to categorising *Fateless* and *Kaddish for an Unborn Child* – I argue is similarly reflected in *Liquidation*. In addition, however, to preventing the construction of problematic identifications, the text itself suggests another reason for its peculiar generic melange. Encouraged by Kingbitter to write what he believes would be the extraordinary testimony of a man born in Auschwitz, B. is adamant in his refusal; 'it's fine the way it is', he insists, 'shapeless and bloody like a placenta. But once I write it down, it becomes a story.'⁵⁰ Set in opposition to the placenta with its specific connotation of organic birth, B. implies that the stylised nature of a written narrative is distinctly undesirable – a position that intensifies as B. demands to know how, as a literary editor, Kingbitter would respond to his testimony:

"I don't know," I said.

"The hell you don't," he fumed. "Look here, I submit to you a piece concerning how, with the cooperation of a bunch of thoroughly decent people, a child is born in Auschwitz. The *Kapos* lay down their clubs and whips, and, moved to the core, they life the wailing infant on high. Tears rise to the eyes of the SS guard."

"If you put it like that, then of course . . ."

"Huh?" he urged. "Huh?"

"Well . . . kitsch," I said. "But it can also be written in other ways," I added hastily.

"It can't. Kitsch is kitsch."⁵¹

The presence of Kertész's own voice in this exchange is demonstrable through similar claims he makes elsewhere. Writing 'Who Owns Auschwitz?' for *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, Kertész argues that the price that was paid for the Holocaust entering public consciousness was 'a stylization of the Holocaust, a stylization which has by now grown to nearly unbearable dimensions'⁵² – a popular packaging that he directly links to 'Spielberg's saurian kitsch.'⁵³ It is his subsequent definition of kitsch, however, that is crucial for an understanding of the above passage:

I also regard as kitsch any representation of the Holocaust that fails to imply the wide-ranging ethical consequences of Auschwitz, and from which the PERSON in capital letters (and with it the idea of the Human as such) emerges from the camps healthy and unharmed [...] I regard as kitsch any representation of the Holocaust that is incapable of understanding or unwilling to understand the organic connection between our own deformed mode of life [...] and the very possibility of the Holocaust.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Eaglestone, p. 39.

⁵⁰ Kertész, p. 32.

⁵¹ Kertész, p. 33.

⁵² Imre Kertész, 'Who Owns Auschwitz?', trans. by John MacKay in *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2000), pp. 267-272, p. 267.

⁵³ Kertész, 'Who Owns Auschwitz?', p. 269.

⁵⁴ Kertész, 'Who Owns Auschwitz?', p. 270.

With this definition in mind, coupled with its tone of disdain, the outrage B. expresses towards Kingbitter's suggestion of writing his testimony is clearly Kertész's own. It is B.'s denial of Kingbitter's suggestion that the story can be written in other ways, however, that is most suggestive of *Liquidation's* fictional quality. Implying that the demands of testimony and the role that this mode of writing plays in public life essentially erases the authenticity of the experience of Auschwitz, Kertész argues that memory is distorted by testimony's functional and stylistic conventions. It is fiction, therefore, that becomes the means by which Kertész tells his story; but this is fiction of a specific kind. Obscuring and revealing his own voice throughout *Liquidation*, Kertész plays with boundaries of genre in a way that does not constrict his meditations on the complexity of surviving Auschwitz – a complexity that, in his opinion, is effaced by testimony and the public arena in which it is situated. Arguing that very few writers have succeeded in testifying authentically to the experience of Auschwitz⁵⁵ and commenting that with increasing frequency, 'the Holocaust is stolen from its guardians and made into cheap consumer goods',⁵⁶ Kertész's position comes through the voice of B., who states in *Liquidation* that 'I have no wish to pitch my stall in the literary flea market.'⁵⁷ To approach Kertész's fiction, then, is to encounter a literary work that almost paradoxically relies on the unreal to make the real visible. *Liquidation* is not fiction in its ordinary sense; rather, it is the voice of an individual that comes to rely on the medium in order to meditate on the complexity of the Holocaust in a way that testimony – with its emphasis on moral categorisation and objective truth – often does not permit.

Kertész's rejection of 'any representation of the Holocaust that is incapable of understanding or unwilling to understand the organic connection between our own deformed mode of life [...] and the very possibility of the Holocaust'⁵⁸ is equally significant for an understanding of the particularity of his fiction. In both his critical commentaries and *Liquidation*, Kertész observes the world around him as inherently disordered. Juxtaposing sharply with the critical position that the Holocaust represented a sudden moment of moral rupture, *Liquidation* suggests that rupture and chaos is the *modus operandi* of the universe. It is Kingbitter who comes to most clearly imply the world's illogicality:

⁵⁵ Kertész, 'Who Owns Auschwitz?', p. 268.

⁵⁶ Kertész, 'Who Owns Auschwitz?', p. 268.

⁵⁷ Kertész, p. 77.

⁵⁸ Kertész, 'Who Owns Auschwitz?', p. 270.

In the world as it presented itself to me, effects did not always derive from causes, nor did causes always prove adequately grounded points of departure; as a result, in that world the sort of logic that presumed to arrive at causes through unravelling the effects was a mistaken logic. I consider that the world as it presented itself to me had no logic whatsoever.⁵⁹

The world that Kingbitter describes here is one of randomness, chance and irrationality. Coupled with the many observations of life as 'questionable and confused',⁶⁰ 'inessential',⁶¹ 'impossible',⁶² and 'meaningless'⁶³ that pervade the text, Kertész controversially positions Auschwitz not as the exception to rationality, but as symbolic of the absurd, irrational character of existence itself. This is not a claim that could be made outside the realm of fiction. In historical and philosophical discourses, the horror of the Holocaust is discussed almost exclusively in opposition to the notion of ethics in order to assert the base brutality of its happening. Released, however, from the demands of such opposition, fiction functions as a space where difficult and uncomfortable questions can be raised about how and where evil intersects with good. Acknowledging what many historians, philosophers, and many other survivors do not in their desire to present the Holocaust as an aberration, Kertész's implication that Auschwitz was borne from an already broken and corrupt moral landscape not only demands consideration of the horror of which all humanity is capable, but of how we perceive – and what powers are at play in defining – the moral quality of our social realities.

Whilst Kertész's peculiar testimonially-inflected fiction admits a permeability of the boundary between the two, his use of comedy – and the irreverence with which it is associated – simultaneously renders *Liquidation* as a text that stands in opposition to testimony. Despite Stephanie Bird's observation that 'comedy has, understandably, been commonly held to be incompatible with the tragic experience of others' deaths or the awareness of one's own finitude'⁶⁴ the use of humour in the representation of tragedy, horror and death is – as Bird goes on to discuss – not without precedent. In 1987, Terrence Des Pres noted in response to the near-laughter in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* that artistic

⁵⁹ Kertész, pp. 36-37.

⁶⁰ Kertész, pp. 16-17.

⁶¹ Kertész, p. 28.

⁶² Kertész, p. 48.

⁶³ Kertész, p. 67.

⁶⁴ Stephanie Bird, 'Death, Being and the Place of Comedy in Representation of Death' in *Women and Death: Women's Representations of Death in German Culture since 1500*, ed. By Clare Bielby and Anna Richards (London: Boydell and Brewer, 2010), pp. 134-151, p. 144.

representations of the Holocaust were changing;⁶⁵ an observation that, with the release of Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful*⁶⁶ and Radu Mihaileanu's *Train of Life*, confirmed the move of Holocaust aesthetics beyond the mournful and testimonial alone. In this cultural moment, as Massimo Leone observes, "the question was no longer: "Can there be fiction about the Shoah?", but rather: "Can there be humour about the Shoah?"⁶⁷ Much critical discussion surrounding the place of laughter in relation to the Holocaust argues for the jarring, sobering effects created by the mix of high and low culture.⁶⁸ Kertész's comedy, however, does something quite different. Certainly, Kertész alludes to the relationship between horror and laughter already so heavily theorised – the play *Liquidation* that sets the novel's action in motion is twice referred to as 'the comedy (or tragedy)'.⁶⁹ But Kertész's use of humour also serves to highlight the absurdity that much of text argues is constitutive of reality itself. In a scene from the play, Dr Obláth consoles office-mate Kürti who is lamenting the futility of his life:

OBLÁTH (*consolingly*): Everyone here makes a botch of his life. That's the local specialty, the genius loci. Anyone who doesn't botch up his life here simply has no talent.

In another exchange, Kürti and his wife Sarah – who works alongside him in the publishing house – discuss their relationship:

SARAH: Look, Sándor, wouldn't it just be simpler if we got a divorce?
KÜRTI: Simpler, yes indeed.
SARAH: Then why don't we divorce?
KÜRTI: But why? It's just as nonsensical as staying together. To say nothing of all the inconvenience.

In these fictional exchanges, boundaries completely collapse: genius becomes synonymous with failure and love becomes interchangeable with indifference in a way that cannot help but be humorous through the absurdity such parallels suggest. Rather than simply providing comic effect, however, the farcicality of these conversations comes to reinforce the meaninglessness of reality as Kingbitter, B. and Kertész clearly see it. Veering onto tangential musings whilst recounting his interactions with B., Kingbitter

⁶⁵ Terrence Des Pres, 'Holocaust Laughter' in *Writing into the World* (New York: Viking, 1991), pp. 77-86.

⁶⁶ For an excellent discussion of laughter in this film, see Maurizio Viano, "'Life is Beautiful.'" Reception, Allegory and Holocaust Laughter' in *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (1999), pp. 26-34.

⁶⁷ Massimo Leone, 'Shoah and Humour: A Semiotic Approach in *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2002), pp. 173-192, p. 174.

⁶⁸ See, for example, David Brauner, 'Fetishizing the Holocaust: Comedy and Transatlantic Connections in Howard Jacobson's "Kalooki Nights"' in *European Judaism: A Journal for the new Europe*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (2014), pp. 21-29, p. 25.

⁶⁹ Kertész, p. 13 and p. 68.

worries that he is 'slightly departing from [...] reality' before asking, 'how could I depart from reality, totally incomprehensible and unknowable as it is'.⁷⁰ In this text, the irreverent absurdity of humour stands not in contrast to tragedy but in parallel alongside it; comedy, tragedy and life itself, *Liquidation* suggests, are constituted by the same meaningless irrationality. Whilst comedy is a rare feature in testimonial writing – a genre that traditionally demands self-referential objectivity in discussions of death and dying – the fiction Kertész believes is crucial to Holocaust representation is a space in which humour and the absurdity it highlights can play out, raising questions of meaning, value and intersubjective interaction.

The shared space of victimhood

In one of *Liquidation's* most striking scenes, Kingbitter tries to recall a game he saw B. play at a party:

"You must be thinking of *Lager* poker," Obláth enlightened me. "A simple game, simple rules. The players sit around the table and each person says *where they have been*. Only the place-name, nothing else. That was the basis for determining the value of the chips. As best I remember, two Kistarcsas were worth one Fő Street . . . one Mauthausen, one and a half Recsks . . ."

[...]

"Am I right in recollecting that Bee pulled out of that hand?" I asked.

"Right." Obláth grinned. "He didn't want to cheat. He must have been aware from the beginning that he had a royal flush up his sleeve."

"Auschwitz." Kürti nodded. "Untrumpable."⁷¹

The discussion of concentration camps in the context of a poker game implies a similar irreverent levity to that underpinning the humorous exchanges analysed above. However, this conversation somehow has an unmistakably darker, far more sinister quality; a profoundly discomfiting character engendered by the glib comparison of such horrific events and sites of death. This unsettling, however, is Kertész's precise intent. Writing in 'Who Owns Auschwitz?' that he also rejects as kitsch 'works where Auschwitz is regarded as simply a matter concerning Germans and Jews [...] when the political and psychological anatomy of modern totalitarianism more generally is disregarded; when Auschwitz is not seen as a universal experience',⁷² Kertész suggests that Auschwitz is not a historical aberration, but a moment of violence situated in a historical chain of similarly devastating rupture. Whilst the poker game references the sense of competition that occasionally attends comparative discussions of violence and death, the

⁷⁰ Kertész, p. 85.

⁷¹ Kertész, p. 51.

⁷² Kertész, 'Who Owns Auschwitz', p. 270.

similarity implied between the concentration camps of the Holocaust and those associated with the communist regime reflects Kertész's conviction of the necessity of analysing Auschwitz in relation to a wider context of totalitarian brutality – a conviction that sheds light on the compelling relationships between B., Kingbitter and their respective histories. Comparative discussions of atrocity are often characterised by what Michael Rothberg terms the 'zero-sum competition'⁷³ between memories of the Holocaust and other historical instances of mass suffering; comparison, it seems, generates anxieties not only about the legitimacy of one lived experience when compared to another, but about perceptions of the depth of suffering endured by each group. Whereas Rothberg's comments are made in the context of the relationship between Holocaust memory and the legacies of colonialism and slavery, Kertész seems to substantiate the Arendtian parallels between communism and the Holocaust.⁷⁴ Although comparative discussions of violence are contentious, Kertész uses his fiction to create a space in which histories come into being in relation to one another in a way that often seems impossible elsewhere.

One of the strongest indicators of the connection Kertész establishes between the violence of the Holocaust and that of communism are the tropes of Holocaust literature and Holocaust-inspired trauma theory employed in his presentation of non-Jewish Kingbitter and those around him. In many ways, Kingbitter is presented as a paradigm of traumatic victimhood; he is described as detached from reality,⁷⁵ suffers from 'existential angst'⁷⁶ and is plagued by the question 'Am I or am I not?'⁷⁷ Often positioned in a liminal state between presence and absence, Kingbitter does, at times, invoke Primo Levi's description of the *Muselmänner*; a section of the population represented definitively by Kertész in his depiction of the homeless community in Hungary who are dressed in mismatched rags and lie inert on street corners.⁷⁸ Like Primo Levi himself, who – as discussed in Chapter One – inflicts pain on himself to feel and thus know he is alive, Kingbitter is jailed for an act of political resistance not motivated by ideology but by the need 'to break the monotony of the daily grind, to acquire some news of my own existence'.⁷⁹ In addition, however, to Kertész imagining Kingbitter's mental state in the terms so frequently employed in Holocaust writing, the Holocaust and communism are united by the word "liquidation" that eventually

⁷³ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 3.

⁷⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Penguin Classics, 2017).

⁷⁵ Kertész, p. 3.

⁷⁶ Kertész, p. 5.

⁷⁷ Kertész, p. 6.

⁷⁸ Kertész, pp. 4-5.

⁷⁹ Kertész, p. 46.

defines both of these experiences. Despite being most commonly associated with the Final Solution, the concept of liquidation characterises Kingbitter's past, present and future: whilst Kingbitter 'grew up among sober people whose minds, character and individuality had been liquidated by wars and various dictatorships',⁸⁰ he observes in his present that politically and professionally, 'a general liquidation is in full swing'⁸¹ and considers the most extreme form of self-liquidation – suicide – later in the text.⁸² Employing the word "liquidation" as both the novel's title, and as the title of the play within it, Kertész implies that destruction of a similar character is a unifying factor in B. and Kingbitter's lives; these men, both victims of totalitarian regimes, are marked by their experiences in a way that binds them to one another. As discussed in this dissertation's Introduction, the debates about Holocaust uniqueness and the ethics of comparative violence analyses are complicated and divisive. Testimony, in its most traditional form, has always worked towards establishing the uniqueness of the event to which it relates through emphasising its particularities and demanding objectivity to ground the fact of its happening. Whilst one survivor's testimony may demonstrate similarities with that produced by a survivor of a different violent moment, the possibility of their comparison is frequently resisted in the often intensely politically sensitive testimonial context. It is within the realm of fiction – as Kertész recognises in *Liquidation* – that suggestions of comparison can most effectively be made and explored. This is not to say that fiction is an apolitical mode; as argued by Joyce Carol Oates, fiction is inherently political because of the way that it invades the lives of others, inviting reaction, unsettlement and challenge.⁸³ *Liquidation*, with its clear and discomfiting comparative references to the Holocaust and communism, is no exception. Taking advantage of the space of fiction – a space defined by Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott as 'making available a historically variable, complex and contradictory range of ideological discourses and counter-discourses'⁸⁴ – Kertész builds a multidirectional relationship between two violent histories that not only demonstrates his conviction of the need to view Auschwitz in a global context of immorality, but that challenges his readers to consider this controversial mode of existential enquiry that raises questions about how trauma might create bonds in spite of the destruction characterising the events that produce it.

⁸⁰ Kertész, p. 35.

⁸¹ Kertész, p. 12.

⁸² Kertész, p. 42.

⁸³ Joyce Carol Oates, *The Faith of a Writer: Life, Craft, Art* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), p. 33.

⁸⁴ John Storey, 'Fiction' in *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 42-77, p. 56.

The bond between the survivors in *Liquidation* is certainly illuminating; the search for B.'s lost work invigorates a previously deadened Kingbitter, whilst B.'s ex-wife Judit explains that '[t]hrough him I had come to understand everything I had not understood, had not even dared to understand, by reason of my parents, my family, my entire monstrous heritage.'⁸⁵ However, there is a sense in which the twinning of B.'s history with that of Kingbitter's is decidedly uncomfortable – a discomfort that is not induced by the fact of their comparison, but by the interactions between B., Kingbitter and their stories. Explaining his compulsive need to find what he is convinced is B.'s vanished magnum opus, Kingbitter states that:

It would be vitally important for me to read it, because I would probably learn from it why he died, and perhaps whether, now that he is dead, it is permissible – if I may put it this way – for me to go on living. I am trying to think when our friendship began to shift more into a form of dependence [...] I caught myself living parasitically off his words – taking my cue from him [...] that's what we're like, somewhat second-hand people, feeding off the lives of those stronger than ourselves, as though a crumb of those lives is our due as well.⁸⁶

Between the unhealthy implications of the word 'parasitic' and the suggestion that Kingbitter is looking to this text for permission to exist, *Liquidation* – whilst championing comparative views of violence and its survivors – simultaneously appears to caution against this very exercise. Kingbitter comes to depend on B.'s story – a story, he states, that 'I wish to relate [...] (even if merely to salvage my own)'.⁸⁷ However, the implication that Kingbitter is somehow owed B.'s story is troubling. In fact, so certain is Kingbitter of the missing book's existence 'that he can all but feel the creased manuscript, hear the rustle of the pages as he thumbs through it.'⁸⁸ With Kingbitter verbally and imaginatively inserting himself into B.'s story, this act of imagination becomes representative of the reductive elision of experience that grounds the arguments of theorists who vehemently oppose comparative studies of violence. Fiction, as discussed above, is a space in which discourses and counter-discourses can come into being with, and against, one another; it is perhaps the very virtue of the medium that compels Kertész to argue for comparative views of violence whilst allowing the simultaneous presence of the case against it. However, there is scope to suggest that the dependence and due signalled in this passage are not interdictions *against* comparison and commonality but cautions regarding the nature of testimony in opposition to fiction. Given Kertész's stark statement of the need to contextualise Auschwitz within a wider understanding of historical horror, it is difficult to read *Liquidation* as anything but a support of this

⁸⁵ Kertész, pp. 116-117.

⁸⁶ Kertész, pp. 40-41.

⁸⁷ Kertész, p. 46.

⁸⁸ Kertész, p. 86.

view. But in presenting the uneasy conflation of his protagonists in the moment when Kingbitter fixates on locating B.'s testimony, Kertész argues against the homogeneity of individuals and experience that testimony so often generates. In 'Who Owns Auschwitz?', Kertész makes the following statement:

In my *Diary from the Galleys*, I found myself compelled to write: "The concentration camp is imaginable only and exclusively as literature, never as reality. (Not even – or rather, least of all – when we have directly experienced it.)" The drive to survive makes us accustomed to lying as long as possible about the murderous reality in which we are forced to hold our own, while the drive to remember seduces us into sneaking a certain complacent satisfaction into our reminiscences: the balsam of self-pity, the martyr's self-glorification.⁸⁹

To testify, according to Kertész, is inevitably to falsify; a falsification that manifests itself in testimonies that adhere to scripts of 'self-pity' and 'self-glorification' that package the survivor's narrative – and the survivor themselves – as paragons of martyrdom, heroism and ethics. In presenting Kingbitter as so uncomfortably reliant on B.'s story, *Liquidation* can be read as a warning against the conflation not of histories, but of those who experience its limits. Whilst championing dialogic discussions of violence, Kertész simultaneously gestures towards the need to retain specificity; a suggestion that does not preclude comparative discussion but is its own suggestion of how to go about it.

Zakes Mda – Ways of Dying

Writing uncertainty: fiction in the interregnum

Prefacing the TRC's *Final Report*, Chairperson Archbishop Desmond Tutu metaphorically describes the TRC as one piece of a jigsaw puzzle that might never be completed; its completion, he states, would require 'a truth that will, in the very nature of things, never be fully revealed'.⁹⁰ Much has been written about the complex dynamics of truth in the context of the TRC.⁹¹ My discussion of Mda's fiction, however, speaks to Tutu's admission of the sense of uncertainty pervading South Africa despite a judicial process that demanded eyewitnesses, factual testimony and clearly demarcated categories of victim and perpetrator – an uncertainty that, as I will argue here, Mda's *Ways of Dying* explicitly

⁸⁹ Kertész, 'Who Owns Auschwitz', p. 268.

⁹⁰ TRC Final Report, p. 4: <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/Volume%201.pdf>, [accessed on 10th July 2018].

⁹¹ See, for example, James Gibson, 'The Truth about Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa' in *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (2005), pp. 341-361 and Madeleine Fullard and Nicky Rousseau, 'Uncertain Borders: The TRC and the (Un)Making of Public Myths' in *Kronos*, No. 34 (2008), pp. 205-236.

addresses. My interpretation of Mda's texts thus tends towards the allegorical, despite my awareness of the reservations surrounding this critical approach. In *Against Allegory*, Derek Attridge discusses allegory in the South African context. After explaining that the draw of allegory is its imposition of meaning onto an otherwise puzzling text,⁹² Attridge warns against the restrictive totalising of interpretations that reject the possibility of uncertainty; 'Allegory,' he states, 'deals with the *already known*, whereas literature opens a space for the other. Allegory announces a moral code, literature invites an ethical response'⁹³ – 'allegory', he concludes, 'cannot handle perhapses'.⁹⁴ But what happens, I ask here, when the allegorical interpretation is one that emphasises uncertainty, and insists on the ethical responses that Attridge refuses to see allegorical readings as capable of? Whilst demonstrating the permeability of the boundary Attridge constructs between allegory and literature, the following analysis examines how Mda's fiction comments on the complexity of reconciliation through the various relationships that his text constructs.

One of the central relationships this text interrogates is that between past and present. Significant to this enquiry is that fact that Mda's presentation of mourning – depicted through Toloki, a self-styled Professional Mourner – is filtered through the concept of performance. Critical theorising around this element of Mda's text is varied. Sam Durrant claims that *Ways of Dying* invents a mode of mourning that emphasises community as a direct response to the colonial violence that aimed to destroy indigenous collectives; '[f]or the post-apartheid writer', he states, 'mourning becomes a way of testifying to a fundamental commonality.'⁹⁵ For Yogita Goyal, however, Toloki's performative mourning emphasises his otherness; 'Toloki', she argues, represents a vagrant, an outcast, a peripheral figure, an errant outsider to social norms.⁹⁶ *Ways of Dying* constructs a tense relationship between the inclusivity and exclusion Toloki's mourning generates. Although the text's depiction of Toloki's social interactions highlights his isolation and strangeness, the funerals that he attends are communal spaces where history, pain and memory are shared. However, what much critical writing surrounding Mda's text does not take account of is the significance of the artifice associated with, and the overtly

⁹² Derek Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 39.

⁹³ Attridge, p. 64.

⁹⁴ Attridge, p. 54.

⁹⁵ Sam Durrant, 'The Invention of Mourning in Post-Apartheid Literature' in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (2005), pp. 441-450, p. 448.

⁹⁶ Yogita Goyal, 'The Pull of the Ancestors: Slavery, Apartheid, and Memory in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* and *Cion*' in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (2011), pp. 147-169, p. 150.

commercial nature of, Toloki's performative mourning. Cloaked in a costume that 'did not belong to any world that ever existed',⁹⁷ Toloki aims to add an air of professionalism to his mourning and ponders that:

One day he would [...] like to have a fixed rate of fees for different levels of mourning, as in other professions. Doctors have different fees for different illnesses. Lawyers charge fees which vary according to the gravity of the case [...] But for the time being he will accept anything he is given, because the people are not yet used to the concept of a Professional Mourner [...] he is still the only practitioner.⁹⁸

Coupled with the stark statement that '[h]is service is to mourn for the dead'⁹⁹ and the fact that Toloki is inspired to profit from death by a man from his township who made his fortune selling luxury coffins,¹⁰⁰ the commercial lexicon employed in this passage – 'rate', 'fees', 'professions' 'practitioner' – connects materiality to mourning in a way that can be read as Mda's commentary on a South Africa still in violent turmoil. Using fiction to translate mourning and death into the language of business of commerce, Mda emphasises the mundanity and quotidian nature of death in the townships; the result of enduring violence within black communities that, with its emphasis on interracial reconciliation, the TRC did little to address.¹⁰¹ Positioning Toloki as necessary for the emotionally realised pain of the victim's relatives, Mda suggests a numbness that surrounds death in this time and place; a numbness that shifts mourning from the emotional to the transactional. The performative element of Toloki's mourning extends Mda's social commentary to political critique. Resisting the connection that Durrant makes between mourning and the formation of community, Toloki's costume and aggrieved moans are specifically designed to differentiate him; to distinguish his professional mourning from the personal mourning of the victim's relatives. Crucially, Toloki's performance of mourning – where he 'weeps softly'¹⁰² for a small sum and makes 'moaning sounds of agony'¹⁰³ for larger payments – does nothing to actually help the mourning families of the dead. Whilst Toloki inspires a certain depth of feeling amongst the gathered crowds, his lack of connection to these strangers means that the effectiveness of his mourning is restricted to the immediacy of its performance; his groans supplement the pain of others, rather than working towards

⁹⁷ Mda, p. 26.

⁹⁸ Mda, p. 17.

⁹⁹ Mda, p. 15.

¹⁰⁰ Mda, pp. 130-133.

¹⁰¹ For a comprehensive argument regarding the failure of the TRC to acknowledge residual violence, see Rupert Taylor, 'Justice Denied: Political Violence in Kwazulu-Natal after 1994' in *African Affairs*, Vol. 101, No. 405 (2002), pp. 473-508.

¹⁰² Mda, p. 16.

¹⁰³ Mda, p. 17.

any real reconstitution. Read alongside the aims and objectives of the TRC, which were being established at the time of *Way of Dying's* publication, Mda's depiction of this empty mourning, which is also rendered farcical by virtue of Toloki's dramatic costume, can be read as his doubtful critique of the reconciliation process as it was to be carried out. Presenting public mourning as symbolic rather than truly cathartic, Mda raises the question of the extent to which testimony – in the context of the TRC – is capable of generating the healing of a nation and agency of a victim.

My argument for Mda's presentation of enduring tension in *Ways of Dying* is further substantiated by the text's movement between depictions of beauty and decay, exemplified by Mda's description of Noria:

There she is, Noria, in a rubble of charred household effects next to her burnt down shack. A lonely figure. Tall and graceful. Sharp features. Smooth, pitch-black complexion [...] She wears a fading red dress with white polka dots [...] She looks beautiful, this Noria, standing surrounded by debris, holding flowers of different colours.¹⁰⁴

Suggested by this passage and the image it creates is life, death and the close proximity of one to the other. Situated within a landscape of destruction – signalled by the charred remains of the shack – and vitality, as implied by the coloured flowers, is Noria, a figure whose physical beauty contrasts with the fading of her once-vibrant red dress. After Toloki helps Noria rebuild her shack, 'the structure is a collage in bright sunny colours. And of bits of iron sheets, some of which shimmer in the morning rays, whilst others are rust-laden.'¹⁰⁵ Pervading the text, the contrast between beauty and decay is itself symbolic of a nation in transition. Rarely presenting beauty without an accompanying image of decay, Mda once again casts doubt the specific future the TRC promised – a future of interracial harmony, equality and progress.

It is not only the idea of national reconciliation, however, that Mda addresses in *Ways of Dying*; the possibility of forgiveness and laying the past to rest are also challenged through Mda's use of contrast. Despite describing Toloki as 'not the type who forgives and forgets',¹⁰⁶ the relationship that he rebuilds with Noria notwithstanding the pain she caused him in childhood challenges this statement; despite

¹⁰⁴ Mda, pp. 50-51.

¹⁰⁵ Mda, p. 67.

¹⁰⁶ Mda, p. 13.

extended meditations on his resentment towards his father, the novel ends with Toloki accepting the figurines connected with his father's neglect of him. It is the novel's contrasting temporalities, however, that make the strongest statement regarding the separation between past and present. Without warning, the novel moves from Toloki's present-day life to memories of his childhood and descriptions of the events and people that defined it. What is significant about this specific temporal presentation is that the links between the events of the past and those of the present are clear. Unlike many trauma novels that resist linearity in favour of aporia and fragmentation, it is easy to understand how Toloki and Noria's childhoods shaped them into the adults Mda writes; although Mda plays with the boundaries of time, these shifts – whilst slightly disruptive to the reading experience – are meaningfully connected. Working on the assumption of testimony as catharsis, one of the TRC's primary aims was to draw a line between the past and the future; to air the grievances and pain of years gone to enable the reconciliation of tomorrow. Harnessing the power of fiction to powerfully demonstrate the inherent connectedness of these temporalities, Mda argues that one cannot be easily disentangled from the other.

Another significantly complicated aspect of *Ways of Dying* is the relationship between community and individuality. Set at a time when 'police bullets have a strange way of ricocheting off the walls of township houses'¹⁰⁷ and 'smart settlement people never sleep naked' because 'if one has to die, one should at least die with one's clothes on',¹⁰⁸ the South Africa that Mda paints in *Ways of Dying* is one in the throes of civil and political chaos; a tension-filled landscape that threatens death at every turn. The picture that Mda paints of this South Africa is a bleak one; interethnic tensions run high between the township locals and migrant workers,¹⁰⁹ children orphaned by political violence are left to roam the dumping ground,¹¹⁰ political corruption is endemic¹¹¹ and sexual violence within the townships is rife.¹¹² It is particularly interesting, therefore, that *Ways of Dying* simultaneously emphasises the strength of community that exists within this same landscape. The text is narrated in the first person plural; a voice which declares its communal status with the statement that 'No individual owns any story. The

¹⁰⁷ Mda, p. 47.

¹⁰⁸ Mda, p. 193.

¹⁰⁹ Mda, p. 22.

¹¹⁰ Mda, p. 168.

¹¹¹ Mda, p. 54.

¹¹² Mda, pp. 47-48.

community is the owner of the story'.¹¹³ Whilst these words allude to South Africa's oral tradition of storytelling, they also imply the collective character of life in a landscape that is elsewhere presented as essentially divided. Community is not only implied by the text's narrative voice. After the death of Noria's son, she is comforted by neighbours described in familial terms;¹¹⁴ when her shack burns down, kind men and women bring her furnishings for her new home; Noria herself joins a street committee in the latter half of the novel, which works towards improving communal life. Echoing Kuzwayo's complex engagement with the concept of community discussed in the previous chapter, Mda simultaneously presents the strength and non-existence of community in a single text; intercommunal bonds are at once fraught with tension and undeniable. Utilising fiction to emphasise the complexity of the society he writes and allegorically comments upon whilst so doing, Mda creates a sense of precarity around understandings of social cohesion that challenges the conciliatory narratives that dominated South Africa in the final years of liberation against the apartheid system. In creating a society as complex as this one, where hate and love exist within this community in equal measure, Mda writes back against a narrative of national reconciliation that defined the black voice as a homogenous entity that was to be heard solely in opposition to its similarly homogenised white counterpart; a criticism substantiated by Krog's observation that the TRC's methodology 'freezes the debate in tones of black and white'.¹¹⁵ In addition, Mda's depiction of this social complexity humanises the black experience through the nuance with which he presents it. This is not simply a community of victims; the individuals in *Ways of Dying* are angry, happy, resentful, loving, hungry for vengeful justice and desperate for a tacit peace. Whilst testimony relies upon the authoritative recollection of an individual experience, the narrative scope of Mda's text reveals an experiential variation that provides a snapshot of the complex social dynamics of the townships and their inhabitants. Although *Ways of Dying* illuminates the history and experience of township communities who are so often ignored in discussions and evaluations of apartheid viewed solely through the lens of black-white race relations, Mda leaves his reader with no sense of certainty regarding the future of the community he creates; this is a community in flux, liminally caught between a violent yesterday and an uncertain tomorrow.

¹¹³ Mda, p. 12.

¹¹⁴ Mda, p. 12.

¹¹⁵ Krog, p. 87.

Fractured healing: Toloki and Noria

In order to further demonstrate how Mda's fiction emphasises liminality and the doubts surrounding the future, I now move to an extended analysis of how the relationship between Toloki and Noria develops. Both protagonists, when readers initially encounter them, exist in isolation. Toloki is socially peripheral; homeless, dirty and unconcerned with personal hygiene, he does not fail to notice the aversion people have to his unwashed presence.¹¹⁶ But Toloki's isolated lifestyle is also one of his own choosing. Given the traumas of rejection and ridicule that defined his childhood, Toloki 'avoided funerals that involved homeboys and homegirls [...] [and] never wanted to have anything to do with any of the people of his village.'¹¹⁷ Mourning the loss of her son, Noria, like Toloki who declares that he is incapable of love,¹¹⁸ 'finds it impossible to love at the moment'.¹¹⁹ Despite her childhood beauty affording her advantage and favour in her early years, adult Noria is described as 'a lonely figure'.¹²⁰ Although they have 'no desire to find one another',¹²¹ Toloki and Noria meet again when Toloki mourns at a funeral, unaware that Noria is the mother of the dead boy being eulogised as the text opens. But death, in Mda's text, is not only a tragedy. In *Ways of Dying*, death appears to become a catalyst for regeneration, healing, and renewed relationships; a renewal that Mda gestures towards in his noticeably embryonic descriptions of his protagonists. Despite his resentment towards his childhood home, Toloki 'sleeps in the foetal position that is customary of his village'¹²² whilst Noria too, despite the years that have passed, 'sleeps in a foetal position, like all the true sons and daughters of her village.'¹²³ Although both of these characters are steeped in the worlds of death, loss and grief, the metaphoric image of Toloki and Noria as unborn infants symbolically foreshadows their roles as carriers of new hope – statuses that become more apparent as their relationship begins to flourish. However, as I will argue here, the road to reconciliation as it is figured through Toloki and Noria is not totally harmonious. Rather, reflecting the reality of South African society in the post-apartheid interregnum, rebuilding the relationship between Toloki and Noria is a difficult, painful – and not entirely successful – process.

¹¹⁶ Mda, p. 8.

¹¹⁷ Mda, p. 13.

¹¹⁸ Mda, p. 51.

¹¹⁹ Mda, p. 70.

¹²⁰ Mda, p. 50.

¹²¹ Mda, p. 12.

¹²² Mda, p.15.

¹²³ Mda, p. 152.

It is particularly compelling from a structural perspective that the stories of Toloki and Noria's respective pasts emerge only once the characters have re-established contact with one another. Seeing Noria at the funeral of her son is a turning point for Toloki; despite having resolved to shut all thoughts of his past out of his mind – a conviction that brings to mind the classic repressive association of memory to trauma – his encounter with her involuntarily recalls 'Noria. The village. His memories have faded [...] Now, however it is all coming back'¹²⁴ – 'come to think of it', he continues to remember, 'at the very first funeral he ever attended back in the village, he was with Noria.'¹²⁵ The latter half of this statement may well be read as revealing the unconscious place, and influence, that Noria has had on his present life; indeed, Toloki is still travelling the road of mourning that began with Noria at his side. But what is fascinating about these remarks as a whole is the statement they make about the accessibility of memory in the post-traumatic context. Healing, it seems, can only take place here once a dialogic encounter has taken place. Substantiating this suggestion is the fact that Noria's memory, too, is awakened by her reencounter with Toloki. Despite having previously stood by whilst Toloki was taunted as 'too ugly'¹²⁶ a moment of reconciliation appears when Noria turns to Toloki and asserts that 'you have always been good at creating beautiful things with your hands'.¹²⁷ In addition to their dialogue creating ever-increasing opportunities for the past to be remembered, Noria's statement infuses that past with new meaning; by admitting to feelings and thoughts unexpressed in those previous years, Noria works toward a healing that can only be achieved by her extension outside of herself and the opening of a dialogue with another. The reconciliatory implications of this moment prompt María López's claim that *Ways of Dying* is a novel 'in which life and hope are unstoppable forces in the midst of [...] violence and death', and where pain is 'transformed into the basis for a new kind of community.'¹²⁸ It is precisely the fact of this optimism, however, that I argue implies Mda's emphasis of the opposite. In light of the fractured society that Mda invites his readers to appreciate through his contrast of beauty and decay and the death that continues to mark this politically and emotionally charged landscape, this romanticised moment of reconciliation is presented as inherently unlikely; a fantasy that Mda's fictional mode of writing reinforces. The simplicity and saccharine sweetness of this moment is its own contrast

¹²⁴ Mda, p. 28.

¹²⁵ Mda, p. 41.

¹²⁶ Mda, p. 68.

¹²⁷ Mda, p. 67.

¹²⁸ María J. López, 'Communities of Mourning and Vulnerability: Zakes Mda's "Ways of Dying" and Phaswane Mpe's "Welcome to Our Hillbrow"' in *English and Africa*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (2013), pp. 99-117, pp. 99-100.

to the violence and tension of its backdrop; a contrast which suggests that a reconstitutive dialogue of this kind can only exist in the realm of the imaginary.

This is not to say that Mda entirely forecloses the possibility of reconciliation in the South African context. In a scene that gestures towards the text's parallels with the TRC, Toloki apologises for mentioning the tensions that resulted in Noria's son's death. 'Perhaps we shouldn't talk about this, Noria', he says. 'I am sorry I brought it up.' Encouraged, however, by Toloki's receptive and empathetic listening, Noria reassures him that speaking her past is necessary: 'it is painful to remember', she acknowledges. 'But we cannot pretend it did not happen.'¹²⁹ Confronting the past, in *Ways of Dying*, is both obligatory and inevitable; whilst Noria suggests that the past must not be effaced, the landscape Mda writes in his text is one that has not moved past the violence and enmity that characterised it – to live in the townships, as Mda's shifting temporalities make clear, is to live a past that remains undeniably present. What is important here, however, is the text's emphasis on integrity of intent with regard to the listening, and speaking, of trauma. Whilst, as the above suggests, Toloki's listening and Noria's desire to testify to the past are sincere, the text implies that *what is said* is crucial to the project of reconciliation. A turning point in the novel comes with Noria's apology to Toloki:

"Toloki, I am sorry about the way they treated you back in the village . . . about the way we treated you."
"It happened a long time ago, Noria. I never think about it at all."¹³⁰

The move from 'they' to 'we' in Noria's statement is a transformative statement of accountability. In acknowledging her part in Toloki's childhood abuse and admitting her part within it, Noria simultaneously apologises to Toloki and confronts her own acts of transgression. Of course, this is a gross simplification of the complex dynamics of forgiveness in the South African context; whilst Mda's fiction works to highlight many of the social and political intricacies of these turbulent years, this exchange appears particularly trite – a consequence, perhaps, of the translation of politics into melodrama. This exchange does suggest, however, that reconciliation is possible when it is underpinned by sincerity. This is a sincerity that, much like the future of South Africa itself, was mired in doubt with regards to the TRC; a process described by Dr Sean Kaliski in Krog's *Country of My Skull*

¹²⁹ Mda, p. 150.

¹³⁰ Mda, p. 151.

as being sold as 'this quick fix, this Rugby World Cup scenario [where] we [...] go through the process and fling our arms around each other [...] that is nonsense – absolute nonsense [...] there will be no grand release.'¹³¹ Using fiction here as a space in which to present fantasy and the impossibility of these reconciliatory dreams, the sarcastic simplicity of the forgiveness in this moment becomes its own statement of the complexity that inheres in the search for harmony.

Mda's juxtaposition of optimism with pessimism is further suggested by the fact that Toloki and Noria remain wary of one another; although their bond has been somewhat re-established, an edge of unease perpetuates. After seeing Toloki mourn at a funeral for the first time, Mda describes how:

Noria and Toloki walk quietly back to her shack. She does not know what to make of what she has just seen. Toloki was hoping for immediate praise, or at least some positive comments from her. But it seems that she chooses to reserve her opinion, almost as though she is disturbed. Oh, how eager he is to hear at least one word of approval from this powerful woman.¹³²

The dialogue figured as so crucial to reconciliation in the previous paragraph gives way to silence in this moment of apprehension. After having restricted Noria both physically and mentally from his world, Toloki's attempt to now include her within it is one laced with anxiety. The tense reticence in this passage is chilling; Noria's response, it seems, will determine the success of the reconciliation towards which they have both been working. But although her silence is disappointing to Toloki, her uncertainty may be allegorically representative of the hesitancy, doubt and uncertainty characterising the post-apartheid years. Noria, here, is exposed to a world that initially confuses her. She recognises elements of the scene before her – death, mourning and sadness – but she remains unsure as to how to navigate the new configuration of mourning that Toloki represents. She walks alongside Toloki, yet remains at a remove; Toloki views her as a powerful figure, yet it is his authority at the funeral they have just attended which, in her view, casts him in the same role. The sense of unease in this important passage poses its own challenge to the claims of healing through speech that were attached to the TRC. Demonstrating the possibility of silence alongside the fact of speech – responses to violence that are so often set in opposition to one another in the context of both trauma and literary theory – Mda writes against this homogenisation by highlighting the uncertain, yet very real space between hurt and healing. Mda makes

¹³¹ Krog, p. 195.

¹³² Mda, p. 109.

clear that the prospect of connection is bound tightly to the possibility of rejection; connection, here, is linked directly to precarity due to the heavy burden of expectation, reputation and memory that fiction is so crucial in depicting in its entirety.

Mda's implication of the complexity inherent in reconciliative healing is highlighted in one particularly moving scene. Significantly, this encounter between Toloki and Noria takes place after Noria has emotionally relayed the story of her son's death to Toloki. The atmosphere is raw, the preceding silence heavy. And then:

[s]he asks Toloki to take his clothes off [...] She meanwhile takes off all her clothes, unveiling her womanhood to him [...] He also takes off his clothes and unveils his maleness [...] They take turns to stand in the basin and splash water on each other's bodies [...] All this they do in absolute silence [...] Toloki takes his perfume from his trolley, and gives it to her. She splashes some of it on his body. He does likewise to her body. Without saying a word to each other, they spread their blankets on the floor, and doss down – in their separate kingdoms.¹³³

In addition to their nakedness reinforcing the implications conveyed by Mda's previous description of their foetal symbolism, this moment is almost baptismal in the sense of ritual and newness it conveys. Although this scene is undeniably intimate, it is noticeably not sexual. Implied by the admission of mutual fraternal love made in reference to each other elsewhere in the text,¹³⁴ the bond between Toloki and Noria that is being created in this moment requires a basis that is significantly more profound than lust alone. In their nakedness, Toloki and Nora almost come to represent a modern-day Adam and Eve; although the townships are no Eden, they are figured here as essential players in an act of creation that has the potential to build a new world. Once again, however, Mda's use of fiction presents the problematic alongside the utopic. This fundamental exchange takes place in silence. In focusing these moments on actions rather than speech, Mda implies here that dialogue is only one part of the movement towards reconciliation. Neither silence nor speech are sufficient in isolation; both, this scene and its antecedent moments imply, are crucial. Despite the intimacy of this moment, Toloki and Noria sleep on separate sides of Noria's hut – they each remain, as the text reminds us, 'in their separate kingdoms'. One moment of understanding, clearly, does not an instant union make. The fantasy of their union is made apparent by Mda's presentation of the hut Toloki and Noria build together. In this shack:

¹³³ Mda, p. 192.

¹³⁴ Mda, p. 114.

The four walls are divided into different sections. On some sections, he plasters pictures of ideal kitchens. There are also pictures of lounges, of dining rooms, and of bedrooms. Then on two walls, he plasters pictures of ideal gardens and houses and swimming pools, all from the *Home and Garden* magazines. [...] Then Toloki takes Noria's hand, and strolls with her through the grandeur. First they go to the bedroom. And she runs and throws herself on the comfortable king-size bed [...] They move from the bedroom to explore the kitchen [...] They go to the lounge and stretch out on the black leather sofas [...] Noria and Toloki take a brief rest in the wooded gazebo [...] The deck has an above-ground pool'.¹³⁵

Whilst my analysis has thus far avoided discussion of Mda's use of magic realism on the basis that it has already been the foundation of so much critical discussion,¹³⁶ it bears comment in relation to the illusory nature of the progression that the novel's latter half presents. It is easy to read this moment as the climactic moment of reconciliation; read from a certain allegorical perspective, the magic realism in this passage can be understood as representative of a connection still in the glowy, aspirational stage of its infancy, symbolising the rainbow-tinted hopes of a South Africa in the throes of its own genesis. In employing this fantasy-based mode of fictional writing, however, I argue that Mda emphasises the very unobtainability of this vision. The pictures from *Home and Garden* magazine are symbolic of this illusion. Contrasting starkly with the economically and violently ravaged landscape where this shack is constructed, the idyllic connotations of these images emphasise what is not there; the 'gardens and houses and swimming pools' that constitute the walls of Toloki and Noria's home become representative of the unrealised dreams that are its foundation. The walk that Toloki and Noria take through the grounds of their "home" further emphasises the extent to which this home can only exist within the realms of imagination; the images here are those of an impossible life.

The dual possibilities of this passage, however, gives Mda's fiction its strength. The fact that this scene can be read as aspirational or illusory is its own representation of the precipice on which South Africa's social dynamic teetered; intertwining magic with the mundane and the real with the imagined, Mda generates a sense of discomfiting uncertainty reflective of this distinct social moment in South Africa's history. The novel's final scene substantiates this claim. Once again, Mda presents a scene that superficially suggests redemption. Toloki and Noria, living together in blissful happiness, are surrounded by children dancing to Noria's singing whilst Toloki – previously unable to draw people –

¹³⁵ Mda, pp. 111-113.

¹³⁶ See, for example, Paulina Grzęda, 'Magical Realism: A Narrative of Celebration or Disillusionment? South African Literature in the Transition Period' in *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2013), pp. 153-183 and Christopher Warnes, 'Chronicles of Belief and Unbelief: Zakes Mda and the Question of Magical Realism in South African Literature' in *Ways of Writing: Critical Essays on Zakes Mda*, ed. by David Bell and Johan Jacobs (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009), pp. 73-90.

sketches the scene before him. Indeed, the landscape itself appears changed by the change of those who inhabit it:

Somehow the shack seems to glow in the light of the moon [...] Crickets and other insects of the night are attracted by the glow [...] Tyres are still burning [...] The smell of burning tyres fills the air. But this time it is not mingled with the sickly stench of roasting flesh. Just pure wholesome rubber.¹³⁷

In referencing the horrific practice of necklacing that claimed the life of Noria's son, the text's conclusion is that of a present still inflected by the memories of the past. Despite attempting to distinguish between the 'sickly stench of roasting flesh' with 'pure wholesome rubber', the juxtaposition of these descriptions refuses the erasure of what has come before; coupled with the smell of 'burning' that 'fills the air', this scene is literally saturated with memory. Toloki and Noria can thus be read as the crickets and other creatures that are dangerously attracted to the glow of the light. Using fiction to complicate the boundaries between past and present and safety and danger, Mda intimates that death is never far away; an implication that emphasises the precarity of this scene and challenges a model of reconciliation that sought to lay a still-present past to a subsequently impossible rest – depicting a South Africa not hurtling headlong into harmony, but mired, still, in a landscape marked by tension, death and uncertainty.

Gilbert Gatore – *Le Passé devant soi*

Fiction: A Place to Feel

Opposing the demands of a charged ethno-political context that mandates displays of emotion in commemorations to violence, Gatore's text is an unrestrainedly emotional narrative. For Yolande Mukagasana, as demonstrated in Chapter One, visceral descriptions of emotion are key to the reader identifications she invites. But what purpose might allusions to pain and anguish serve in the context of fiction; a mode of writing that is able to evoke its readers in a far freer way than that demanded by testimony? The centrality of feeling in this novel is significant because of the challenge it poses to the assumptions of melancholy and powerlessness associated with the survivor in the wake of traumatic

¹³⁷ Mda, p. 212.

events. At the start of the novel, however, the omniscient narrator's description of Isaro appears to align with this conventional characterisation. 'She holds herself rigidly', reads the text, 'and one has to pay close attention to make sure that she's not a mannequin.'¹³⁸ The wooden, inanimate stiffness these words imply place Isaro firmly within the clinical parameters set out in this chapter's introduction. Her reactions to violence substantiate this. Describing Isaro's mental and emotional state after she hears a news bulletin on the radio about the death toll in Rwanda, Gatore writes that:

[t]he news item on the air [...] had assaulted her the way a criminal pounces on its prey [...] She plummeted down inside her head, feeling as cumbersome and painful as a brick in the pit of her stomach. Her brain sap was trying doggedly to rein her in, to no avail [...] Everything she heard made her nauseated [...] immobilized.¹³⁹

Whilst the physicality of this description suggests the very real psychosomatic connection between mind and body, the description of Isaro as 'prey' underscores her helplessness in the face of memory. Paralysed by the past and overwhelmed by the mental images associated with it, Gatore's initial presentation of Isaro paints her as a numbed victim of trauma in the most traditional sense. Corroborating the DSM-IV's description of PTSD symptomatology including social and emotional withdrawal, Isaro does indeed appear to be suffering an inescapable, numb melancholy.

Isaro's changing reactions to, and relationship with memory, however, challenge this characterisation and suggests that her responses to violence are more emotionally complex. The turning point comes when Isaro overhears her Parisian classmates' flippant, dismissive reaction to the news bulletin that shakes her so violently. Isaro, the text states, is:

shocked [by] the world's obscenity [...] in the attitude of those who could find nothing else to say in reaction but "it's terrible, but what can you do" [...] Suddenly, the attitude she had been so lovingly taught and in which she had wallowed so comfortably for years made her sick [...] How many people have, and will always have, no other reaction but that?¹⁴⁰

What is fascinating here is the collapse of distance between Isaro and her homeland. Prior to this moment, memories of Rwanda were feared and avoided; now, however, they demand to be claimed and remembered. Whilst the sense of sickness in the previous quotation is borne from the associations

¹³⁸ Gatore, p. 9.

¹³⁹ Gatore, pp. 11-12.

¹⁴⁰ Gatore, p. 22.

Isaro makes with home, the sickness she experiences here is the realisation that people are *not* associating with the history that she now realises is a part of who she is. This moment of enlightenment prompts Isaro's decision to actively engage with the memory of the genocide by compiling the testimonies of those caught up in the violence – a project, and its results, that will be discussed in the coming pages. It is her aim, however, that is significant here. In undertaking this work, Isaro states that her goal is 'shedding light on subjectivity, for it is on this that hatred and violence are based. I don't think that we should seek to draw the horror of these events towards us but, rather, that we should move toward it.'¹⁴¹ In a stark contrast to the connotations of paralysis implied by the quotation above, this is a statement of intent that implies an engagement with the memories Isaro previously tried to avoid. In writing this shift, Gatore not only suggests how perceptions of history can be determined by the reactions of others to our stories, but the way in which pain is capable of prompting, and not just inhibiting, purposeful action.

The emotional complexity that Gatore's text invites its readers to experience, however, soon takes a darker turn. After being orphaned by the genocide, Isaro was adopted and raised in Paris by the French couple who had unsuccessfully hidden her parents during the massacres. Although Isaro had come to accept her place in this new family, her awakening to memory jeopardises this connection with Isaro coming to believe that:

Her parents' generosity had taken away her power of being an orphan [...] of being shattered by it or else reborn from it. They deprived her of the possibility of being submerged by sadness and resurfacing from it [...] she blamed them for having diverted her from grieving [...] She had to embrace that silence and that oblivion as a way of expressing her gratitude [...] For her eighteenth birthday, they had given her two binders filled with photographs [...] Everything was there except for what was missing – what had taken place before the first photograph [...] the careful and systematic chronicling of her acts and gestures since she had arrived only highlighted what was omitted.¹⁴²

Suggesting commemorative selectivity and the missed opportunity for expressing the pain of grief, it is difficult not to read this passage as Gatore's comment on Rwanda's own orchestrated, emotionally-restrictive memorial practices. But whilst criticisms of Rwanda's memorial strategies are often based on their curtailing of pain, this passage implies that it is the possibility of 'power' that has been precluded by the absence of mourning. Implying once again that trauma can generate growth *and* grief, Gatore

¹⁴¹ Gatore, pp. 47.

¹⁴² Gatore, pp. 29-30.

complicates dominant understandings of trauma as a debilitating experience and – in highlighting Isaro’s ability to ‘blame’ – demonstrates the agency that can be retained in the aftermath of violence. This passage is also extraordinarily disturbing for the inverted perception of love and malice it implies. Whilst, as discussed in Chapter One, Primo Levi emphasises the morally antithetical world of Auschwitz, Gatore suggests here that kindness and cruelty are similarly confused in the post-traumatic context. The parallels do not end there. Where Levi meditates on the fate of the drowned, Isaro figures ‘being submerged by sadness’ as an opportunity to resurface as a stronger individual; where, for Levi, there is power to be found in pain, Isaro, too, believes that there is growth to be found in grief. Tapping into the tropes of Holocaust testimony in his fictional writing, Gatore connects historical moments and their survivors while raising questions regarding the multiple ways, and multiple times, that the pain of a single event makes itself felt.

Writing to her parents later in the novel, Isaro expresses her frustration and anger that ‘you never told me anything of what happened, of the events that led you to take me in, basically, of who I am.’¹⁴³ Although this may superficially be read as evidence of trauma’s deindividuating and self-estranging power, the anger that accompanies this accusation implies that it is the knowledge of the way that one has been wounded that is itself the foundation of identity. In an attempt to rediscover her history, Isaro returns to Rwanda and cuts contact with her adoptive parents. It is through the destruction of these bonds, Isaro believes, that her true self can emerge through the ashes of the genocide; although many of the relationships discussed in this chapter are significant because of their presence, it is the destruction of this relationship that is critical in this context. Countering the DSM-IV’s connection of isolation with melancholy, Gatore’s text suggests that choosing isolation might be a conscious act of agency. However, the complexity of the emotional responses to trauma that I argue this novel highlights is emphasised by Isaro’s obvious misunderstanding of the intent of her parents’ silence; although her severance of their relationship is evidence of her capacity for agency in the aftermath of trauma, her misguided sense of anger is perhaps indicative of a residual wound. Given the horrific circumstances of her parents’ death, it is obvious that Isaro’s adoptive parents employ silence as kindness; as a way of shielding her from pain, not as an intended erasure of identity. In addition to suggesting yet another possibility of the character of silence in relation to trauma, Gatore’s presentation of Isaro’s misguided

¹⁴³ Gatore, p. 68.

anger – in tandem with the conscious choice of solitude – presents readers with a figure who is both suffering *and* acting; who, despite being in the throes of pain, is able to respond definitively to it. Countering the often one-dimensional characterisations of the survivor figure discussed in the previous chapter, Gatore’s literary representation of survival necessarily requires the depiction of emotional range to accommodate the varied and unpredictable nature of its character.

In addition to prohibiting herself from receiving love, Isaro also finds love impossible to give; and it is here that Gatore’s presentation of the survivor moves from the complex to the radical. After cutting contact with her parents, Isaro:

began to turn her back on the other person in her life. [...] he laid himself wide open to the innumerable whims, reproaches, and frustrations she let loose on him. Very soon he was no more than a puppet she’d summon, manipulate, and reject as she saw fit. Too much in love with her, he let her. Too intoxicated with her power, she abused it [...] Then it was her friends’ turn.¹⁴⁴

Like Rwanda itself, this lover is never identified by name in the novel. The focus here is entirely on Isaro and the cruelty of her actions; the passivity implied by the way that ‘he let her’ ‘let loose on him’ highlights the callousness of her behaviour. There is certainly scope to suggest that Isaro’s rejection of love is borne of her conviction that pain is the key to self-knowledge; mirroring the fictional mode of this novel, the story that Isaro tells herself is that she requires pain in order to mourn her past. However, it is the description of her emotional violence in this passage, coupled with the admission that ‘she’s not sorry for having been so hurtful’¹⁴⁵ that insinuates something quite different. Read alongside the lack of remorse in these words, Isaro’s spiteful toying with this man reads as an almost sadistic interaction; like those who inflicted the violence from which Isaro is now suffering, Isaro is inflicting her own pain, creating victims of her own and destroying human connection. Whilst the act of bearing witness largely positions the survivor in opposition to the immoral brutality and violence to which they testify, Gatore uses fiction here to blur the lines between immorality and virtue. The possibility that Isaro is not a benevolent individual is discomfiting precisely because of the fact that she is a survivor; for readers, encountering a survivor is traditionally to be reminded of a morality that is almost pedagogically instructive. However, as the following section will argue in greater detail, *Le Passé devant soi* is a text

¹⁴⁴ Gatore, p. 31.

¹⁴⁵ Gatore, p. 55.

that refuses the unproblematic assignment of characters and their stories to clear-cut categories. The text is a meditation on what people – not only those designated as “perpetrators” – are capable of; and it is only within the realm of fiction that such an enquiry can be carried out. Rather than representing a flaw in her character, Gatore’s presentation of Isaro as a woman who both suffers from, and inflicts, emotional pain is a depiction of a complexity that humanises the figure of the survivor who has been characterised by theorists such as Thomas Trezise as essentially ‘other’.¹⁴⁶ Inviting readers to witness Isaro’s darkness and her own capacity for cruelty, Gatore plays with the boundaries of victimhood to raise questions surrounding the distinction between various acts of cruelty.

The question of roles that Gatore poses is extended by the theme of performance that comes to characterise Isaro’s relationship to pain. Convinced that silence has robbed her of the chance to mourn, Isaro finds herself suddenly ‘taking pleasure in feeling lost, crushed, trapped’;¹⁴⁷ ‘she needed’, explains the text, ‘to feel and display the scar she had tried so hard to conceal’.¹⁴⁸ The pain that Gatore presents here is not one connected to the loss of identity, but one that becomes its foundation. Compellingly, Isaro’s draw to pain intensifies as the text continues:

she would moan in grief but enjoyed feeling she was playing her part at last [...] sometimes her eyes pulled away from her to watch herself, and what they saw added to the seductiveness of the grief to which she clung as to a talisman. She needed it.¹⁴⁹

Recalling the ‘orgasm of sadness’ described by Mukagasana in Chapter One, the performative grief enacted by Isaro generates a sexual pleasure as it expresses pain; in this moment, pain is belonging and history, linking Isaro to her parents’ suffering. Figuring pain here as a point of mutuality through which connections can be made, Gatore might be understood as critiquing the Rwandan commemorative strategies that seek to *avoid* expressions of pain to foster a national sense of community; a sense of connection that Gatore suggests might be more successfully obtained through its voicing. However, this suggestion is undermined by the increasing emphasis on the performativity associated with the expression of pain as the text continues. Reflecting Mda’s Toloki, who explains to

¹⁴⁶ Thomas Trezise, *Witnessing Witnessing: On the Reception of Holocaust Testimony* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 159.

¹⁴⁷ Gatore, p. 13.

¹⁴⁸ Gatore, p. 30.

¹⁴⁹ Gatore, p. 37.

Noria that 'my body needs to mourn [...] I cannot live without it [...] I am an addict',¹⁵⁰ Isaro's masochistic need to feel pain becomes a compulsion; it is only through suffering that she can truly feel alive. Thus, life becomes something that, in Isaro's mind, might be too pain-free a state for her; she begins to believe that living might itself foreclose the possibility of authentic mourning. Like Kertész's B., who, as Judit explains, must have committed suicide because 'he was fed up with having to seek out new prisons for himself',¹⁵¹ Isaro's discovery of her *need* to mourn through the experience of pain makes life itself a frightening prospect; suicide, Isaro comes to believe, is the ultimate performance of grief. Explaining the rationale behind Isaro's first, unsuccessful suicide attempt by overdose, the narrator states that:

Her state and the action she committed were not a negation of meaning – quite the contrary. She was looking to inflict upon the world and upon herself the spectacle of odd behaviour that she had controlled and suppressed all too long [...] Secretly she hoped her disappearance would cause a scandal [...] Incarnating horror and having her unspeakable, embarrassing misery explode before the eyes of everyone.¹⁵²

The theme of performing pain is extended here through the spectacle Isaro wants to create; a spectacle that has several contradictory implications. On one hand, this suicide attempt is represented as a communicative statement, a desire to turn the 'unspeakable' into that which cannot be denied by others. The word 'inflict', however, suggests that the act of dying is a vengeful one – an act of retribution designed to punish those who refused to see, or let Isaro express, the depth of her pain. In addition, though, her desire to 'cause a scandal' and create 'horror' implies that she intends not only to communicate but to shock and frighten; a continued imposition of the hurt and terror that began with Isaro's manipulation of her unnamed boyfriend. In light of these conflicting intentions, Isaro's suicidal plans become symbolic not only of her lostness but of the complexity that inheres in her current state: she is both overwhelmed by pain, and prepared to inflict it upon herself and others; she is undone by the fact of her parents' deaths, but welcomes, and tries to bring about, her own. Whilst drawing attention to the multifaceted experience of survival that cannot be adequately represented by a single set of diagnostic criteria, Gatore's imagining of Isaro's suicide attempt as unsuccessful is similarly significant. The success of the act itself does not matter – pain, whether affecting a still-living Isaro or her bereaved relatives, would still exist. Regardless of the restrictions placed upon the expression of pain in Rwanda, Gatore's text suggests, pain endures; although this is a pain that can contribute to growth, the fact of

¹⁵⁰ Mda, pp. 150-151.

¹⁵¹ Kertész, *Liquidation*, p. 96.

¹⁵² Gatore, p. 37.

suffering and distress is unchanged – refusing the performance of pain does not preclude its existence. Illustrating the dense, multi-layered nature of Isaro’s pain, Gatore utilises the space of fiction to express the very suffering that is restricted in the Rwandan socio-political context whilst making clear that the dynamics of the survivor’s interactions with others are far more complex than the DSM-IV’s criteria imply.

Interrogating the Grey Zone

When Isaro arrives in Rwanda, she dedicates herself to collecting the testimonies of those who experienced the genocide. However, quickly deserting the testimonial genre entirely, Isaro becomes obsessed with the idea that ‘in order to understand what happened, one must hear from those who caused it.’¹⁵³ Consequently, Isaro finds herself compelled to write the fictional story of Niko, a Hutu perpetrator of the genocide who retreats to a solitary island in an attempt to escape the guilt and shame of his actions and the memories they generate. Much critical writing around Gatore’s text has focused on his controversial exploration of perpetrator guilt. Indeed, whilst Catherine Coquio claims that this novel fails to represent the genocide because of the sympathy it generates for the killer,¹⁵⁴ Charlotte Lacoste argues that the text’s focus on Niko recasts the genocide’s true victims as Hutu – Gatore’s text, she insists, is guilty of a heinous act of revisionism.¹⁵⁵ In this section, however, I argue that Gatore does not just explore perpetrator lives through the character of Niko, but – through the drawing of distinct parallels between Niko and Isaro – raises questions about how and why people cross moral and ethical lines; his enquiry, whilst certainly drawing attention to the perpetrator, has a wider, more universal significance that extends beyond the opposition of good and evil. Like Isaro, Niko is tormented by his past; mirroring Isaro’s nauseated reaction to the news bulletin about Rwanda, Niko’s thoughts subject him to ‘a flood of memories that sicken and exasperate him to the point that he vomits.’¹⁵⁶ Examining the implications of these parallels and the significance of Isaro authoring this specific individual, I now move to consider how, through the fictional depiction of a creative relationship between self and other,

¹⁵³ Gatore, p. 45.

¹⁵⁴ Catherine Coquio, ‘Poétiser l’enfant tueur. Questions sur *Le Passé devant soi* de G. Gatore’ in “*J’ai tué.*” *Violence guerrière et fiction*, ed. by Déborah Lévy-Bertherat and Pierre Schoentjes (Geneva: Droz, 2010), pp. 231-265, p. 258.

¹⁵⁵ Charlotte Lacoste, *Séductions du bourreau, Négation des victimes* (Paris: PUF, 2010) pp. 347-348.

¹⁵⁶ Gatore, p. 20.

Le Passé devant soi raises questions about the definition of victimhood, notions of voice, who has the right to mourn and be mourned, and the limits of empathy, pain and guilt.

Whilst several critics have stated that Niko is Isaro's creation – the revelation of which is only made at the novel's end – few have commented on the significance of the text's metadiegetic narrative structure, which becomes especially charged in its depiction of voice and silence. It is compelling that Isaro characterises Niko as a mute. Born to a mother who dies giving birth to him on the night of a raging storm – its own symbolic reference to the violent chaos Niko eventually encounters and creates – Niko's relatives initially believe that his voice is drowned out by the noise of the night. When infant Niko still does not make a sound, however, his relatives theorise that he must be in shock from his mother's passing; baby Niko, they insist, 'was expressing a certainly astounding form of mourning in the only way he could offer any idea of his suffering: through silence.'¹⁵⁷ Figuring silence as expression in a way that recalls the rationale behind her suicide attempt, Isaro's connection between loss and silence not only binds her story to Niko's but – in so doing – humanises the figure of the perpetrator in a way that can be read as demonstrative of the agency that exists alongside her pain. Despite her own suffering, Isaro's ability to place the perpetrator within a framework of similar distress and post-traumatic silence might be understood as an act of empathy that indicates her resilient approach to the past. However, Isaro's characterisation of Niko points to the limits of this empathy even as their connection through silence gestures towards it. Despite signalling connection, Niko's mutism suggests both Isaro's own act of silencing and the possibility that in his mutism, he is but a figure for Isaro's exploration of self; a silent conduit through which Isaro attempts to address the questions and memories that cause her pain. Read in this way, silence – in addition to being figured in this text as indicative of Isaro's pain and her adoptive parents' kindness – is additionally presented as a form of revenge; mirroring the génocidaires' strategy of reducing Tutsi to cockroaches in order to promote their political ideology, Isaro reduces Niko to a fictional representation of a man to ask her own existential questions. Gatore's parallel renderings of their respective silences, however, imply something quite different. Describing Niko as suffering from 'a rare form of complete mutism that doesn't even let you cry, weep or moan',¹⁵⁸ this silence refuses the suggestion that Niko's silence, theorised as mourning by his relatives, is grief in its conventional sense.

¹⁵⁷ Gatore, p. 49.

¹⁵⁸ Gatore, p. 49.

The stronger implication within the narrative is that Niko's silence is generated by remorse and shame; adding two further possibilities to the multi-faceted silence that Gatore's text suggests. The implication here is that mourning is not a uniform tradition. In addition to suggesting that lamenting the past can be realised through silence or sound, Gatore's juxtaposition of these narratives repositions mourning as an expression of pain that, although reacting to different losses and pertaining to different actions, functions as a point of mutuality between victim and perpetrator. Whilst Gatore's figuration of silence therefore invites comparison, Isaro's both demands and rejects its possibility; a contrast that not only points to the complexity of voice in the post-traumatic context, but raises questions surrounding the character and dynamics of mourning.

The suggestion that Isaro creates Niko in order to work through her own questions and issues is substantiated by the rootlessness and desire for belonging that, inherent in her own story, she writes into Niko's. Mirroring the uncertainty surrounding her identity, Isaro creates a character without a name. 'Since he couldn't answer', Isaro writes, 'no one ever called to him, and so Niko remained nameless for a long time. To catch his attention everyone yelled at him, "Niko!" which means no more than "hey you!" or "yo!"'¹⁵⁹ Deprived of identity and attention, Niko's childhood is a joyless, lonely time in which he himself is unsure of the value of his own existence. He is constantly 'shoved out of the kitchen by his stepmother, who always had something more important to do than give him a second of her time, [whilst] his father [...] would push aside the child that prevented him from living like a distinguished man'.¹⁶⁰ Both Isaro and Niko have been let down by their parents: Niko has been cruelly dismissed and neglected, and Isaro believes that her adoptive parents' effacement of her past is the gravest of errors; 'everything her parents would do to anchor her in life', she believes, 'removed her from the only thing essential in her eyes'¹⁶¹ – an understanding of her true identity. Both Niko and Isaro experienced childhoods marked by loss and a search for something more; the fragility of their respective identities leaves them craving definition and belonging. This is the search that leads Isaro back to Rwanda to write the story of Niko, whose own search for acceptance leads him to the act of killing. Whilst the violence of Niko's actions initially appears to suggest a gulf separating him from Isaro, the fact that she ascribes this fate to him after writing him a childhood so reflective of her own poses the question of how

¹⁵⁹ Gatore, pp. 49-50.

¹⁶⁰ Gatore, p. 50.

¹⁶¹ Gatore, p. 24.

the need for belonging and a sense of identity motivates people's actions; a question that Gatore, placing these narrative as obvious parallels to one another, extends. The implication of this particular narrative structure is the fragility of the line separating killers and victims. The need to belong is presented in both cases as being linked to death; whilst Niko's first kill is motivated by the acceptance it would guarantee him, it is Isaro's need to connect with her history and identity through pain that leads to thoughts of suicide. Despite Elizabeth Applegate's claim that Niko and Isaro 'represent opposites: beautiful vs. ugly, victim vs. killer',¹⁶² Gatore uncomfortably dissolves this opposition by highlighting the subjective and circumstantial nature of these categories. With the parallels between Niko and Isaro's narratives highlighting the arbitrary nature of perpetration and victimhood, this element of the text generates a difficult empathy for Niko whilst creating suspicion towards Isaro's own capacity for evil; emotional responses that are traditionally reversed in their relations to victims or perpetrators. In *The Art of the Novel*, Milan Kundera observes that 'the novel's wisdom [is] the wisdom of uncertainty'.¹⁶³ The uncertainty that Gatore invites his readers to experience here is made possible only through the interrogative possibilities of fiction. Although the judicial process with which testimony is associated demands clear-cut definitions between victims and perpetrators, fiction's ability to tell the stories of the condemned blurs these boundaries and forces consideration not only of the way that one trauma gives rise to another, but of the permeability of the boundary separating killers and victims.

The suggestion that we may all be capable of evil is substantiated by Isaro's presentation of Niko in an overwhelmingly natural environment. The island to which he has retreated is lush; birds sing, the lake is beautiful, the trees are in bloom and small creatures roam the landscape. In addition, Niko – rejected by the humans who he has known all his life – is taken under the wing of a group of monkeys. This contrast is its own statement of the barbarity of the genocide; the world that Isaro presents is one in which animals have more compassion than humans. But in emphasising the natural character of this landscape and integrating Niko within in, Isaro can be understood as further pointing to the primacy of humanity, painting a portrait of a human ruled by the survival instincts that govern animals – instincts that lead us all to kill when our own lives, as was the case for Niko, are otherwise in danger. It is worth

¹⁶² Elizabeth Applegate, 'Reimagining the Swallow and the Toad: Narrating Identity and Reconciliation in Postgenocide Rwanda' in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (2012), pp. 70-88, pp. 73-74.

¹⁶³ Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p. 7.

noting here that Gatore's father is rumoured to have taken part in the killings.¹⁶⁴ Although, as Hitchcott notes, Gatore has only ever responded to this claim in a fairly ambiguous manner,¹⁶⁵ it is interesting to consider the possibility that the attempt to naturalise the predatory instincts of humans may come from a personal place of conflicted identity that Gatore reflects in both of his protagonists. This adds yet another ethical dimension to the consideration of perpetrators in the context of their personal relationships; whilst emphasising the fact that perpetrators of the genocide were fathers, brothers, sons and uncles, *Le Passé devant soi* suggests the complex nature of navigating memory and shame in the familial sphere in the context of a crime that is so often dominated by theoretical and governmental discussion. Compellingly, responses to the possibility of Gatore's father's involvement in the genocide are not singular; although we sympathise with Gatore for the conflicted position in which he finds himself, this is not a difficulty that offsets the potential barbarity of his father's actions; readers cannot excuse killing, despite the complexity of the circumstances Gatore presents. Furthermore, is forgiveness even ours to give? And what are we to make of this attempt to humanise those who act with inhuman cruelty – and the man who is behind it? Creating a space where the personal and the imagined collide, Gatore's text answers none of these questions; but it is their asking – and the ethical quandaries that are created and considered in response – that makes *Le Passé devant soi* such a powerful text.

And indeed, questions are the means by which Niko is most clearly revealed as Isaro's mouthpiece. Reflecting her own mastery of stoicism, Niko is somewhat successful in fortifying his mind against memory; mirroring the narrator's description of Isaro as 'an unmoving image',¹⁶⁶ Niko 'let the visions that once undid him file past without betraying any emotion [...] Reduced to a motionless shell, his body seems foreign to anything that might stir his mind. He has grown numb to memory.'¹⁶⁷ However, reflecting the need that led to Isaro's creation of him, Niko's defence against the past is short-lived. It is not long before Niko is plagued by questions and considering his own suicide:

Can a murderer go back to his previous life [...] Does picking up one's regular activities, purging oneself and the outside world of any recollection of the crime committed, allow you to once again become a normal man? Does taking another person's life forbid you to use your own as you see fit? [...] Those eyes. Those bodies. Those screams whose words he didn't

¹⁶⁴ Coquio, p. 262.

¹⁶⁵ Hitchcott, p. 86.

¹⁶⁶ Gatore, p. 2.

¹⁶⁷ Gatore, p. 100.

know. That blood. The more he denied it, the more it torments him [...] His own existence was scrutinizing him with disappointment in its eyes [...] Being as far away and as alone as possible now seems urgent, crucial. The world could only inspire unbearable memories in him. So it was mandatory that he withdraw from it.¹⁶⁸

The descriptive and audial images of agony in this passage are their own statement of the ferocity of these returning memories; a tormenting presence that Niko – like Isaro – has been unable to escape. It is his admission of existential nakedness, however, that is the final collapse of the boundary between Niko and his creator; a girl who is so connected to the story she is writing that ‘the words spilled all over each other inside her arm [...] She can still feel the trace of their violent and acrid rush through her veins [...] She has unleashed the flow of words and the thoughts they express, like bloodletting’.¹⁶⁹ Isaro, like Niko, finds no answer to her questions despite her hopes that the act of writing might serve to fill the lacunae in her understanding of herself and her past. Particularly compelling is the fact that the questions in this passage, ascribed to Niko, apply in their own way to Isaro: having killed her relationships with her family and friends, can Isaro reinsert herself back into quotidian life? Has the act of writing – figured in the novel as Isaro’s own attempt at purging herself of uncertainty – resulted in some kind of normality? Echoing the way that Kingbitter relies on B.’s writing, does Isaro’s act of imagining Niko’s life in relation to her own restrict her own movement beyond her text? Whilst the first two questions go unanswered, Isaro’s suicide at the text’s end indicates that Niko’s death is, in fact, the cue for her own. Despite undertaking this writing project in the hope of moving past a reliance on pain to feel the mourning her childhood precluded, the novel’s final pages reveal her enduring conviction that ‘living on the fringes, suffering and death’¹⁷⁰ are the only authentic expressions of her distress. Having displaced herself to the periphery of social and familial life and suffering as a result, the only way for Isaro to address the perpetual uncertainty of self and history in which she still finds herself is through death. The idea of uncertainty is thus used doubly in *Le Passé devant soi*. Whilst Gatore capitalises on the creation of uncertainty to question the expectations of survivors and perpetrators and force reconsiderations of the boundaries between them, the uncertainty generated by a lack of self-knowledge – a lacuna of identity that is directly linked to a lack of mourning – is presented as its own destabilising force. Although the novel refuses to make clear distinctions regarding the ethical qualities of violent acts in the context of genocide, Gatore – like Kertész – argues that stories are the foundations

¹⁶⁸ Gatore, pp. 89-91.

¹⁶⁹ Gatore, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷⁰ Gatore, pp. 105-106.

of identity. Forced to write her own story, and retreating into isolation as a form of self-inflicted suffering, Isaro is a victim of silence; a silence that, in the insecurity it creates, is responsible for the tragic moment when Isaro 'closes her eyes [...] fighting her reflexes as she falls, to keep herself straight and not let go of the dagger pointed at her heart.'¹⁷¹

Conclusion

Considering the relationship of metaphor to memory, Cynthia Ozick observes that '[t]hrough metaphor, the past has the capacity to imagine us, and we it [...] Those who have no pain can imagine those who suffer [...] We [...] can imagine the familiar hearts of strangers.'¹⁷² Whilst Ozick meaningfully identifies metaphor's capacity to form sympathetic understandings between temporalities and subjectivities, Kertész's, Mda's and Gatore's work suggests that the potential of fiction in the context of trauma goes beyond sympathy alone. Trauma fiction tells a markedly different story to that of survivor testimony. Where the definitive parameters of testimony work towards establishing what *was*, fiction reaches out to language and character to explore what might have been, what stories do, and challenges established thinking around certain events and the characterisations of those associated with them. Kertész's, Mda's and Gatore's texts are exceptional because rather than falling back on the tropes of aporia and fragmentation traditionally associated with trauma literature, they confront death directly. Constructing and imbuing with meaning the relationships that psychiatric and literary discourses theorise as eluding those who come into contact with traumatic events, these texts consider moral and subjective opposites in relation to one another, thus raising crucial questions and generating important, occasionally uncomfortable thinking about subject positions, ethics and life itself.

Through the relationships that he creates – both between the real and the imagined, and those between his characters – Kertész's fiction points to the elements of absurdity and unreality that are present in our quotidian experience. Inviting his readers to view Auschwitz not as an aberration of culture, but as symptomatic of it, Kertész plays with boundaries of sociological understanding as he blurs those

¹⁷¹ Gatore, p. 119.

¹⁷² Cynthia Ozick, 'Metaphor and Memory' in *Metaphor and Memory* (New York: Random House, 1991), pp. 265-283, p. 283.

between genre; and it is this uncomfortable argument for the latent capacity for human brutality that makes Kertész's fiction a shared space of victimhood. Kertész uses his narrative to engage with the notoriously controversial debate surrounding comparative suffering; an engagement that not only highlights the ubiquity of dehumanising violence that itself gestures towards a universal capacity for evil, but also points to a network of victimhood and the potential for one violent history to productively intersect with, and illuminate, another. For Kertész, mourning Auschwitz necessitates the mourning of other tragedies that are inextricably linked with it due to a totalitarian presence that extends beyond the occurrence of the Holocaust. This is an undeniably dark world view, with discomfoting implications. But it is precisely this darkness and discomfort that necessitates Kertész's fictional mode of writing. Whilst survivor testimonies explicate the depths of human depravity, they are ultimately narratives of triumph; their very existence is evidence of the overcoming of disaster. For Kertész, though, Auschwitz is a tragedy that has not been overcome because the cultural and ideological landscape that made it possible has not ceased to exist. Kertész's argument for the continued potential for death in Auschwitz's aftermath also underpins his depiction of the complexity of survival. Resisting one-dimensional characterisations of the survivor as either helpless or heroic, it is ironically through fiction that the true depth of, and variation within, the state of survival is realised; although this is unsurprising, perhaps, for a text that continually exposes the holes in the stories we tell about ourselves through the construction of its own.

Like Kertész, Mda actively engages with the question of what it means to mourn a past that is not entirely past. Published at the start of the TRC's proceedings, his text acknowledges the residual tensions and issues the national rainbow harmony narrative did not through its insistent presentation of uncertainty and contrast. Playing with the boundaries of temporality, nothing is certain in the South Africa that Mda writes; beauty exists only alongside decay, community is at once significant and arbitrary, and death is both exceptional and exceptionally mundane. In this text, relationships are frayed and broken; division is present both within individual communities and across racial lines; and the country's politics still takes the lives of its youth instead of securing them. This is an instability that I have argued is reflected in the relationship between Toloki and Noria, who are themselves allegorical figures for a South Africa in transition. Their lives are each marked by political upheaval, chaos and death; initially, neither wants anything to do with the other; and the potential for any meaningful

connection between them appears impossible under the burden of the memories of a painful past. What is significant about Mda's text is that it depicts a process of mourning and healing that is neither smooth nor straightforward; taking account of what the TRC's narrative did not, *Ways of Dying* acknowledges the emotional resonances of the past without effacing them from the mourning process. Toloki and Noria are presented as creative beings; people that, due to this creative ability, possess the potential to change the dynamic between them. But without dialogue and meaningful action, Mda's text implies, no such change is possible. Certainly, Toloki and Noria grow closer as they complete acts of creation in partnership with one another. But *Ways of Dying* expertly navigates between the fatalistic and the optimistic – it is, as Chielozona Eze points out, 'a book of grief, but also of hope; a book of hatred, but also of love'.¹⁷³ Typifying the ominous sense of uncertainty pervading the text is its ending, that comes to represent the instability of redemption in the South African context. Reminding readers that death is never far away, Mda's fiction – through the relationship it imagines – emphasises the illusory nature of redemption after a trauma that has not been entirely addressed.

There is nothing redemptive about Gatore's *Le Passé devant soi*; the text is but an iteration of questions regarding human nature that provides no clear-cut answers. In Gatore's fiction, Isaro becomes emblematic of the consequences of a past that remains unacknowledged. Rendered rootless and without identity, Isaro's painful existence is a cautionary tale regarding the necessary relationship between the past and memory in the present – embodying Eke et al's claim that 'the reconciliation of highly stratified societies appears impossible without examining fundamental questions of identity, history and power'.¹⁷⁴ Creating a space where distress can be voiced, Gatore defies Rwanda's post-genocide policy of forgetting the past and allowing memory to surface only on specific dates and at specific times. Whilst Kertész plays with the boundaries of genre and Mda blurs those of time, the most compelling line that Gatore distorts is that between victim and perpetrator – and, by extension, that between morality and malevolence. Whilst critical treatments of this text have analysed Gatore's figure of the perpetrator, *Le Passé devant soi* is as heavily focused on the complex ethical qualities of the victim. Echoing Kertész's muddying of the waters between the ethical and immoral character of

¹⁷³ Chielozona Eze, "Death, Here I Am": Violence and Redemption in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* in *Journal of Narrative Theory*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (2013), pp. 87-107, p. 88.

¹⁷⁴ Maureen N. Eke, Marie Kruger and Mildred Mortimer, 'Memory/History, Violence and Reconciliation: Introduction' in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (2012), pp. 65-69, p. 65.

existence, Gatore's text is a jarring and sobering reminder of the way that the arbitrary becomes the exceptional; of the way that circumstances, both random and created, motivate a person's actions. Using fiction to probe both the perpetrator and the survivor in ways that testimony's insistence on categorisation does not permit, Gatore's fiction presents the closeness of the relationship between Isaro and Niko to demonstrate our own fearful, but very real proximity to the unthinkable.

Referencing the work of Joseph Skibell and Lucy Ellman, Sue Vice notes that 'the counter-argument to scepticism about the value, or even viability of Holocaust fiction is put most pressingly [...] by writers themselves.'¹⁷⁵ Whilst Kertész's work confirms this statement, Mda's and Gatore's writing is evidence of the same in the South African and Rwandan contexts. Defying master narratives that seek to clearly demarcate the parameters between past and present and disaster and renewal, these writers call on the relationships between people and temporalities to demonstrate the fallibility of these political and ideological narratives. Putting conceptual and subjective opposites in direct contact with one another, Kertész, Mda and Gatore not only reveal uncomfortable truths about the past's presence in the present, but emphasise the central role of stories and dialogic exchange in addressing trauma. It is precisely through the unreal that these writers comment on the real, highlighting the uncertainties, questions and ethical grey zones that are present and constitutive elements of our own lives.

¹⁷⁵ Sue Vice, *Holocaust Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 7.

Chapter Four

Intergenerational Trauma: The After-Words of Afterwards

Moving from literary representations of traumatic moments and their aftermaths in autobiography and fiction, this dissertation's final chapter probes how survivors' descendants engage with traumatic pasts. Interestingly, each of the texts analysed here occupies a slightly different narrative space: whilst Jonathan Safran Foer's fictional text *Everything is Illuminated* quivers on the boundary between fantasy and history and K. Sello Duiker's semi-autobiographical *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* is a *Bildungsroman* of sorts, Diogène Ntarindwa's autobiographical *Carte d'identité* harnesses the power of drama. Despite these generic variations, however, one narrative technique links these texts: vocal multiplicity. Unlike traditional survivor literature, which focalises experiences of violence through an individual, there is never one individual in these texts whose story is told to the exclusion of all others'. Foer, Duiker and Ntarindwa present characters worlds away from themselves: amongst others, Foer explores the trauma of a Holocaust perpetrator, Duiker writes the lives of black women, Afrikaners and homosexual black men, and Ntarindwa dramatises Rwandan violence whilst voicing the colonial racism that was its catalyst. These texts move across lines of gender, sexuality, power and blood, with each narrative voice possessing a unique character and intonation. Why, and to what ends, I therefore ask here, do survivor's descendants write multi-voiced narratives? And what might this narrative strategy reveal about how these writers perceive, relate to – and are themselves affected or otherwise by – the traumatic events of previous generations?

Substantial work has been done in the service of discovering the effect of a parent's traumatic past on children, primarily within the disciplines of psychiatry and psychoanalysis in relation to the descendants of Holocaust survivors.¹ The majority of such studies have concluded that the children and

¹ See, for example, Natan P. F. Kellermann, 'Transmission of Holocaust Trauma – An Integrative View' in *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes*, Vol. 64 (2001), pp. 256-267 and Janet Jacobs, *The Holocaust Across Generations: Trauma and Its Inheritance Among Descendants of Survivors* (New York: New York University Press, 2017). Another recent volume is *Trans-Generational Trauma and the Other: Dialogues Across History and Difference*, ed. by Sue Grand and Jill Salberg (New York: Routledge, 2017) which argues for the need for survivors' descendants to interact with a new 'Other' to overcome the ghosts of the past. See also Vamik D. Volkan, Gabriele Ast, and William F. Greer, Jr., *The Third Reich in the Unconscious: Transgenerational Transmission and Its Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2002) and Pamela C. Alexander, *Intergenerational Cycles of Trauma and Violence: An Attachment and Family Systems Perspective* (London: W. W. Norton &

grandchildren of survivors are somehow affected by their grand/parents' traumas.² Between Haydée Faimberg's notion of 'telescoping' between generations,³ René Kaës's hypothesis regarding intergenerational psychical links⁴ and Yael Danieli's influential *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*,⁵ it becomes clear, in the worlds of Clara Mucci, that '[e]xtreme experiences and extreme pain experienced individually and by social groups [...] cannot but have psychic consequences in subsequent generations'.⁶ It is to the precise nature of these 'consequences' that this chapter turns. The vast majority of the research alluded to thus far has liberally employed the term "trauma" in its descriptions of the emotional, behavioural and mental states of survivors' descendants: a semantic designation that has led to these groups being themselves defined as second- or third-generation "survivors". The implication of these primarily psychoanalytic studies and the referential terminology they have generated is that the descendants of survivors are directly wounded by the trauma undergone by their ancestors. In addition to expanding the scope of the conversation regarding intergenerational trauma to include events outside of the Holocaust,⁷ the following chapter asks how written texts might provide an alternative perspective from which to contribute to a discussion currently dominated by psychoanalysis.

This is not to suggest that literature has been overlooked in connection to the question of intergenerational trauma until this point. For some time, "second-generation literature" – as it has come to be known – has been critically accepted and theorised as a mode of enquiry into the dynamics of a life lived under the mark of a parent's trauma. Second-generation accounts of a trauma-inflected childhood, adolescence and adulthood are ubiquitous, and even the mainstream media has taken to

Company, 2015). For a sociological perspective, see Esther Jilovsky, Jordana Silverstein and David Slucki, eds., *In The Shadows of Memory: The Holocaust and the Third Generation* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2016).

² This is not to say that work on the resilience of post-Holocaust generations has not been undertaken. See, for example, John J. Sigal and Morton Weinfeld's *Trauma and Rebirth: Intergenerational Effects of the Holocaust* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989), which is among the earlier studies to include quantitative research on the interaction between survivors' grandchildren and Holocaust memory.

³ Haydée Faimberg, *The Telescoping of Generations: Listening to the Narcissistic Links between Generations* (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁴ René Kaës, 'The Psychical Reality of Linking' in *Families in Transformation: A Psychoanalytic Approach*, ed. by Anna Maria Nicolò, Pierre Benghozi and Daniela Lucarelli (London: Karnac Books, 2014), pp. 3-20.

⁵ *Intergenerational Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, ed. by Yael Danieli (New York: Plenum Press, 1998).

⁶ Clara Mucci, *Beyond Individual and Collective Trauma: Intergenerational Transmission, Psychoanalytic Treatment and the Dynamics of Forgiveness* (London: Karnac Books, 2013), p. 135.

⁷ As with psychiatry and psychoanalysis, much of the discussion around intergenerational trauma in literature has taken the Holocaust as its exclusive focus. See, for example, Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017) and R. Crownshaw, *The Afterlife of Holocaust Memory in Contemporary Literature and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

reporting the second-generation “condition”.⁸ Narratives such as Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, Thane Rosenbaum’s *Elijah Visible*, Eva Hoffman’s *After Such Knowledge*, Louise Kehoe’s *In This Dark House* and Joseph Skibell’s *A Blessing on the Moon* – to provide just a few examples – now represent a barely differentiated extension of the Holocaust literature genre created by survivors themselves. Similarly, analysts of these texts have seen their work integrated into the canon of Holocaust criticism. Implying that concerns of representation, memory and language plague the second and third generation of survivors’ descendants as they do survivors themselves, critical concepts such as Marianne Hirsch’s postmemory extend the particular trauma of the Holocaust to those who did not directly experience it. To live as a member of the generation of postmemory, as Hirsch puts it, is:

[t]o grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness [...] to risk having one’s own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped [...] by traumatic fragments of events [...] These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present.⁹

Although Hirsch later states that postmemory ‘is a *consequence* of traumatic recall but (unlike posttraumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove’,¹⁰ this attempt at qualification and differentiation does not quite achieve its aim. Employing the words ‘overwhelming’, ‘dominated’ and ‘displaced’ and referring to the ‘traumatic fragments’ of the past, Hirsch invokes the traditional nomenclature of trauma theory to describe the second-generation condition in a way that complicates the generational distinction she claims; the language Hirsch uses hints at similarity even as she claims difference. If, as Hirsch argues, ‘postmemory clarifies how the multiple ruptures and radical breaks introduced by trauma and catastrophe inflect intra-, inter-, and transgenerational inheritance’,¹¹ postmemory does not truly divorce itself from original Holocaust trauma. In fact, Hirsch claims elsewhere that ‘[p]erhaps it is *only* in subsequent generations that trauma can be witnessed and worked through, by those who were not there to live it but who received its effects, belatedly, through the

⁸ See, for example: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/mar/15/trauma-second-generation-holocaust-survivors> [accessed 22nd May 2017], <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/04/25/health/ptsd-trauma-genetics-study/index.html> [accessed 7th August 2017] and <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2015/aug/21/study-of-holocaust-survivors-finds-trauma-passed-on-to-childrens-genes> [accessed 25th May 2017]. This more recent article points to the doubts surrounding the intergenerational transmission of trauma: <https://www.haaretz.com/science-and-health/.premium-1.786465> [accessed 27th September 2017].

⁹ Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 5.

¹⁰ Hirsch, p. 6.

¹¹ Hirsch, p. 33.

narratives, actions and symptoms of the previous generation'.¹² Responding to, and challenging, the conflation of traumas inherent in Hirsch's suggestion, this chapter asks how the questions and possibilities raised by these multi-voiced texts might indicate the distinction between the trauma of the original wounding event and the nature of its intergenerational resonance.

Born in 1977 to a mother whose parents survived the Holocaust, Jonathan Safran Foer is an all-American third-generation writer. Foer studied at Princeton after growing up in Washington, where the attention and encouragement he received from Joyce Carol Oates motivated him to pursue creative writing. As evidenced by his novels *Everything Is Illuminated*, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *Here I Am*, Foer's writing is preoccupied with the past's presence in the future and the relationship between storytelling and trauma across generations. *Everything Is Illuminated* follows a fictional protagonist also named Jonathan Safran Foer¹³ as he travels to Ukraine in search of Augustine, the woman who saved his grandfather from the Nazis, and the history of the shtetl of Trachimbrod where his grandfather lived. He is accompanied by a translator named Alex, whose grandfather – also called Alex – is the trip's designated driver. As the journey progresses, Jonathan does not find Augustine, but creates a fictional account of Trachimbrod that reveals more about his relation to, and perception of, that history than the shtetl's actuality. As the quest for information continues, Alex's grandfather is revealed to have betrayed his Jewish best friend Herschel to the Nazis; a discovery which sets into motion a whirlwind shift of identity for Alex and changes his understanding not only of his family's specific dynamic in the present, but of his past. Focusing on the specific way this novel addresses the concept of families and the way in which trauma conceals or reveals the true identities of the individuals within them, this chapter probes the relationship between relatives and the stories that constitute their histories.

In a contrast that is perhaps due to the diasporic movement of Holocaust survivors and the families they went on to establish outside Europe, South Africa's post-apartheid generation is not as clearly

¹² Marianne Hirsch, 'Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory' in *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2001), pp. 5-37, p. 12.

¹³ When referencing the author, this chapter will use the name "Foer". When referencing the character, the chapter will use the name "Jonathan".

removed from apartheid as Holocaust survivor's children are from Auschwitz. This generation, as Katherine Newman describes it, is constituted by:

the South Africans who came of age during the post-apartheid transition [...] these people were children during the old regime but by the time they came of age, apartheid was far enough in the past to have receded into the background. This generation [...] struggles with the meaning of the past but is no longer a prisoner of it.¹⁴

K. Sello Duiker is emblematic of this generation. Growing up during the apartheid years but spared apartheid violence and discrimination due to his monied upbringing and international education, Duiker returned as a young adult to a “new” South Africa still marked by its past. Despite being consistently referred to as a ‘post-apartheid’ or ‘second generation’ writer in, and outside, critical contexts, Duiker’s temporal and geographical proximity to apartheid complicates the sense of remove these terms imply. Given the particularity of his generational placement, Duiker might be better described as belonging to the “1.5 generation” defined by Susan Suleiman. Suleiman, considering child survivors of the Holocaust, contrasts the second-generation’s ‘common shared experience [...] of belatedness’ with ‘the 1.5 generation’s shared experience [...] of premature bewilderment and helplessness’.¹⁵ As Duiker’s text and his suicide at the age of 30 suggest, bewilderment and helplessness are indeed characteristic elements of his writing and life experience. *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* follows its central protagonist Tshepo – a character with a similar childhood experience to that of Duiker himself – and his friends as they navigate their social and sexual lives against a milieu of residual apartheid prejudices and the various challenges of class and racial integration. Focusing on scarcely spoken-of issues such as sexuality and mental health, the novel is a scathing commentary on the deep social fissures that exist in the supposedly newly harmonious rainbow South Africa. Interestingly, there has not been extensive critical work undertaken on Duiker’s oeuvre, despite his popularity and the praise attributed to him by fellow South African writers.¹⁶ The criticism that does exist, however, has primarily focused its attention

¹⁴ Katherine S. Newman and Ariane De Lannoy, *After Freedom: The Rise of the Post-Apartheid Generation in Democratic South Africa* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), p. xi.

¹⁵ Susan Suleiman, ‘The 1.5 Generation: Thinking About Child Survivors and the Holocaust’ in *American Imago*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (2002), pp. 277-295, p. 277.

¹⁶ Eulogising Duiker at his funeral, Zakes Mda stated that: ‘Many critics said Sello Duiker was treading on my footsteps: but I say he was going to be much greater. He had achieved greater things than I did at his age.’ Essayist and notoriously harsh literary critic Lewis Nkosi eulogised Duiker saying: ‘A lifetime is usually required to master the craft of writing: the miracle is that Sello should have achieved so much in such a short time; the tragedy is that his life was cut so brutally short when his best work probably, almost certainly, still lay ahead.’

solely on the implications of the novel's homosexuality narrative¹⁷ and the text's discussion of race in a post-apartheid context.¹⁸ Whilst acknowledging these aspects of this text, this chapter aims to contribute to this critical corpus by examining the specific character and quality of Tshepo's pain and the novel's various particularities of voice to ask how Tshepo's perception of his past might attest to the nature of his disturbance in the present.

The relative recentness of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda means that the generational gap between survivors and those old enough to represent the next generation's perspective on that specific moment of violence is still relatively small; these are voices that are, to a large extent, still waiting to emerge in full. To fixate on the genocide of 1994 in the context of intergenerational trauma, however, is to ignore the reality that Rwanda is no stranger to bloody conflicts borne of extreme interethnic tensions. Diogène Ntarindwa was born in Burundi to Rwandan parents who fled the mass killings of 1959. Deciding to join the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) of his own accord when the genocide broke out in 1994, *Carte d'identité* – like *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* – can be read as a commentary on what it means not only to grow up with a sense of distinct trauma, but the extent to which traumatic history implicates those who come after it into its cycle. Viewed through the lens of Ntarindwa's play, Rwanda's genocide of 1994 is a link in a historical chain of violent inter-ethnic conflicts which stretches back to pre-colonial times. In view of such cyclical violence, this chapter – which primarily reads the play as a written text – asks several questions: in addition to exploring whether or not Ntarindwa appears traumatised at all, this chapter also enquires whether any trauma – should it be detected – is one supplemented by the experiences of his parents, or something created entirely new from his own involvement with conflict. The play's script is preceded by a small note informing the reader that 'all roles are played by the author'.¹⁹ The connotations of this line go beyond the indication that

¹⁷ See, for example, Marc Epprecht, 'Recent Trends in the Treatment of Homosexualities in Literature and Film by African Artists' in *Men in African Film and Fiction* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2011), pp. 153-163, Jessica Murray, 'Stereotypes and Subversions: Reading Queer Representations in Two Contemporary South African Novels' in *English in Africa*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (2013), pp. 119-138, Dobrota Pucherova, 'Re-Imagining the Other: The Politics of Friendship in Three Twenty-First Century South African Novels' in *Journal of South African Novels*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (2009), pp. 929-943, and Nonhlanhla Dlamini, 'Negotiating Legitimacy and the Normalization of Queer Desires in Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*' in *Journal of the African Literature Association*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2016), pp. 68-79.

¹⁸ See, for example, Annie Gagiano, 'Adapting the National Imaginary: Shifting Identities in Three Post-1994 South African Novels' in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (2004), pp. 811-824 and S. Graham, 'Peripatetic Mapping: K. Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*' in *South African Literature after the Truth Commission: Mapping Loss* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 120-127.

¹⁹ Diogène Ntarindwa, *Carte d'identité* (Carnières-Morlanwelz: Lansman, 2009), p. 6. Due to the lack of published English translations available at this time, all translations are my own.

Ntarindwa is a talented performer. Considering the implications of the many roles that Ntarindwa plays – and, indeed, the many histories to which he gives voice – this text forces the asking not only of who can speak trauma, but the extent to which trauma travels across landscapes, time and generations.

Jonathan Safran Foer – *Everything is Illuminated*

Jonathan: embodying imagination between presence and absence

'The origin of a story', acknowledges Jonathan's grandfather Safran, 'is always an absence'.²⁰ Read in isolation, this line frames Foer's text as a paradigmatic trauma novel: whilst reflecting Cathy Caruth's definition of trauma as a missed encounter with a historical moment,²¹ these words suggest the haunting and lack so tightly bound to it. *Everything is Illuminated*, however, is a text that trades on inversion; a text that probes the boundaries between absence and presence in a way that is symbolised by Foer's own curious presence within the text. *Everything is Illuminated* is a developed version of Foer's senior thesis, a creative writing project that explored the experience of his grandfather, Holocaust survivor Louis Safran. Pre-empting his character Jonathan's journey to the same place, Foer travelled to Ukraine to learn more about his family's point of origin; a trip on which he learned of the Nazi liquidation of, and his familial links to, the shtetl of Trachimbrod whose history Jonathan imagines in this novel. Jonathan – as a character – is both present and absent in the text. Whilst the text's first half documents his travels, these are primarily narrated by his guide, Alex; in the latter stages of the novel, Alex and Jonathan correspond by letters of which only Alex's are shown. Jonathan's textual presence and obscurity are their own statement of Foer's perception of his past. This history is a part of his story that is both known and utterly unknowable due to the destruction of his place of origin and the people who inhabited it; the project of discovery that both Foer and Jonathan undertake is perhaps inevitably doomed to failure, in spite of the limited knowledge Jonathan is armed with at its start. The dynamic between presence and absence that propels the text is signalled by its dedication, which reads, 'Simply and impossibly: for my family.'²² Juxtaposing 'simply' and 'impossibly', Foer signals the essentiality and unattainability of the story that he tries to tell. Implied by the word itself, lineage is a network of direct connection; an undeviating line of blood ties that anchor individuals within a familial framework. Violence, however,

²⁰ Jonathan Safran Foer, *Everything is Illuminated* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 230.

²¹ For a detailed discussion of Caruth's theory, see this dissertation's introduction.

²² Foer, p. vii.

disrupts these lines of continuity by leaving holes where links should be and death where there should be life; thus insisting upon absence in place of presence. Telling his family's story as it is punctuated by the Holocaust therefore relies upon Foer's restrained presence in this text; this is a history that he is at once a part of, and inevitably removed from. Reflecting the particularity of this third-generation perspective, the indirectness of Jonathan's voice emphasises both his connection to, and disconnection from, the stories of the past.

Compellingly, the blankness of Jonathan's past – so often theorised as a consequence of an overwhelming trauma that coerces survivors into silence – is actually generated in part by Jonathan himself. Reminiscing with Alex, Jonathan recalls how his grandmother would scream out into the night in unintelligible Yiddish. Alex responds with a question:

“Why did you not ask her what the words meant?”
“I was afraid.”
“Of what were you afraid?”
“I don't know. I was just too afraid. I knew I wasn't supposed to ask, so I didn't.”
“Perhaps she desired for you to ask.”
“No.”
“Perhaps she needed you to ask, because if you didn't ask, she could not tell you.”
“No.”
“Perhaps she was shouting, Ask me! Ask me what I'm shouting!”²³

Jonathan's grandmother is obviously hesitant to talk about the past; she gives no explanation, for example, about the photograph of the woman she gives Jonathan's mother after fifty years, whose subject motivates Jonathan's exploratory journey.²⁴ However, what this passage suggests is that the silence between Jonathan and his grandmother is not only rooted in her refusal to speak, but also – reflecting Primo Levi's nightmare – in Jonathan's refusal to listen. Constructing an uneasy borderline between speech and silence, Foer invites his readers to debate the roles of interlocutor and silencer in an intergenerational context in a manner that neither assumes nor dictates the parameters of either; although Jonathan and his grandmother both insist on silence, these are silences borne from radically different impulses, with vastly different implications. The repetition of the words 'perhaps' and 'no', are similarly significant here. Whilst Alex's probing questions continually suggest the possibility of intergenerational exchange, Jonathan's repeatedly negative and profoundly defensive responses to this

²³ Foer, p. 159.

²⁴ Foer, p. 61.

suggestion is the decisive rejection of this dialogue. However, the fact of Jonathan's journey to Ukraine is evidence of his desire to discover the very past that he refuses to learn about from his direct link to that history. How are readers to understand the simultaneous refusal of, and search for, this story? The answer to this question goes to the heart of the intergenerational dynamics of traumatic memories. At two generational removes from the Holocaust, Jonathan is able to refuse the traumatic quality of its memory in a way that his grandmother cannot. Whilst sensing that the intimacy of talking to his grandmother would expose a trauma that he confesses he is 'afraid' of, Jonathan's generational situation allows him to divorce the painful from the personal. Thus, Jonathan sets out to interrogate a past, that – precisely because of the silence he has created between himself and his grandmother – he approaches in terms of memory, and not trauma. Undertaking this project on his own terms, exclusive of his grandmother's narrative, Jonathan is able to approach what is a very personal mission in rather objective terms: the past, as he has chosen to expose himself to it, is a puzzle that requires solving. Although Jonathan and his grandmother are linked by the same history, their respective generational proximities to that history governs the terms of their relationship to its memory.

Jonathan's specific relationship to memory is demonstrated by the peculiar history of Trachimbrod that he produces on his return to America. Employing magic realism throughout, Jonathan imagines the lives, deaths, dreams, marriages, divorces, triumphs, quarrels and illnesses experienced by Trachimbrod's residents in a way that not only points to the fictionality of this record, but occasionally situates Trachimbrod within the realm of the absurd. Jonathan's use of folkloric magic realism to describe the knowledge gleaned from a seemingly antithetical quest for fact appears puzzling. Whilst Elaine Safer ties this whimsical representation of Trachimbrod to traditional tropes of Jewish folktales,²⁵ Lee Behlman argues that Foer purposefully employs Ashkenazic folklore to highlight the tragedy of this community's eventual annihilation.²⁶ However, I suggest that this particular aesthetic strategy speaks to Foer's third-generation status. In light of his refusal to engage with his grandmother and failure of his fact-finding mission to identify the woman in the photograph, Jonathan's familial origins necessarily have something mythical about them. For Jonathan, the construction of this history in some sense

²⁵ Elaine Safer, 'Illuminating the Ineffable: Jonathan Safran Foer's Novels' in *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, Vol. 25 (2006), pp. 112-132, p. 122.

²⁶ Lee Behlman, 'The Escapist: Fantasy, Folklore, and the Pleasures of the Comic Book in Recent Jewish American Holocaust Fiction' in *Shofar*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (2004), pp. 56-71, p. 58.

requires an element of the unintelligible, the mysterious and the magical. It is fitting, therefore, that Foer employs a folkloric magic realism – a form that dances between the real and the imagined – to relate a family history that is both somehow known and utterly unknowable. The significance of this form, however, goes further in the context of intergenerational memory. Just as Jonathan's journey into his past is undertaken of his own volition and dictated by his individual curiosity, Foer's decision to employ magic realism in the representation of his familial history suggests that, like survivors themselves, second and third generation descendants of survivors remember the past in ways that reflect their specific relationship to it. Writing within the bounds of fiction, Foer's text makes a statement not only about the non-traumatic quality of Holocaust memory as remembered by those who did not directly experience it, but about the specific way in which that history must become personalised for the descendants of the survivors who become its guardians. Understood in this way, the memory of events like the Holocaust does not remain static; rather, it is a dynamically evolving process in which the second and third generation are intimately involved. Whilst perhaps not a faithful retelling of the specifics of his familial origin, the mythical and fable-like elements of this narrative are not present to deflect the trauma of the past, for to Jonathan, there is no threat of trauma. Rather, fiction here both signifies Jonathan's willingness to engage with that history, and demonstrates the necessary individuation of the memory that Jonathan is implicating into his understanding of his own identity.

However, although Jonathan's use of magic realism suggests his distance from the history that he describes, the novel's focus on storytelling implies its simultaneous capacity for connection across, and between, generations. The connection that the novel makes between trauma, storytelling and family is epitomised by the description of the relationship between Jonathan's great-great-great-great-great grandmother Brod and her father Yankel. Brod's origin is trauma itself: seemingly born of the River Brod for which she is subsequently named, emerging from it alive when her father and pregnant mother were killed in a horse-cart accident, she is entrusted to Yankel after her tiny fist picks his name at random from a list of potential guardians. Jonathan's description of the forming of their family unit states that:

[a]s my great-great-great-great-great-grandmother grew, she remembered, of course, nothing, and was told nothing. Yankel made up a story about her mother's early death – painless, in childbirth – and answered the many questions that arose in the way he felt would cause her the least pain.²⁷

²⁷ Foer, p. 48.

Here, trauma both defines and destroys family; whilst the trauma of Brod's origins must be silenced to spare her pain, a new trauma and story of loss must be created in order to bind her to the family unit that will sustain her. Fearing that the trauma of her birth might be too harsh:

Yankel didn't have the heart to tell her that he was not her father [...] So he created more stories – wild stories, with undomesticated imagery and flamboyant characters. He invited stories so fantastic that she had to believe [...] What else could she do?²⁸

Yankel and Brod, as Jonathan writes, continued 'willfully playing the parts they wrote for themselves, wilfully creating and believing fictions necessary for life.'²⁹ In addition to mirroring Kertész's suggestion that fiction is somehow an inherent part of everyday life – an implication that provides yet another rationale for the mythical tone of the text as a whole – the relationship between Yankel and Brod makes a strong statement about how stories connect families; they are bound by the fictional trauma of a death in which they both come not only to believe, but also to rely. Despite being motivated by an impulse to protect, Yankel's fabrication of this trauma is not ethically unquestionable. What it does demonstrate however, is the way that – as this dissertation has demonstrated throughout – trauma tests the relationship between memory and reality. As a third-generation writer, Jonathan and Foer's own acts of storytelling connect them to the past through the very virtue of the medium which is so inherently tied to trauma. Although he is not directly threatened by traumatic memory, Foer's own engagement with storytelling links him both to his past and the darkness inherent within it.

Alex and Grandfather: cautiously familiarising the other

When the provincial, carnivorous Ukrainian meets the self-assured, vegetarian New Yorker, Alex and Jonathan appear, quite literally, to be worlds apart. As the text reveals more about both men's lives, however, the dynamics of their relationships with their respective grandparents betray the illusion of total contrast. Just as Jonathan insists on not mentioning the past to a grandmother he believes is resistant to its discussion, Alex notices his grandfather crying on several occasions but 'never mentioned it';³⁰ when the opportunity arises for Alex to learn more about his grandfather's past, he, like

²⁸ Foer, p. 77.

²⁹ Foer, p. 83.

³⁰ Foer, p. 5.

Jonathan, rejects the opportunity for intergenerational dialogue.³¹ The equivalence between the two men is indicated on a structural level too, with the story of Alex meeting Jonathan and guiding him around his home country – whilst unwittingly on an exploratory journey of his own – constituting half of the novel's narrative space; in fact, the text eventually yields exclusively to Alex's writing on Jonathan's return to America. The relationship between Alex and Jonathan has interested many critics including Lisa Propst, who theorises their connection as Foer's means of exploring the 'reconciliations [that] arise from the acknowledgement of a shared legacy of violence and of mutual questions of identity that stem from it.'³² For her, the unmistakable parallels between Alex and Jonathan are evidence that 'contemporary Jewish identity involves the acceptance of responsibility for the needs and suffering even of apparent enemies [...] a willingness to listen to multiple voices.'³³ Although Propst situates her argument in the context of Foer's engagement with Judaism, there is merit to this argument in the context of a discussion of third-generation writing. Understanding the prominence afforded to Alex's narrative is to understand that for Foer, writing the Holocaust as a third-generation individual is to require the voice of another – or others – that allows its story to be told in totality; a requirement that, extending Propst's argument, transcends the boundaries of religion alone. Whilst the vast majority of survivor writing is focalised through one individual's experience, *Everything Is Illuminated* expands the scope of inquiry to shed light on the broader context of the Holocaust. Legacies of trauma, in this novel, do not only connect families, but people across nationalities and time in the representation of a historical moment in which they are all somehow implicated.

Foer's commitment to context and complexity is also clearly demonstrated in the parallels that the text draws between victims of trauma, in addition to those evident between their descendants. When Grandfather first sees the photograph of Augustine, Alex notices how he 'put it close to his face, like he wanted to smell it, or touch it with his eyes';³⁴ later that evening, Alex records how 'his hands were still shaking [...] they had been shaking all day,'³⁵ and when night falls, '[h]is body rotated over and over.'³⁶ Mirroring Jonathan's grandmother, whose varicose veins are unspoken testimonies to her desperate,

³¹ Foer, p. 111.

³² Lisa Propst, "'Making One Story'? Forms of Reconciliation in Jonathan Safran Foer's "Everything Is Illuminated" and Nathan Englander's "The Ministry of Special Cases" in *MELUS*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2011), pp. 37-60, p. 38.

³³ Propst, p. 38.

³⁴ Foer, p. 62.

³⁵ Foer, p. 73.

³⁶ Foer, pp. 73-74.

arduous flight by foot across Europe, Grandfather's trauma is psychosomatically communicated through a body that testifies to his past even as he refuses to speak of it. Reflecting Jonathan's grandmother's absence of speech is Grandfather's claim to blindness; he insists on a lack of sight that is symbolically indicative of a shame that forbids him to "see" the past or its consequences in the present. However, despite the theoretical insistence on these parallels denoting similarity between the experiences of Alex and Jonathan's families, Foer resists this experiential closeness even as his writing gestures towards it. Whilst Alex and Grandfather display pain and confusion that invites sympathy, they are linked to the farcical in a way that compromises the authenticity of their anguish. Alex in particular is presented in a comic light: his obviously overstated confidence in his sexual prowess, his comedy-of-errors-style guidance of Jonathan and his overblown prose invite laughter and point to the overt fictionality of his character. Grandfather, meanwhile, is presented as a stereotypical, bumbling old man whose lack of patience with Jonathan makes the cultural and temporal gulf between them an amusing distraction from the text's darkly complex explorations of guilt, shame and history. Of course, the inclusion of comedy highlights the sinister aspects of the narrative; the use of comedy in Holocaust representation, as discussed in the previous chapter, is nothing new. However, these characterisations refuse the total symbolic reconciliation between Ukrainians and Jews for which Propst argues. There is no real reconciliation in this novel; on Jonathan's return to America, Alex's letters to him go unanswered and Jonathan does nothing to ease Alex's distress regarding his discovery of Grandfather's betrayal of Herschel and his complicity in the Holocaust's violence. With this in mind, the comedy Foer employs in his representation of these lives suggests that although his third-generation writing invites a broader understanding of context and acknowledges the possibility of others' pain, this is a pain that is not presented without qualification or some hesitancy. Although Foer's mode of writing and curious insertion of himself into the narrative indicate his distance from the history he writes, this is a distance that does not preclude his emotional engagement with it; an emotional engagement that refuses the purely reconciliatory, unproblematic presentation of alternate histories and stories that critics such as Propst argue for.

Indeed, this particular ambivalence comes to characterise the reactions that Foer's readers are invited to experience towards Grandfather. Silence, for Grandfather, is a shield; a shield that leads him to deny another of his senses when the woman who they initially believe to be Augustine tells the story of

Jonathan's family and the horrors they endured. 'Shut up', he shouts, punching a table. 'You are lying about it all'.³⁷ Foer presents Grandfather as a victim of traumatic memory in the most traditional sense, refusing to hear the painful past spoken aloud. But this is not a silence that is motivated by memories of oppression; it is rooted in the shame of complicity and betrayal. The specific illumination of this pain, coupled with the sympathy that is generated through the image of an elderly man in distress, invites readers to see Grandfather's pain as existing beyond the divide between victims and perpetrators – the text demands the blurring of those lines and the consideration of the trauma that can be generated by both victimhood and perpetration. Grandfather's character both demands and defies compassion; the trauma he displays is at once uncomfortable and somewhat satisfying in light of the crime he has committed. With Foer emphasising his trauma and transgression in equal measure, Grandfather is both perpetrator and victim, guilty and innocent, liberated and tormented. Attributing narrative space to Grandfather's pain, Foer writes a decidedly third-generation history of the Holocaust in which there is a place not only for other stories, but for other victims plagued by other guilt, other memories and other losses. However, it is precisely because of Foer's third-generation positioning that this distress is presented alongside its source. Emphasising the hesitant compassion that I argue is characteristic of Foer's third-generation treatment of the Holocaust, Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* not only illuminates the perpetrator pain that is refused in survivor writing, but the uncertainty with which Foer approaches these narratives despite their inclusion in his text.

How trauma travels

Although Foer approaches the task of presenting the pain of others with caution, the complex dynamics of the distress that he does display further inform this analysis of intergenerational trauma. Previous to Alex finding out that his Grandfather was instrumental in Herschel's murder, he insists on Jonathan asking his grandmother about her history: 'if this means looking at her when she cries', he insists, 'then you must look'.³⁸ Initially, Alex views the pain of the past as something that both the victim and their descendants must confront. When, however, the ugliness of his own past threatens to be exposed in the novel Jonathan is writing about their journey, Alex demands the erasure he previously protested against. Alex begs to Jonathan to alter his story to omit his Grandfather's crime: 'I beseech you', he

³⁷ Foer, p.

³⁸ Foer, pp. 143-144.

writes, 'to forgive us, and to make us better than we are. Make us good.'³⁹ This statement is not simply a request for silence, or a suggestion of the way that writing is bound up with record and definition. It is a request for the rewriting of history, an appeal for acquittal. Acutely aware that 'once you hear something, you can never return to the time before you heard it',⁴⁰ Alex attempts to bury the traumatic consequences of his grandfather's actions. It is important to note, however, that these consequences differ dramatically for Grandfather and Alex. As discussed in the previous paragraph, the resurfacing of the past for Grandfather is the reintroduction of shame, guilt, anguish and loss into a life that he had tried to forget. However, Alex's request for Jonathan's silence is indicative of a trauma that is markedly different. 'What made this story most scary', explains Alex, 'was how rapid it was moving. I do not mean what happened in the story, but how the story was told. I felt that it could not be stopped.'⁴¹ The fact that it is not 'what happened in the story' that scares Alex is key; what frightens him is the impact of these revelations on his own sense of identity. For Alex, learning about his Grandfather's past is not only the discovery of who his grandfather is but a story about the darkness of his origins. What Alex discovers has consequences for his psychical placement in the world, consequences for the way in which he understands his own identity and the history to which that is tied. Thus, although Grandfather and Alex are affected by the memory of the Holocaust, discussion of that past elicits very different reactions that spring from very different places. This is significant in terms of understanding what intergenerational trauma is, and how any pain suffered by subsequent generations – if, indeed, it is suffered at all – must not be conflated with that of the survivor in order to maintain the complexity, nuances and uniqueness of both.

And indeed, it is the failure of one character to understand that the trauma of the past does not have to be an all-consuming, destructive force that produces the novel's tragic ending. 'I knew', Grandfather tells Alex shortly before he takes his own life, 'that I had to change everything to leave everything behind and I knew that I could never allow him [Alex's father] to learn of what I did because it was for him [...] he is how he is because a father is always responsible for his son [...] I loved him so much that I made love impossible and I am sorry'.⁴² In his stream-of-consciousness confessional to his

³⁹ Foer, p. 145.

⁴⁰ Foer, p. 156.

⁴¹ Foer, p. 186.

⁴² Foer, p. 251.

grandson, Grandfather explains his silence as emerging not only from a place of shame and guilt, but of paternal responsibility. But despite initially believing that the silencing of history would provide security and the bliss of ignorance, Alex's father 'is how he is' – 'a first rate puncher',⁴³ Alex tells his readers at the start of the novel – because Grandfather's silence made the expression of that love impossible. Trauma, the novel suggests, precludes the possibility not only of history, but of love when silence is employed as a defence against its memory – a fact that is not only demonstrative of the depth of trauma's wounds, but illustrative of the trauma that can be generated for a survivor's child. In the few lines that describe him in the text, Alex's father is painted as a cold, abusive, unfeeling man who cares little for his children. But whilst these references prejudice the reader against him on first reading, an examination of his character in the context of the frustrated silence he grew up with invites a compassionate understanding. Clearly, Alex's father is traumatised; but, crucially, not by the Holocaust itself. Alex's father is a victim of the complex political legacy of genocide and of a parent muted and held captive by memory, unable to show love to his child – a trauma that is no less wounding, but critically different from the trauma experienced by Grandfather despite the ways in which they are connected.

Alex shows no signs of this inability to love. At many points in the text, he expresses his affection for his younger brother and vows to protect him; promises which suggest that the post-traumatic consequences of detachment affecting his father have not filtered down to him. It is, in fact, the reality of how he is *not* wounded in this way that makes Grandfather's suicide so tragic. In a letter that he writes to Jonathan before he commits suicide in the bath, Grandfather explains his decision to end his life as follows:

All is for Sasha⁴⁴ and Iggy, Jonathan. Do you understand? [...] They must begin again. They must cut all of the strings, yes? With you (Sasha told me that you will not write to each other anymore), with their father (who is now gone forever), with everything they have known. Sasha has started it, and now I must finish it. [...] it is not out of weakness that I will go to the bath [...] it is not because I cannot endure. [...] I am complete with happiness, and it is what I must do, and I will do it. [...] I will walk without noise, and I will open the door in darkness, and I will⁴⁵

The imagery invoked by Grandfather's insistence on Sasha and Igor 'cut[ting] all of the strings' is that of total severance between past and future. With the statement that 'Sasha has started it, and now I must finish it', Grandfather implies that they cannot exist at the same time; he feels compelled to liberate his

⁴³ Foer, p. 6.

⁴⁴ Sasha is Alex's real name.

⁴⁵ Foer, pp. 275-276.

grandsons from the shame he cannot escape from, determined that his trauma should not be their inheritance. The fact that he admits to feeling 'happiness' in this moment can be read as his conviction in the nobility of his actions. But his words are not entirely convincing; although he claims happiness and insists that the decision to end his life is not because of his inability to continue, the extreme mental anguish he has clearly experienced as his memories have resurfaced make these claims difficult to accept. This is a man who has claimed blindness to shield himself from painful memories, and his grasping at death appears indicative of an increased desire for a more permanent blindness; a final refuge from memory, fear, anger and guilt. But whilst Tracy Floreani suggests both his pain and shame as the motivation for his suicide,⁴⁶ this chapter suggests that in this moment, it is the misunderstood nature of transgenerational trauma that leaves death as a singular option. Although it is clear that Alex is not suffering the effects of trauma as his father did, and does not associate himself with his grandfather's past in a shameful way, Grandfather – symbolically blinded by his trauma once again – cannot see this. Refusing, or perhaps simply unable, to comprehend how the depth of his own wounds might not destroy his descendants in the same way it has him, Grandfather views his death as a necessary condition for Alex's life and liberation; a liberation of the sort that, crucially and tragically, Alex does not need. Certainly, Alex has been shaken by the revelations of his Grandfather's past; but memory does not consume him as it does his Grandfather. The disturbance he experiences is related to the forced reconsideration of his origins and identity, not one associated with the crippling guilt experienced by his Grandfather. Although both men are bound to a specific past, they are bound to it in radically different ways; the misunderstanding of which leads to the death of the elder. Whilst they are of course connected, the sense of tragedy at the novel's end is created by the failure to distinguish between the original trauma and the very different pain its memory generates; a cautionary tale that, through the implications of its multiple voices, demonstrates the urgency and necessity of distinguishing between intergenerational expressions of suffering.

⁴⁶ Tracy Floreani, 'Metafictional Witnessing in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated*' in *Unfinalized Moments: Essays in the Development of Contemporary Jewish American Fiction*, ed. by Derek Royal (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2011), pp. 139-150, p. 144.

K. Sello Duiker – *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*

Tshepo/Angelo/Angelo-Tshepo/Tshepo: the complexity of the aftermath

Reflecting Foer's insertion of himself into *Everything is Illuminated* through the character of Jonathan, it is difficult not to read Tshepo as a semi-autobiographical iteration of Duiker. Sharing Duiker's struggles with mental health, sexuality and crises of identity and prejudice, encountering Tshepo's refracted and anguished voice is to hear the unmistakable echo of Duiker's own sense of precarity in a post-apartheid landscape. *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* is a cacophonous work, constituted by eleven first-person narratives of which Tshepo's is the most complex – developing and regressing, as this section's title suggests, throughout. It is clear from the novel's first page that Tshepo is a man afflicted: despite being recently released from Valkenberg, a mental health facility where he was diagnosed with 'cannabis induced psychosis',⁴⁷ Tshepo remains a melancholic figure plagued by memories of a mother whose murder he witnessed as a child. The specific character of Tshepo's pain is significant. It is easy to read Tshepo as a paradigmatic trauma victim: displaying classic trauma symptomatology, Tshepo describes the 'hollow ugliness that is always with me when I close my eyes',⁴⁸ 'the memories and cries that are haunting me',⁴⁹ and admits that 'I don't know what I feel half the time.'⁵⁰ However, Tshepo simultaneously defies the conventions of silence and submission associated with trauma in significant ways. In stark contrast to Alex's grandfather who recalls his past with extreme reticence, Tshepo recounts – with precise detail and little emotional difficulty – the events of the night on which he lost his mother, his virginity, his relationship with his father and his innocence.⁵¹ Where Alex's grandfather avoids memory, Tshepo actively seeks it out: 'I spent my late teens and early twenties searching for the truth', he tells his best friend Mmabatho. 'It nearly killed me. It was hell'.⁵² However, the resilience implied by these reactions is complicated by Tshepo's continued melancholic state. 'I feel', he laments, 'like I've lost something'⁵³ – an expression of loss that is crucial in characterising Tshepo's anguish; an anguish that, in the distress it implies, challenges Verena Jain-Warden's argument that Tshepo's

⁴⁷ Duiker, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Duiker, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Duiker, p. 2.

⁵⁰ Duiker, p. 18.

⁵¹ Duiker, pp. 94-97.

⁵² Duiker, p. 97.

⁵³ Duiker, p. 1.

'experience of pain [...] has no meaning in itself.'⁵⁴ At once haunted by and searching for the past, Duiker presents Tshepo as liminally suspended between an uncomprehending state of trauma and a depression borne of a recognised loss; whilst Tshepo is at times overwhelmed by the past, he has, to some extent, come to terms with its consequences. It is this state of liminality that is reflective not only of Duiker's own position as a second-generation writer, but of South Africa itself. Tshepo's state becomes emblematic of the post-apartheid generation, who, as described by Newman above, are not held hostage by the past but remain acutely aware of it; like Tshepo, the generation of which Duiker is a part is caught in an uncertain present that is its own liminal state between a violent past and a still-undefined future. Playing with the poles of temporality from the outset through his protagonist, Duiker presents a dynamic interplay between trauma and loss and past and present that becomes its own metaphor for the emerging, yet still unstable, generation and landscape that he writes – and the perspective from which it is written.

Substantiating the argument that Tshepo comes to represent the infancy of post-apartheid South Africa is the close association between his character and the motif of childhood. Whilst Zebron, a fellow patient at Valkenberg, describes Tshepo's behaviour as 'childish',⁵⁵ his landlord's wife notes '[h]is big, overgrown eyes that appear childlike'⁵⁶ and observes that Tshepo 'has many books and spends hours poring over them like a child playing with a favourite toy.'⁵⁷ But the association between Tshepo and a childlike state is made not only by outsiders; Tshepo himself continually idealises childhood. In a moment of uncertainty, he admits that he 'search[es] for the boy I lost along the way [...] I miss that boy terribly.'⁵⁸ Mmabatho notices as he looks wistfully 'as we pass children playing in a quad at a nearby school'⁵⁹ and Tshepo admits a mournful nostalgia for youth's naivety.⁶⁰ But in addition to childhood representing the potential for absolute happiness for Tshepo – he states, having embraced his homosexuality that the pleasure of exploring a man's body 'is like being a child again'⁶¹ – there is an undeniably dark edge to these references too. When he is drugged into submission by the doctors at

⁵⁴ Verena Jain-Warden, 'Angels in South Africa? Queer Urbanity in K. Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* and Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*' in *Re-Inventing the Postcolonial (in the) Metropolis* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2016) pp. 101-114, p. 108.

⁵⁵ Duiker, p. 61.

⁵⁶ Duiker, p. 127.

⁵⁷ Duiker, p. 120.

⁵⁸ Duiker, p. 71.

⁵⁹ Duiker, p. 76.

⁶⁰ Duiker, p. 84.

⁶¹ Duiker, p. 444.

Valkenberg, Tshepo 'become[s] a child again';⁶² in his most vulnerable moments after having been attacked by his roommate and love interest Chris, Tshepo 'became mute, like a child';⁶³ and in confrontation with his father, Tshepo is aware of himself 'sounding like a ten-year-old'.⁶⁴ What these opposing statements make clear is that childhood is the fault line upon which his identity is split; whilst childhood is idealised, the discriminatory and violent political dynamics of both Tshepo and Duiker's childhoods simultaneously charge this idealism with an uneasy darkness. Mirroring the liminality that Duiker presents between trauma and loss is that presented between innocence and destruction in the context of childhood that is its own troubled characterisation of the time of Duiker's writing and Duiker's uncertain place within this post-apartheid landscape.

The sense of precarity surrounding Tshepo is not confined to the conceptual. Through the interactions that he has with those around him, Duiker exposes the uncertainty and isolation generated by living in a society that has duped itself into believing the myth of its own post-racial reality. Upon his release from Valkenberg, Tshepo notes that whilst the post-apartheid generation may see beyond colour, today's concern is that:

you are wearing Soviet jeans with an expensive Gucci shirt [...] Dolce and Gabbana kicks more ass than any bill of rights [...] You must wear a Swatch so that a swarthy-looking blond can have a pick-up line. So that colour becomes secondary to the person you present. They want to say ah you're cool and not ah you're black or white.⁶⁵

Whilst the rules have changed, the game has not; Tshepo learns quickly that whilst they may not be racial, there are still conditions attached to social acceptance and a need to distract others from the colour of one's skin. The brand names in this passage become badges of acceptability, emblematic of a standard from which exclusion is inevitable. Cut off by his wealthy father, Tshepo is outside these conditions of acceptance even as he delineates them. As a privately-educated black man who, through the circumstances of life, now struggles financially, Tshepo is rejected both by the black community who view him as 'spoiled, one of those darkies who went to larney schools and learned to talk like them'⁶⁶ and by the cautiously hybrid social groups seeking alternative ways to assert superiority. In using

⁶² Duiker, p. 17.

⁶³ Duiker, p. 230.

⁶⁴ Duiker, p. 533.

⁶⁵ Duiker, pp. 17-18.

⁶⁶ Duiker, p. 204.

Tshepo's voice to observe that still, 'there is no sense of solidarity'⁶⁷, Duiker pokes yet another hole in the rainbow nation narrative of national harmony and makes clear that exclusion and discrimination are still-present elements of post-apartheid society; and, therefore, that the trauma of discrimination is still a very real danger. Contrasting Tshepo's starkly melancholic voice with the materiality and flippancy characterising the tone of the passage above, Duiker collapses the temporal boundary between past and present by emphasising the continued existence of prejudice and the consciousness of colour.

Acutely aware of his relegation to the peripheral and his poverty, Tshepo seeks belonging and employment – finding both of these at Steamy Windows, a massage parlour catering to South Africa's gay community. After colouring his hair copper, Tshepo tries to:

think of a name for the face staring back at me. I have always liked the name Michelangelo, and of course the artist's work. I settle for the last part of his name, Angelo. I say it over and over in the mirror till I begin to feel comfortable with it, till I begin to believe it.⁶⁸

The implications of creation associated with this name and its origin are significant; reinforcing the connotation of the childhood motif, Angelo's inhabitation of this new identity relies on a process of creation; an artistry that is itself reflected in Duiker's fictional project, which is his own attempt at inhabiting and exploring the parameters of post-apartheid identity. In light of this argument, the connection that Duiker makes between stories and identity is compelling: repeating this new name until he himself is convinced of his relation to it, Angelo's ability to reject his painful past is predicated, here, on the construction of an identity based on illusion. Whilst this can be understood as Duiker's critique of the fragility and illusion of a post-racial South Africa, this may also point to the way that – as Foer suggests – stories are necessary foundations of identity in post-violence presents. Crucial to this chapter's discussion of multi-voicedness, however, is the contrast between Tshepo and Angelo's voices; the variation within the narrative of a single character. Tellingly, Angelo's voice is less inwardly focused than Tshepo's; whilst Tshepo wonders about the inadequacies of his own life, Angelo questions 'how much pressure *our* culture exerts on *us*' [emphasis mine].⁶⁹ Considered alongside the construction of a new identity explicitly intended to sever his past from his present, this shift from an individual to a

⁶⁷ Duiker, p. 29.

⁶⁸ Duiker, p. 303.

⁶⁹ Duiker, p. 440.

collective mentality reflects Foer's implication that post-survivor literature necessarily expands the scope of the stories told about the past, to build communities bound by shared experiences of discrimination and suffering. And indeed, for some time, Angelo's newfound community remains intact, giving him the confidence to assert his sexuality. 'Why shouldn't two men show each other love, the way they want?' he asks. 'Who is anyone to judge [...] What am I waiting for? [...] Permission? Fuck permission.'⁷⁰ The difference in tone between Angelo's and Tshepo's narratives is clear: where Tshepo was weak, Angelo is strong; where Tshepo was afraid, Angelo is fearless; and whilst Tshepo is convinced that social progress has been a lie, Angelo's newfound rainbow community allows him to see possibilities for real interracial peace in the future. In an instant, however, Angelo's illusion of acceptance is shattered when his boss expresses concern that one of Angelo's colleagues would 'go kaffir on us.'⁷¹ Crucially, this episode and the racist slur at its centre takes place within Tshepo's narrative, not Angelo's; Angelo's voice, from this moment onwards, fades entirely from the novel in a way that becomes symbolic of the silencing generated by the prejudice that continues to plague South Africa. Duiker's juxtaposition of Tshepo's and Angelo's narratives is purposeful as it painful to read. Employing multivocality within, as well as between, his characters, the contrast between the optimism of Angelo's voice and the melancholic overtones of Tshepo's renders Duiker's protagonist a man torn between hope and disappointment. Given the way that Angelo's confidence is predicated upon an illusory identity, it is perhaps unsurprising that his narrative fails to endure throughout the text. It is Duiker's connection of hope to illusion, however, that makes this voice significant despite – and, indeed, because of – its breakdown. Housing the voices of dashed hope and continued despair within the figure of his lead character, Duiker presents Tshepo's voice as inflected, in turn, by the pain of the past, the optimistic hope for the future and the continued sting of rejection in the present. Understood in this way, the many voices associated with Tshepo's character signal not only the instability of this specific historical moment, but that way that this instability is directly connected to the interaction between past, present and future that Tshepo's tortured and changing voice comes to represent. The tragedy here is not that nothing has changed; it is not, as Tshepo states, the fact that 'we become pigments in a whirlpool of colour [that] in the centre [...] is lily white.'⁷² Rather, the heartbreak of this textual moment is generated by the devastating destruction of the hope for a future beyond racism; a shattering that is emphasised

⁷⁰ Duiker, pp. 443-444.

⁷¹ Duiker, p. 374.

⁷² Duiker, p. 458.

by the collapse of Angelo's voice and the reinstatement of Tshepo's, inflected by the pain of a past that clearly remains tragically present.

The novel's ending is particularly compelling in the context of the movement between past and present. Following an episode of suicidal, manic psychosis that Duiker attributes to Angelo-Tshepo – a character whose very name suggests the chaotic meeting of temporalities – Duiker presents us once again with Tshepo who has 'left Angelo behind in Cape Town, still roaming its streets and exploring its underworld.'⁷³ Tshepo has settled in Hillbrow, where he works in a children's home. This setting substantiates the connection between childhood and South Africa's infancy discussed above, but it is the didactic quality of Tshepo's final statements that are most curious. Tshepo explains that he forgives the children who make mistakes, '[b]ut only if they ask me to forgive them [...] too much damage has been done by people who do not know how to ask forgiveness.'⁷⁴ Four pages later, Tshepo muses that 'perhaps the future of mankind lies in each other, not in separate continents with separate people. We are still evolving as a species, our differences are merging.'⁷⁵ Invoking the concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation, Duiker taps into tropes of transition writing that should perhaps have been moved past in post-apartheid renderings of South African society. It is the very fact of this aesthetic, however, that demonstrates the particular position of the post-apartheid generation of which Duiker is a part. Although writing from a time practically removed from the apartheid era, the layered and complex presence of that past in this present creates an environment of instability that comes to characterise its inhabitants and literary efforts at its representation.

Voicing gender: motherhood and the mythic

In light of the autobiographical underpinning of Tshepo's character, the voice that Duiker gives his female characters inevitably relies more heavily on imagination rather than experience; the consequences and implications of which are most interesting in his creation of Mmabatho, Tshepo's female best friend. Whilst Tshepo oscillates between trauma and loss, the complexity of Mmabatho's character is generated by her own occupation of the liminal space between tradition and modernity.

⁷³ Duiker, p. 603.

⁷⁴ Duiker, p. 604.

⁷⁵ Duiker, p. 608.

Mmabatho embodies contrast. Whilst she is a sexually liberated feminist who questions the double-standard of behaviour expected from men and women,⁷⁶ she admits that 'in the arms of a man sometimes I lose all judgement'.⁷⁷ She is both a model of cosmopolitanism and a victim of cosmopolitan society; although she has a multi-racial network of friends and relationships, she is branded as 'coconut, trash, confused, needy, cheap, desperate, pathetic'⁷⁸ by those outside it. Despite experiencing racism, Mmabatho holds strong prejudices of her own, expressing to Tshepo her disdain of foreigners' 'funny smells and accents'.⁷⁹ Highlighting the complexity of her character through these contradictory character elements, Duiker endows Mmabatho with a depth of personality that makes her appear relatable and authentic. This depth appears, initially, to extend to Duiker's understanding of the difficulty inhering in navigating gender in post-apartheid South Africa. Mmabatho, ruminating on a failed relationship, says that men 'will never know the amount of preparation it takes to be a woman, the degree of caution [...] A woman has to go far to look for herself'.⁸⁰ Whilst the loss and lostness implied here ties Mmabatho to Tshepo's own search for identity, Duiker's words signal an emotional understanding of the female experience for which he has been praised by critics such as Sam Radithalo who emphasises Duiker's 'close identification with [...] womanhood'.⁸¹ Reflecting *Everything Is Illuminated*, it appears that *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* reaches out to the experience of others through the polyvocal mode to create a network of lives touched by the same moment of violence.

However, Duiker's often-problematic presentation of gender in *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* points to the limits of imagining alterity through polyvocality even as Duiker attempts it; although Mmabatho's voice appears to represent a complex, authentic and fierce femininity, the integrity of this voice is undermined by several other textual elements. One such example is the repeated connection that Duiker makes between myth and motherhood. Struggling with mental health issues caused by the loss of his mother, Tshepo addresses her directly, at length, at several points in the text; these are loquaciously dense pages in which Tshepo reveals that 'I miss you and ache for the days when you were around to look after me [...] those were the happiest days of my life'.⁸² Tshepo's mother's voice is never heard in

⁷⁶ Duiker, p. 14.

⁷⁷ Duiker, p. 165.

⁷⁸ Duiker, p. 43

⁷⁹ Duiker, p. 344.

⁸⁰ Duiker, p. 170.

⁸¹ Sam Radithalo, "'The Travelling Salesman": A Tribute to K. Sello Duiker, 1974-2005' in *Feminist Africa*, Vol. 5 (2005), pp. 96-104, p. 100.

⁸² Duiker, p. 83.

the text, despite its often overwhelming multi-voicedness. As such, readers are presented only with an idealised image of a woman who epitomises the maternal qualities of unconditional love, protection and acceptance. Given the romanticised perfection of this characterisation, it is perhaps unsurprising that Tshepo's mother takes on mythical status. At first, Tshepo figures his mother first as nature itself: 'You are like a cool river flowing with clear water, the sacred Nile, the mother of people.'⁸³ Here, Tshepo metaphorically realises his own point of origin as water, life's own sustaining force. As the text progresses, however, Tshepo's references to his mother become grander: 'You are Isis', he declares, 'resting in the garden of delights, the mother who never forgot her child'.⁸⁴ Framing his mother as the Egyptian goddess and as an archetype of motherhood in an Edenic setting, the sentimentality that initially characterised Tshepo's expressions of mourning becomes a projection of incomparable perfection; his mother, quite literally, becomes the stuff of legend. It is the idealisation inherent in this characterisation, however, that problematises Duiker's portrayal of femininity. The woman who is presented as perfect is the only one who does not speak directly; she exists only as a construction of Tshepo's imagination, filtered through a framework of myth that only serves to emphasise her distance from reality – she is a story, an abstraction and profoundly one-dimensional. Significantly, Mmabatho's narrative quickly comes to centre around the circumstances surrounding her own pregnancy. Restricting the portrayal of women in his text to symbols of motherhood, Duiker fails to recognise and represent the variation and complexity of the female experience; a reductive portrayal that belies the understanding of the feminine existence that this narrative strand initially suggests.

In addition to reducing these women to their anatomical abilities alone, the novel's troubling presentation of women is supplemented by the fact that the novel's homosexuality narrative is intensely and exclusively phallogocentric. The discussions of gender and sexuality that Tshepo has at Steamy Windows – most frequently with the character of Sebastian – display a strangely simultaneous draw to, and revulsion against, feminine energy. Sebastian is a passionate advocate of 'the brotherhood'⁸⁵ – a homosexual male collective who advocate for the primitive rawness and near-spiritual possibilities of homosexual intercourse; 'being gay', he claims, 'is god-inspired'.⁸⁶ Although Sebastian praises gay

⁸³ Duiker, p. 118.

⁸⁴ Duiker, p. 506.

⁸⁵ Duiker, p. 339.

⁸⁶ Duiker, p. 333.

women⁸⁷ and views both god and the earth as essentially feminine,⁸⁸ there is an overt animosity in his comment that 'we queens have been quietly living in the shadow of women for so long'⁸⁹ and the assertion that gay men 'understand each other's needs better than a woman.'⁹⁰ Whilst he acknowledges that 'women make things work in a way that men can't, even gay men', Sebastian attributes this ability to quiet introspection; '[w]omen make better bosses', he claims, 'when they are not trying to be men, because they don't use aggression as a tool'.⁹¹ Reducing women once again, this time to stereotypical passivity, Sebastian's narrative highlights the curious contempt in which women are held by the homosexual community into which Tshepo – who echoes this contempt at other points in the text⁹² – integrates himself. Claiming that 'Duiker's novel subjects the vision of brotherhood to a stinging critique, highlighting its potential sexism',⁹³ Derrick Higginbotham implies Duiker's conscious emphasis of misogyny. Considering the brotherhood's philosophy in isolation, this observation is interesting. However, the existence of this narrative alongside Mmabatho's resists Higginbotham's claim of Duiker's conscious representation of gender prejudice. The contrasts employed at the start of Mmabatho's narrative are suggestive of a genuine attempt at the conveyance of complexity. However, giving way to stereotype as Mmabatho's narrative progresses, the limit of Duiker's imagination of the other is exposed in a way that suggests the particular character of this second-generation writing. Writing in relative proximity to apartheid and immersed in a present in which the past's traces remain, Duiker – as his autobiographical rendering of Tshepo suggests – exists in a state of personal liminality in which the parameters of his own black, homosexual identity in this changing landscape are continually being defined. Mirroring Foer's text, Duiker's second-generation writing reaches out to other experiences of suffering. But whilst Foer's third-generation status allows him to approach this task with a more defined sense of self in relation to a past that he is both temporally and geographically removed from, the closeness of the past and its residues for Duiker makes the project of his self-representation challenging enough; imagining the complex lives of others, as his conflicting representation of femininity suggests – is not quite possible when they are imagined from a place of uncertainty. In addition to making its own

⁸⁷ Duiker, p. 335.

⁸⁸ Duiker, p. 549.

⁸⁹ Duiker, p. 449.

⁹⁰ Duiker, p. 335.

⁹¹ Duiker, p. 335.

⁹² Duiker, p. 417.

⁹³ Derrick Higginbotham, 'Beyond Identity: Queer Affiliation and the Politics of Solidarity in Gordimer's *None to Accompany Me* and Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*' in *Queer in Africa: LGBTQI Identities, Citizenship and Activism*, ed. by Zethu Matebeni, Surya Monro and Vasu Reddy (Oxon: Routledge, 2018), pp. 45-62, p. 51.

argument for the need to distinguish between generations when discussing intergenerational trauma and its literary representation, the contradictory and occasionally troubling rendering of the female in Duiker's text suggests the way that polyvocality, whilst emphasising the voices of some, simultaneously obscures those of others.

Voicing friend and foe

Duiker's presentation of gender emphasises the challenge of writing alterity even in the generational aftermath of such deeply depersonalising state-sanctioned mass violence – the instability of which is still keenly felt in Duiker's South Africa. How, though, might Duiker's presentation of men differ in intent and effectiveness than those of women, given the shared experience of gender? The voice of the past in the present is embodied by Zebron, a fellow patient of Tshepo's at Valkenberg whose institutionalisation spans apartheid, transition and the initial post-apartheid years. Zebron initially invites no pity; in his own words, 'I am the forgotten who lies rotting in a barrel of fermenting apples [...] some of us are born with too much corruption to ever survive it.'⁹⁴ He is dangerously manipulative, a convicted rapist and continually catches himself 'fantasising about bludgeoning the female nurses.'⁹⁵ But as the text progresses, and Tshepo forms a bond with him, it becomes clear that there is cause for Zebron's violence; he is at once scarred from an abusive childhood, and continually broken by psychiatrists who medically render him comatose after unsuccessful attempts at abreaction.⁹⁶ The façade of angry defensiveness he displays to those around him, however, is undermined by his admission that:

[w]hen you don't have the privacy of your own thoughts [...] you begin to see that you are just a scribble of flesh and breath, someone else's toy and amusement [...] I don't fear hell. I know it. I live it.⁹⁷

The present tense verbs of 'know' and 'live', coupled with Zebron's metaphoric description of his own immateriality, collapses the distance between past and present by calling attention to the institutional and individual retention of prejudice and the continued epidemic of mental health issues that specifically

⁹⁴ Duiker, p. 23.

⁹⁵ Duiker, p. 23.

⁹⁶ Duiker, p. 23.

⁹⁷ Duiker, p. 53.

affected black South African men during apartheid.⁹⁸ The compelling nature of this passage, however, goes beyond its implications of temporal collapse: the experience it describes, and the words through which it is expressed, draw undeniable comparisons between Zebron and Tshepo. Due to their experience of mental illness, both men – who experienced turbulent childhoods – are forced to describe their thoughts in a way that compromises the privacy of their mental space; like Zebron, who describes himself as a ‘toy’, Tshepo is manipulated and played with by others; where Zebron claims to ‘live’ in ‘hell’, Tshepo – as noted above – was immersed in his own hell when searching for the truth about his past. What emerges here, therefore, is not simply the collapse of the divide between past and present, but that between elder and adult. The polyvocal stands of the novel come to echo one another in this moment in a way which emphasises a commonality of experience despite the generational distance between these characters; Zebron and Tshepo’s positioning on either side of this temporal divide almost appear accidents of birth. The sympathy that Duiker invites readers to feel for Zebron through this passage and through Zebron’s description of his hellish childhood is thus generated both by the disadvantage of Zebron’s youth and the link between Zebron and Tshepo’s lives. Bringing context to bear on the labels and definitions generated by apartheid-era politics, Duiker – like Foer – looks to explain the transgressions of the elder. Furthermore, like that of Jonathan’s grandmother, Zebron’s silence – his refusal to verbalise remorse to the doctors that demand it – is not grounded in trauma. ‘I want to apologise’, he says, ‘but I don’t know how’⁹⁹ – ‘I want to be forgiven’, he cries, ‘but I don’t know how.’¹⁰⁰ Duiker, writing this novel and Zebron’s narrative as a second-generation author from a post-apartheid vantage point has the words that Zebron cannot find. In addition to highlighting the inadequacy of language to address trauma in the immediacy or immediate aftermath of its happening – a critique, perhaps, of the TRC, Duiker’s inclusion of the narrative of a man so defined by the past in his representation of South Africa’s present emphasise the fact that these temporal states – represented by Zebron and Tshepo themselves – cannot be separated with any degree of ease.

Whilst Zebron fails to move beyond the past on a linguistic level, there are also those who cannot move beyond apartheid in other ways. One such example is Chris, Tshepo’s roommate, to whom another

⁹⁸ See, for example, Ros Hirschowitz and Mark Orkin, ‘Trauma and Mental Health in South Africa’ in *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 41, No. 1/3 (1997), pp. 169-182.

⁹⁹ Duiker, p. 152.

¹⁰⁰ Duiker, p. 185.

narrative strand of the novel is allocated. Despite Tshepo falling in love with him, Chris feels an overwhelming resentment towards the 'town boy [with] too much learning and that larney stuff'.¹⁰¹ Chris is desperately angry with a system that has allowed Tshepo relative success whilst he remains, in his own words, 'a fuck up',¹⁰² who is aware that even in a supposedly post racial state, people view him as 'just another kleurling getting by, probably drinking his money away at a tavern'.¹⁰³ He is angry that the new South Africa has made no provision for the healing of grievances like his own, and that he must now 'smile, be polite' to '[t]he same bastards who were telling you to scrub floors and fucked you up if you spoke out of line a while ago [...] I can't smile. Naai, there's too much to remember.'¹⁰⁴ But in addition to using Chris's voice to represent those who the rainbow nation narrative left behind and those for whom interracial hatred still remains very real, Duiker also uses Chris's narrative to expose the poverty that still remains in a country that claimed to want to lift all its citizens. He describes his home, the Cape Flats, as consisting of 'slums, broken toilets with shit flies everywhere, tall riot lamps [...] [t]wo families squatting in three rooms [...] You stop being a person if you spend your whole life in the Cape Flats'.¹⁰⁵ Whilst men like Chris's father may have been openly dehumanised by the apartheid regime, Chris feels dehumanised by the fact that he is still living in the same conditions, albeit with a different narrative underpinning his times. It is his incredible anger towards the world, and towards Tshepo – who constantly reminds him 'that I had to go through the back door to get to where I am'¹⁰⁶ – which motivates him to do the unspeakable. After months of emotionally abusing Tshepo and occasionally striking him, Chris and several of his friends rape Tshepo and rob him as he lies, stunned, in the bathroom of the apartment. This moment is tragic in several ways, each contributing to a statement that Duiker is making through Chris's voice and actions. For Tshepo, who is in love with Chris, this violation is both his fantasy of their coupling manifesting itself in the worst way and a confirmation that he has been rejected once again. Most significant, however, is the cyclicity inherent in this moment; a recurrence indicated by Tshepo's statement that he feels as if his mother has died again.¹⁰⁷ In addition to this brutal violation making a tragic parody of interracial unity in post-apartheid South Africa – substantiating Brenna Munro's

¹⁰¹ Duiker, p. 226

¹⁰² Duiker, p. 202.

¹⁰³ Duiker, p. 205.

¹⁰⁴ Duiker, p. 206.

¹⁰⁵ Duiker, p. 202.

¹⁰⁶ Duiker, p. 278.

¹⁰⁷ Duiker, p. 284.

observation that writers like Duiker 'have turned to rape [...] as a figure for broken social compacts'¹⁰⁸ – the apartheid-era violence to which this moment comes to be linked collapses the boundaries between past and present in a chilling way that warns of the presence of violence in a society that has supposedly progressed past this point.

In his quest to represent South Africa in its entirety, Duiker creates and gives voice to West, an Afrikaner who Angelo meets at Steamy Windows. West, too, is disillusioned with the current state of South Africa; he despairs of capitalism¹⁰⁹ and works at Steamy Windows because 'it forces you to think about things, to examine your beliefs, to test your tolerance.'¹¹⁰ Tshepo is drawn to West because he is a white man seemingly committed to moving beyond the racial boundaries of years past. Unlike others who Tshepo encounters, West understands that '[b]ehind the great facades like money, wealth, positions, influences and power there are still only people.'¹¹¹ But Tshepo is stunned when, on a visit to West's home town, West says nothing when he and Tshepo hear Jacob, the young black boy working for the hardware store owner, calling him 'baas'. Noticing Tshepo's shock, West explains:

Magtig, what do you want me to say to him? Sorry, apartheid is finished now, no more baas? [...] you cannot just abandon people. I am Afrikaans. I will never abandon my people [...] Because if I do, then I'm saying I'm better [...] And I'm not like that [...] It is still apartheid for some [...] Don't you get that? It's painful to some that blacks are in power now. It makes some of them the moer in.¹¹²

Despite appearing to have broken through the colour barrier, the decisive statement that 'I am Afrikaans' and the possessive tone with which West refers to white South Africans as 'my people' compromises the integrity of his supposed commitment to racial equality. What emerges from this encounter is a tension between the real and the imagined, a dynamic to which West – a heterosexual male performing homosexuality at Steamy Windows – is closely tied. It is particularly telling, however, that Duiker chooses to assert the gulf between appearance and reality through language. Inflecting this passage with Afrikaans, Duiker gestures towards the residual racism and discriminatory mentalities that exist even at a generational remove from the apartheid years. Whilst Zebon's lack of words can be read as

¹⁰⁸ Brenna Munro, 'Sexuality and Gender in the African Novel' in *The Novel in Africa and the Caribbean Since 1950*, ed. By Simon Gikandi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 167-180, p. 169.

¹⁰⁹ Duiker, p. 390.

¹¹⁰ Duiker, p. 391.

¹¹¹ Duiker, p. 433.

¹¹² Duiker, p. 479.

Duiker's criticism of the failure of the TRC to generate reconciliation through testimony, the vocabulary of prejudice and betrayal with which West is associated suggests the relationship between language and South Africa's post-apartheid precarity in a different way. The shock of this moment for Tshepo is generated by the exposure of the fallacy underpinning this friendship; the revelation of the fiction of the statements West has made regarding his movement beyond colour. Like Foer and Kertész, Duiker implies here that fiction remains an inherent part of present existence; that the stories we tell each other both create, and destroy interpersonal connections. The precarity of the intersubjective dynamic that appears in this moment – and, indeed, that can be detected throughout the novel – is a consequence of the illusions of which language is capable; illusions which point to the essentially ersatz character even of South Africa's most progressive pockets of society. Certainly, polyvocality functions in *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* as an aesthetic suggestion of the relationship between pains, lives and experiences. But in the interactions that these characters have with one another – in the specific way that their voices and stories intersect and interact – Duiker suggests that the possibility of breakdown is just as strong as that of connection.

Diogène Ntarindwa – Carte d'identité

Since the end of the violence of 1994, performance – both musical and dramatic – has been one of the most popular forms employed in its representation. Why? In her oft-cited article 'Performing the Nation', Ananda Breed argues that:

Theatre in Rwanda is a tool for nation building in the aftermath of genocide. The narrative of a re-imagined identity for the country is performed on a national level through government-sanctioned theatre companies [...] and on a community level through grassroots associations [...] theatre provides a space for perpetrators and survivors to weave new relationships.¹¹³

As Breed subsequently demonstrates, theatre conceptualised as a reconciliatory space can indeed function as a nation-building tool for those who have lived through violence. But how does the dramatic space and form function for the descendants of survivors? Given the unique character of this play's multi-voicedness – with Ntarindwa playing all roles, his play is at once univocal and polyvocal, both singly and somehow multiply narrated – how does this strategy make a statement about the past's

¹¹³ Ananda Breed, 'Performing the Nation: Theatre in Post-Genocide Rwanda' in *TDR* (1988-), Vol. 52, No. 1 (2008), pp. 32-50, p. 33.

relationship to the present in a way that might differ from, or reflect, those made in the novels discussed above? Analysing this play as a written text whilst being mindful of its dramatic form, I now move to explore these questions and the second-generation voice that forces their asking.

Reconsidering silence: embodying history

A critical suggestion that has been developing throughout this thesis is that of the varied character of the silence theorised by contemporary trauma theory as resultant of the overwhelming, ineffable nature of the encounter with catastrophe. For Levi, silence was the result of unwilling listeners; in Gatore's text, silence is benevolence; for Alex's Grandfather, silence is rooted in shame, whilst Duiker's Zebron simply does not have the words. *Carte d'identité's* opening scene offers yet another possibility for the character of post-traumatic silence. In the guise of his father, Ntarindwa opens the play with the following:

It is not always easy to talk about things to children. There are taboo subjects, especially family history. Especially when this story is punctuated by events like persecution, massacres, exile, extermination, genocide [...] You want to spare your children, you do not talk about it. You want to safeguard the childhood that is in them.¹¹⁴

Although the word 'taboo' initially suggests the risk and discomfort so often associated with post-traumatic silence, this passage makes clear that this silence is borne of an impulse to protect; Ntarindwa's father's resolution to shield his children from the knowledge of prejudice and death. Interestingly, whilst the protective nature of this silence challenges one assumption – that of silence's link to ineffability in the post-traumatic context – it reinforces another: that of the traumatic consequences of Hirsch's postmemory, which posits that the stories of traumatic events traumatise the generation that follow it, often through a haunting 'absence, secrecy, silence, untranslatability'¹¹⁵ apparent in the parent-child relationship. Both the play itself and Ntarindwa's invocation of his father's voice, however, challenge the idea that post-traumatic silence is inherently threatening. Realising that his father's silence is hiding an element of history that undermines his own understanding of self, Ntarindwa – like Tshepo, and unlike Jonathan – asks constant questions about his roots and origins;

¹¹⁴ Ntarindwa, p. 7. All translations from this play are my own, due to the lack of any published English translation.

¹¹⁵ Hirsch, p. 91.

questions Ntarindwa's father does not only answer, but that are met with continued curiosity rather than fear – 'he did not even let me finish',¹¹⁶ Ntarindwa's father explains, before his son interrupts him with yet more questions. Although the passage above reads like a relatively straightforward statement of protection, it is loaded with implication. In addition to suggesting yet another possibility for the existence of the silence that follows disaster, Ntarindwa's father's eventual recitation of this history – and his son's reaction to it – indicates both Ntarindwa's resilience to traumatic memories and the importance of these stories for his understanding and situation of self. Ntarindwa's voicing of his father in this moment points to the limits and dangers of silence even as he explains the kindness and concern that motivate it; a second-generation voice that argues, here, for the essentialism – and non-traumatic quality – of history for those who come after its occurrence.

The stark visibility of Ntarindwa playing the role of his father onstage is a visual representation of intergenerational connectedness. However, there is also scope to suggest that Ntarindwa's multi-voicedness emphasises the generational distance between himself and his father. Voicing his father's experiences, Ntarindwa describes the civil unrest of the last 1950s that forced many Rwandans into exile. Returning home after a nine-month prison sentence, Ntarindwa's father is met with the sight that prompted his flight to Burundi:

On the hill, I found the herd of cows completely decimated. The animals were dying. Their udders were cut off [...] The milk and blood that oozed out mixed in the mud traumatised me so much [...] that night we left Rwanda.¹¹⁷

The image of blood staining the milk on the hillside is disturbing; it is an image of death staining innocence and destruction ravaging wholesomeness. The economic and symbolic significance of the cow in Rwandan culture and its status as a point of contention in the context of Hutu-Tutsi relations renders this moment not only an attack on Ntarindwa's father possessions, but an assault on his very identity; the cows' slaughter is not only an affront, but an immediate threat. With these words, Ntarindwa makes clear that his father has been traumatised by his encounter with violence. However, the fact that Ntarindwa voices this memory is a symbolic statement of the failure of that attack on identity, the failure of the trauma of that image to destroy his father and extinguish his familial line. The fact that Ntarindwa

¹¹⁶ Ntarindwa, p. 8.

¹¹⁷ Ntarindwa, p. 18.

is playing his father's role somehow extends the ownership of these words to him too; whilst the audience are invited to understand his father's history in this moment, the visibility of Ntarindwa delivering the memory is a reminder of the vocal duality at play and the failure of the trauma of the past to disrupt an intergenerational bond of which history is an integral part. Certainly, exile comes with its own pain and threat of cultural severance. However, this expression of memory emphasises the reality of a future beyond the pain of that displacing moment. Spoken in his voice, what is traumatic for his father becomes historic for Ntarindwa; a history that not only illuminates his point of origin, but that allows Ntarindwa to address the lacunae in his sense of self by giving him the opportunity to define himself through a specific frame of national and historical reference. Thus, whilst Ntarindwa's vocalising of his father's past serves to underscore the importance of their shared history, the polyvocality of the play also emphasises a movement beyond that point. Similarly striking, however, are the wider implications of this history that Ntarindwa's father implies. Cautioning his children against the loss of their Rwandan heritage, Ntarindwa's father states that '[t]he values of Rwanda will make you men who can live upright [...] even in hostility, like Jews.'¹¹⁸ Directly comparing the victimisation and endurance of the Jewish nation to his own experience of violence and exile, Ntarindwa's father widens the bounds of memory to bind one history to another. Echoing the connection between himself and Holocaust survivors that Rurangwa makes in the previous chapter, these words integrate Ntarindwa's family into a historical chain of affliction and survival that unites voices and experiences across time and place. Playing with boundaries of temporality and identity, Ntarindwa highlights the dynamic movement of memory across generational bounds and suggests that although history is the story of the past, these events remain relevant to the processes of self-definition that occur in the present.

Multifaceted multi-voicedness

It is initially puzzling that Ntarindwa gives voice to those outside of his family, nationality and race in a play so concerned with his identity; however, as I will go on to argue, each of these voices *is* an integral part of who Ntarindwa is. One particularly interesting scene takes place in a classroom, where a history teacher who, stage directions tells readers of the script, is a Rwandan refugee living in Burundi - settles her class and announces the day's lesson on the precolonial history of the Great Lakes region. This is

¹¹⁸ Ntarindwa, p. 9.

a history, she insists, that cannot be learnt from Western historians, whose versions of African histories she decries as 'propaganda, lies, intoxication, untruths [...] Take out your books', she instructs, 'and write the title: The Precolonial History of the Kingdoms of Africa's Great Lakes'.¹¹⁹ On first reading, this scene appears to make a statement about the intersection of history, authorship and identity; the necessity of writing one's own past and defining one's own place in the present. However, I argue that this scene goes beyond identity politics alone, pointedly laden as it is with poignant irony. This scene is included in a play that tells the story of colonialism, racism, genocide, and interethnic brutality, taking place between the violence of Ntarindwa's past and that which he himself comes to experience through his exposure to the violence of 1994. Understood in this linear fashion, the teacher's instruction becomes almost tragically ironic as clearly writing one's history is not enough to claim one's place in this landscape. Indeed, it is this highlighting of the limits of writing that may itself provide a rationale for Ntarindwa's choice of a dramatic form to tell his story. Implying through this text that inscribing the past and characterising the present in words is not sufficient on its own – that writing resistance is not as effective as performing it – Ntarindwa argues here for the way that identity is not only linked to writing, but to the performance and physical action that his play represents and advocates for.

My argument in this respect is substantiated by Ntarindwa's subsequent dramatic embodiment of Rwanda's history and the voice of the various groups that are tied to it. After asking his father about Rwanda's colonial history, the play's script delineates a historical flashback in which Ntarindwa alternately narrates the history of the Tutsi in Rwanda, the inter-ethnic violence of the 1960s that necessitated the flight of his parents, and the intervention of Belgian colonisers in the social landscape of his parents' home country. What is significant about this flashback scene is that Ntarindwa actively re-enacts history; in inserting himself into this scene and playing these characters, he can be understood as absorbing this history into himself through assuming the role of its mouthpiece. In so doing, Ntarindwa makes the colonial division of 1960s Rwanda personal. He renders his parents' obligatory escape from Rwanda an inextricable part of his own history, and he commemorates the brutality and aftermath of inter-ethnic violence as he speaks it. On both a national and personal level, then, Ntarindwa immerses himself in the history not only of his family but of his country – he becomes a participant in, and not simply a recipient of, the stories of the past. Significantly for a discussion of

¹¹⁹ Ntarindwa, p. 13.

intergenerational trauma, it is noticeable that Ntarindwa's acquisition of his past history does not traumatise him in the sense in which it is traditionally defined. Rather, his reaction to learning about the oppression that led to his displacement prompts his own decisive action. Leading to his decision to join the country and liberate Rwanda from the violence of 1994, Ntarindwa's response to learning of his past is one of anger, frustration and a desire for vengeance on behalf of both himself and his parents. Certainly, Ntarindwa is affected by what he discovers about his past; but what results cannot be read as trauma. Instead, his reaction is a burning sense of injustice that motivates his decision to join the RPF – here, traumatic pasts are not debilitating in their haunting quality, but a call to decisive, reactionary action.

Ntarindwa's commitment to multi-voicedness in this play sees him give voice to several of Africa's detractors; one example of which is a performed exchange between two European historians whose topic of conversation is 'the under-development of Africa'.¹²⁰ After stating emphatically that 'Africa regresses apocalyptically', the historians assert confidently that 'all the people on earth have brought something to humanity [...] except of course black Africans [...] black Africa is a "recipient" and not a "designer" continent.'¹²¹ Spoken in Ntarindwa's voice – in the context of a work that is evidence of the creative capacity these historians deny – this exchange becomes darkly comic; the overt racism and obvious ludicrousness of these claims invite the audience to bear witness to the absurdity and ignorance on which prejudice is built. In this sense, the play becomes pedagogic. Performing an educative function that second-generation writing is, due to its remove from the past, perhaps primed to perform, Ntarindwa exposes a bias whose pervasiveness – in spite of the farcicality of its claims – demands consideration of the authority we give to narratives that define others. The inclusion of this narrative, however, goes beyond the ethical questions it raises regarding voice and classification. This is a narrative that, because of its racism, is a decisive part of Ntarindwa's identity. Whilst perhaps uncomfortable to vocalise, colonial mentalities not only catalysed the killings that necessitated Ntarindwa's parents' exile but the process of his own engagement with his history and his own encounter with violence; both the colonial history of Africa and the ignorance that underpinned the colonial enterprise are key, if dark, realities in Ntarindwa's journey of self-discovery. Whilst apportioning culpability to those who espoused these

¹²⁰ Ntarindwa, p. 11.

¹²¹ Ntarindwa, p. 12.

ideas and, in so doing, created the most hostile and threatening of environments, Ntarindwa defining himself against these reductive stereotypes by exposing their baseless irrationality is a statement of power against them. Reflecting Tshepo, whose experience of violence and rejection motivates him to build an identity in response, Ntarindwa's inclusion of this narrative in *Carte d'identité* is a performative statement of identity that uses this racist narrative to strengthen the sense of self and nation it was originally intended to destroy.

The racist mentalities that Ntarindwa lays bare, however, are not restricted to those of colonialists alone. In another compelling scene, Ntarindwa assumes the role of a Burundian radio journalist. Preceded and followed by a cheery radio jingle, the journalist character announces the national exam results for the year, but points out that whilst the Burundian candidates were passed with a mark of 54.5%, non-Burundian candidates needed to have attained 60% to pass the same exam.¹²² It is not without thought, I argue, that Ntarindwa chooses to highlight this inequality through the medium of radio. As is already critically established¹²³ – and as Mukagasana's testimony indicates in Chapter One – radio was a key player in the dissemination of the hateful rhetoric that drove both the 1993 civil war in Burundi and the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda. Whilst the symbolism of radio may be lost to audience members who are not familiar with the genocide's machinations, the juxtaposition of past and present created by the presence of this media device onstage is a chilling one. Contrasting the reality of interethnic discrimination with music that would be especially effective in a performative space, Ntarindwa not only highlights the banality of the hate speech that motivated the genocide but highlights how ordinary elements of quotidian lives can be linked to the most extraordinary acts of brutality; in the context of genocide, Ntarindwa reminds his audience, nothing retains its innocence once it has been used in the service of death. It is the combination of sight and sound in this moment that makes this scene so powerful. Being visible onstage as himself whilst voicing not only the discriminative words of the radio journalist but also the sounds of the radio through which this narrative is conveyed, the multi-voicedness of this moment emphasises how Ntarindwa, the radio, hate speech, genocide and its aftermath are inextricably linked to one another. Whilst visually presenting a disconcertingly

¹²² Ntarindwa, p. 9.

¹²³ See, for example, Alison Des Forges, 'Call to Genocide: Radio in Rwanda, 1994' in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. by Allan Thompson (London: Pluto Publishing, 2007), pp. 41-54 and Jason McCoy, 'Making Violence Ordinary: Radio, Music and the Rwandan Genocide' in *African Music*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2009), pp. 85-96.

simultaneous representation of past and present, the ominous connotations of this common household item turns this second-generation narrative into a warning for the future in addition to a record of the past.

Ntarindwa's use of polyvocality does not only work, however, to build a sense of his own history; Scene Five, entitled 'Events Leading to the Decision to Join the Army',¹²⁴ sees Ntarindwa assume the voice of not just one person, but of an entire community. 'Mr President, he exclaims, 'we are the Rwandan refugees living in Burundi; we want to return home'.¹²⁵ Voicing the President to whom his first line was addressed, Ntarindwa responds to himself in the character of this President, rebuffing the refugees with the statement that 'the country is too small'.¹²⁶ Ntarindwa appeals to him once again, this time embodying 'the Rwandan refugees living in Tanzania, Zaire and Uganda [...] the oldest refugees in Rwanda, let us go home!' Once again, they are refused. The President retorts that as refugees, they are the problem of the UN; referring the imagined communities Ntarindwa is endowing with voice in this moment to the High Commission for Refugees, the President suggests that they find alternative lands to call home:

[In] Australia, there is space. And why not Russia? Siberia is practically uninhabited. Let's be serious though: what would I say to the tourists? That I emptied the parry to welcome refugees? [...] And those poor gorillas, will you think of them for a moment? Where will they go? [...] And these poor elephants, they need space [...] Have mercy on an endangered species.¹²⁷

Calling upon the same darkly tragic humour invoked by Foer and Duiker, Ntarindwa – who also works as a comedian in addition to being a playwright – invites his audience to laugh at the ludicrous disregard for Tutsi throughout Africa; they, and not the animals, are the real endangered species of Africa. This is, of course, a laughter that invites reflection on the far more sinister concepts of statelessness and discrimination. Reflecting Eva van Roekel's observation that 'humour in post-conflict settings [...] questions the boundaries between 'us' and 'them',¹²⁸ this comedy compels the audience to react to these refugees as figures of entertainment whilst simultaneously putting themselves in their shoes. As

¹²⁴ Ntarindwa, p. 20.

¹²⁵ Ntarindwa, p. 20.

¹²⁶ Ntarindwa, p. 20.

¹²⁷ Ntarindwa, pp. 20-21.

¹²⁸ Eva van Roekel, 'Uncomfortable Laughter: Reflections on Violence, Humour and Immorality in Argentina' in *Etnofoor*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2016), pp. 55-74, p. 56.

mentioned in the previous chapter, the intersection between genocide and comedy has been widely discussed with theorists such as Terrence Des Pres championing the form as an act of resistance against violence¹²⁹ and Matthew Boswell challenging the notion of Holocaust piety and its ineffability through humour, hyper-realism and hyper-surrealism.¹³⁰ Importantly, though, this is a use of humour that is perhaps only accessible to Ntarindwa because he is positioned at a generational remove from the violence at the root of an exile on such a significant scale. Intergenerational representations of trauma are important precisely because of the multiple and varied ways in which they are able to invite engagement with that trauma; ways such as this humour that may remain inaccessible to survivors because of the immediacy of the pain attached to their memories. The theatrical space is an ideal conduit for the conveyance of this humour; allowing Ntarindwa's audience to laugh, and then subsequently to reflect, the dramatic form invites engagement with this history in a meaningful, impactful way. In staging this exchange, Ntarindwa not only affords a voice to those silenced by political bureaucracy, but gives the audience an insight into the refusal of national, ethnic identity that provokes his decision to seek out his own; it is no coincidence that this scene precedes his own decision to join the RPF. Voicing the disparate groups of Tutsi refugees scattered across Africa, Ntarindwa unites these Rwandan refugees and identifies himself as belonging to them, even as he emphasises their displacement.

Violence in the first-person

After learning about Rwanda's colonial history and the violence that forced his parents' exile to Burundi, Ntarindwa resolves to join the army to aid the liberation efforts of the RPF in 1994. It is at this point in the play that Ntarindwa's own voice takes centre stage; hitherto, the character of his father is the play's primary narrator. The narrative shift here appears to signal a division between past and present; however, as I will argue here, this division is undermined by the cyclicity – the connection between these temporal states – suggested by Ntarindwa's words. Ntarindwa's first encounter with Rwanda, by now a country in the midst of genocidal turmoil, is a sombre one:

¹²⁹ Terrence Des Pres, 'Holocaust Laughter' in *Writing Into the World* (New York: Viking, 1991) pp. 277-287, p. 281.

¹³⁰ Matthew Boswell, *Holocaust Impiety in Literature, Popular Music and Film* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

Why are these bodies mutilated on such beautiful hills? If our eyes cannot bear this strange spectacle, those of the vultures, on the contrary, seem to delight in it. In the beautiful sky that they fill with their cries, they do not seem embarrassed to be the only satisfied spectators [...] later [...] [our] nostrils become accustomed to the stink that invites itself at times to remind everyone that death is lurking around.¹³¹

The juxtaposition of beauty and death, spoken in Ntarindwa's voice, underscores the tragedy of this bittersweet homecoming; the images that Ntarindwa conjures here are those of a ravaged beauty. But although this is Ntarindwa's first encounter with Rwanda, the sensory quality of this recollection recalls Ntarindwa's father's similarly sensory description of Rwanda's experience of pillage in the late 1950s: where Ntarindwa's father is confronted by the graphic sight of mutilated cows on the hill, Ntarindwa himself is confronted by bleeding and beaten bodies on those same hills. Both Ntarindwa and his father have seen, and experienced, the pain and violence inflicted upon Rwanda's landscape; it seems almost an inheritance. The cyclical nature of the transgenerational violence that Ntarindwa invites his audience to appreciate here both connects him to his father's history and makes that history newly applicable to him in this moment. Positioning his father's eerily similar narrative as a prologue to his own, Ntarindwa reminds his audience that memories of violence are not static. Like the violence they describe, these memories move across generational lines to define the lives and experiences of father and son – a father and son who are now intimately connected not only through the blood they share, but through that which they have seen spilled; through the dynamic interplay between past and present that Ntarindwa's performance makes so clear despite the voice that attempts to move the play's action beyond his father's story.

Although Ntarindwa's recounting of his experience inevitably harks back to the past, the play implies its relevance for the the future. Before mounting their attack on the Hutu stronghold in Rwanda, Ntarindwa and his fellow soldiers are addressed by a grave-toned general as follows:

Soldier, today is a great day for you [...] your name will be engraved forever in your family history. The true history, the great history, soldier [...] The history of Rwanda begins with you today.¹³²

¹³¹ Ntarindwa, p. 25.

¹³² Ntarindwa, p. 29.

The implication of these words is that the soldiers are about to embark on a journey thus far unwritten. Despite the reality of the violent conflict that is Rwanda's past, there is a distinct sense in which this moment is unprecedented; Ntarindwa's own fight for Rwanda's liberation – the practical action towards self-definition, it seems, that the lesson scene advocated for – is grounded primarily in promises for the future. However, in light of the cyclical nature of the violence that Ntarindwa invites his audience to appreciate, the idea of an entirely new future somehow does not ring true; the permeable boundaries of temporality that the dynamic of *Carte d'identité* trades upon does not permit any moment of history to stand alone. In fact, the way that the future is bound up with the past – despite the general's casting of this moment as exceptional – is indicated by the very next scene, in which a character named only as 'l'éclopé' – the lame man – reiterates a memory imperative which mirrors that expressed by Ntarindwa's father at the start of the play. Not only does this anonymous character warn the anonymous person he is addressing never to forget – 'never! I said never!¹³³ – he worries about the way that the violence will or will not be represented. 'When you are known,' he says, 'you will talk about everything and nothing and like everyone else, you will never talk about us. You will do like the others, won't you?'¹³⁴ The reference to 'the others' implies past failures of the attempt to adequately or accurately commemorate Rwanda's violence – l'éclopé laments the fascination with 'testimony of executioners'¹³⁵ trumping interest in 'the tomb of the unknown soldier'.¹³⁶ It is critical, I argue, that the characters in this scene are anonymous – the wounded speaker, his addressee, the executioners and the unknown soldier are unnamed, undefined and remain obscure. Refusing specificity, this moment is, once again, one that could belong to Ntarindwa or Ntarindwa's father's experience. Despite the general's references to the future, the following scene is saturated with the notion of memory; no movement forward, this play implies, is possible without simultaneously looking back. Collapsing chronological boundaries once again, Ntarindwa presents his audience with a melange of temporalities that link Ntarindwa not only to the past, but to a future that must necessarily take account of what came before.

Despite ending the play, *Carte d'identité*'s final scene refuses any sense of conclusion. The violence of 1994 has ended, and Ntarindwa's family are preparing to return to Rwanda. Ntarindwa's father has one

¹³³ Ntarindwa, p. 32.

¹³⁴ Ntarindwa, p. 32.

¹³⁵ Ntarindwa, p. 32.

¹³⁶ Ntarindwa, p. 32.

wish: 'to go to Kirengo and see the hill where I was born'.¹³⁷ It is an emotional, joyful return; despite his age and rheumatic joints, Ntarindwa's father, who Ntardinwa voices here once again alternating with his own speech, outruns his children in his eagerness to rediscover his home. The play's final lines, however, are particularly significant for this discussion. Ntardinwa's father sees Muhororo in the distance, the parish in which he was christened, and is moved remembering the song that he sang there with his brothers, sisters and cousins. He begins to sing, but is overcome with emotion and memory. Ntarindwa steps in. 'Papa, sing', he says gently. 'You are not finished. Return to your hill, your parish [...] Come Papa, do not let yourself be carried away by emotion. Come and sing, Papa.'¹³⁸ Despite reading as a happy ending, this moment is a simultaneous beginning; whilst Ntarindwa's father's exile has ended, Ntarindwa basks in the newness of a sense of self and pride that he has both physically and mentally fought for. Connecting this ending and this beginning, however, is the violence – and the memories of that violence – that come to serve as a point of mutuality between father and son; memories that disturb the boundary between past and present in no small way. In encouraging his father to sing – and, thus, to remember his past – Ntarindwa implies the responsibility of the second generation not only to engage with, but to help verbalise, history; as the final scene's double voice implies, any identity existing in the present is linked to what has come before. Equally significant, however, is what this scene suggests about trauma and its transmission across generational lines. Certainly, Ntarindwa's father was affected by the violence he encountered. But as the play demonstrates, Ntarindwa's discovery of this violent history does not induce fear; rather, it generates questions and actions through which Ntarindwa comes to claim an identity that renders him as the means by which his father comes to be repatriated. Ntarindwa does not inherit his father's trauma, but engages with it through the responsibility he feels to alleviate, and respond to it in a decisive way. This ending appears to be a happy one – and, to an extent, it is. However, in light of the cyclicity of violence the play gestures towards, the tranquillity of the moment is underpinned with a certain unease. As *Carte d'identité* suggests, the past intrudes and repeats itself in the present in no insignificant way; an intrusion that leaves this scene refusing an absolute finality in spite of its sentimentality and apparent triumph – this is a happiness that almost seems too fragile to last. Whilst dark, this reading is suggested by a play that constantly reminds its audience of the movement between times and identities. Although the play's

¹³⁷ Ntarindwa, p. 33.

¹³⁸ Ntarindwa, p. 35.

title's connotations suggest that Ntarindwa is seeking an identity, the multiple roles he plays and the voices he assumes indicate that identity is not static. Rather, like the history that both moves between, and collapses, the boundaries between past and present and the generations that inhabit them, history and identity are dynamic conceptual stories that are always in flux.

Conclusion

Echoing Hirsch's invocation of the nomenclature of trauma in relation to survivor's descendants, Ruth Lijtmaer states that for the children of survivors, the unspoken past 'shape[s] their lives with [...] void, terror, and loss that defies all comfort.'¹³⁹ This chapter has argued that in the context of *Everything is Illuminated*, *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* and *Carte d'identité*, this is not the case. Certainly, silence is a discomfiting presence in these texts; the silences of Jonathan's grandmother, Tshepo's past and Ntarindwa's father leave gaps in these characters' understanding of self and history that assert themselves strongly within their narratives. However, these are not silences generated by the ineffability or the overwhelming nature of violence. Differentiating itself from the haunting silence to which survivors are so often linked, Foer, Duiker and Ntarindwa literarily render silences that not only invite probing questions of identity, but compel their characters to interrogate and engage with the very pasts that Lijtmaer and Hirsch theorise as so negatively affecting them. These histories and their legacies are complex; as this chapter has shown, the dynamics and implications of intergenerational texts are as varied as those characterising survivor writing. And yet, these texts strongly assert their distinction from individually-focalised survivor testimonies by virtue of the polyvocality through which they approach traumatic pasts. Resisting the elision of testimonies to violence with those of its aftermath, these texts suggest that whilst a second or third generation perspective on the past necessarily speaks *about* trauma, it is not the traumatic suffering of the writers themselves that commands it; instead, these texts suggest that the trauma of the original event is not transmitted through time as an affliction, but as something that can be confronted and explored through writing and performance.

¹³⁹ Ruth Lijtmaer, 'Untold Stories and the Power of Silence in the Intergenerational Transmission of Social Trauma' in *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 77 (2017), pp. 274-284, p. 276.

This chapter began with the question of why Foer, Duiker and Ntarindwa employ polyvocality as a narrative strategy; a literary mode that I have argued is particularly suited to post-survivor writing. These texts engage polyvocality to do two distinct things: to highlight the uncertainty generated by the past in the present and their characters' complex relationships to it, and to build a network of voices inflected by a shared, but very different experience, of a singular moment of historical violence. As discussed in Chapter Two, the expectations attached to survivor testimony are often characterised by demands of authority and transparency; given its function in judicial and documentary contexts, testimony does not permit uncertainty. Survivors' descendants, however, are not bound by these conditions of speech; a liberation that not only allows, but encourages, questions and the admissions of ambiguity in relation to trauma. Indeed, whilst Jonathan's restrained voice within Foer's text unabashedly demonstrates the limitations of his knowledge surrounding Holocaust history and the changing voices of Tshepo are their own statement of a continually undefined sense of self, Ntarindwa's journey of self-discovery is motivated by questions of origin. Calling attention to the questions that are not created by trauma itself, but the temporal distance from the limit event in question, these texts expand the range of narrative voice to suggest that the identities that are formed in post-violence landscapes come into being within a broader context of self-other relations.

The productivity and the limits of polyvocality, however, illustrate themselves most clearly in the way that these writers employ this narrative mode to blur the boundaries between time, people and experience. As these text's treatment of the past suggests, the history that their writers describe is not that of the survivor; as temporal distance from the traumatic event increases, more people, stories, contexts and witnesses emerge to create a broader view of the past than that which is remembered by surviving individuals. It is precisely this expanded perception of the past that facilitates the questions that Foer asks regarding definitions of victimhood and perpetration through the figure of Grandfather; the sympathy that Foer invites for Zebon; and the understanding Ntarindwa seeks in relation to his own involvement with armed conflict. What is fascinating, however, is that despite the polyvocal telling of these stories implying the linkage between life experiences, these are connections that are both made and somehow refused: although Foer invites pity for Grandfather, he renders him a comic figure; whilst Duiker attempts to transcribe Mmabatho's female experience, this narrative gives way to reductive stereotype; and although Ntarindwa gestures towards the plight of African refugees as a collective, the

play's true focus is that of himself and his family. This is not to say that these texts therefore "fail" in their polyvocal ambitions: the interactions between Jonathan, Grandfather and Alex's narratives do force a reconsideration of the subjectivity of victimhood and raise the possibility of a shared legacy of violence; though resounding with their own distinct pains and challenges, the multiple narrators of *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* collectively paint a portrait of a South Africa that is still utterly broken; and Ntarindwa's multi-voiced play invites meditation around exile, home, silence and culpability. These polyvocal texts allow their authors to raise various issues, ask provocative questions and imagine contentious connections that may only become possible in post-survivor writing. There is, however, valuable insight to be gleaned from the failure of connection that emerges alongside these writers' attempts to establish it – a failure that is itself revealing of what the past represents for these writers and the characters they create. For survivors of the Holocaust, apartheid and the genocide in Rwanda, the violence of the past was the attempt at the erasure of identity; for Foer, Duiker and Ntarindwa, the past is a crucial factor in its construction. In addition to explaining their compulsion to engage with it, the writing of other lives sometimes fails to convince because the project of these writers is ultimately to discover themselves through the prism of their respective histories. Despite the occasional failure of these writers to convincingly portray the lives of their secondary characters, their narratives remain crucial because the construction of identity – the theme of each of these texts – requires interaction with alternate, contrasting or similar others. Certainly, the polyvocality of these texts draws attention to wider contexts of violence and the complex stories of those inherent within them. But whilst the polyvocal nature of Foer, Duiker and Ntarindwa's texts highlight these lives, this narrative strategy simultaneously points to the self-referentiality towards which polyvocality works; the way in which their characters require the stories of others to define themselves and the often-precarious post-violence landscapes in which they exist.

The constant collapse between past and present that features in each of these texts is its own statement of the relevance of violent history for the identity-formation that takes place in its aftermath; a relevance which, as I have argued, resonates very differently for survivors and their descendants. There is, however, a final concluding point that is crucial for a discussion of intergenerational trauma narratives: degrees of intergenerationality. The sense of distance from violence between the narratives of third-generation Foer and that of Duiker and Ntarindwa, who can be described most accurately as belonging

to the 1.5 generation as defined in this chapter's introduction, is clear. Whilst Jonathan is able to dictate the terms of his relationship to the past and the stories he hears about it, Tshepo and Ntarindwa involuntarily encounter reminders of their violent histories due to the proximity to catastrophe in which they exist. This is a proximity that renders the search for identity on which they both embark far more complex for them than for Jonathan, who returns to America relatively unconcerned about his failure to find Augustine. The solidity of his third-generation identity renders this history less crucial – although still significant – to his sense of self than the memories of violence that remain potent and definitive elements of Tshepo and Ntarindwa's presents. Whilst the polyvocal qualities of these texts provoke thinking around subject positions, identity and alterity, the intergenerational distinction I point out here suggests its own questions regarding the way that the interaction between memory and identity shifts with generation distance from the original trauma; questions that, despite falling outside the scope of this chapter, deserve consideration. Despite this difference however, *Everything is Illuminated*, *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* and *Carte d'identité* are united by the challenge they pose to Hirsch's suggestion that the trauma associated with a specific event is directly transmitted across generations. Whilst Hirsch argues for the fragmentary, haunting nature of the past, Foer, Duiker and Ntarindwa's protagonists actively seek theirs out; whilst the questions that these characters wrestle with are the *consequences* of past violence, they are not direct wounds *of* that violence. The distinction is subtle, yet important. As these texts demonstrate, the struggles of these writers are markedly different from those experienced by their parents and grandparents. Certainly, the past is affecting in many ways. But in these polyvocal texts, the past is not something to be feared; it is to be interrogated, engaged with and used both as a foundation of identity and as a platform from which difficult and complex questions regarding the self in relation to history can be considered.

Conclusion

Trauma Literature: A Space for Complexity

'If we are to reposition our understanding of the core psychological states that follow trauma,' argue John Wilson and Jacob Lindy, 'we must broaden our brush stroke beyond definitions derived by medicine, psychology, and neuroscience [...] [and] reach out to the world of language itself.'¹ Probing the significance of textual structures and literary aesthetics, this thesis has done exactly that. My research began with the question of how literature might advance discussions of trauma and its representation beyond the psychoanalytically-inspired critical theory which emphasises fragmentation, aporia, and void in trauma's literary iterations. Examining and extending the critical discussion around a culturally-diverse range of testimonial, autobiographical, fictional and dramatic texts, I have argued that these literary representations of traumatic moments and the responses to trauma that they suggest are more complex, varied – and, indeed, far bolder – than the current theoretical emphases on lack and haunting imply. In their departure from the conventional tropes and scripts of trauma literature, these texts present us with complex portraits of suffering and survival. Through their narrative and linguistic choices, these authors create renderings of survival that extend beyond the silence and lack of agency that remain closely associated with the experience of trauma, and pose questions about victimhood, self and memory which call for expanded thinking around trauma's literary representation.

Motivated by Stef Craps and Cathy Caruth's opposing claims on the issue, one of this dissertation's opening questions was that of the relationship between trauma and culture in the literary context. Given the ultimately reductive nature of Caruth's argument for cross-cultural engagement and the compelling examples of cultural specificity Craps presents whilst charging trauma theory with Eurocentrism, I began this thesis with the expectation that the diversity of its corpus would emphasise the cultural specificity of traumatic experiences and responses. Fascinatingly, this has not been the case. Certainly, each text is culturally inflected, containing textual allusions that gesture towards their respective cultural contexts and literary traditions. However, analysed through a comparative lens, this thesis has revealed

¹ John P. Wilson and Jacob D. Lindy, *Trauma, Culture and Metaphor: Pathways of Transformation and Integration* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 39.

more similarity than difference in terms of the aesthetic strategies these authors employ to represent traumatic moments and their complex aftermaths. As pointed out in this dissertation's Introduction, my corpus was not selected on the basis of narrative similarity; rather, reaching across genres and cultures, I chose texts that represented survivors and survival in lights other than those of the silence and submission that so often characterise them. Thus, the aesthetic parallels that emerged did so organically. Although their various engagements with shared themes and narrative strategies refuses any sense of homogeneity, each text in Chapter One emphasised sensory pain; in Chapter Two, each autobiographic voice simultaneously delineated the lives of others; in Chapter Three, fiction was crucial to imagining contentious relationships; and each text selected for Chapter Four was compellingly polyvocal. Asserting itself despite the histories, geographies and temporalities that separate these texts, this compelling sense of linkage is important in its suggestion that encountering trauma is a strongly human, rather than culturally-defined, experience.

It might be argued that these aesthetic similarities are consequences of a financially-driven publishing market that, as Ted Solotaroff observes, can flatten cultural particularity in favour of standardised narrative formats that have proven commercially successful.² Going beyond the demands of the industry, it could also be suggested that similarity might be generated by European influences on emerging literary cultures. In Rwanda, for example, writing workshops organised by youth literacy charity YouLI designed to encourage Rwandan writing take Philip Gourevitch as literary inspiration, citing his text *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families* as 'one of the best books ever written about Rwanda and the Genocide against the Tutsi.'³ Where literary cultures are developing, the perceived instructive quality of Euro/American writing may contribute to similarly styled literary outputs. My dissertation's methodology, however, resists these arguments. Of course, as published texts, these narratives are to some extent shaped by global publishing networks. However, in addition to these texts being selected on the basis of their *deviation* from the stylistic orthodoxies of trauma literature that feature in so many commercially successful trauma narratives, I have intentionally placed the work of internationally recognised writers such as Primo Levi – published by literary giant

² Ted Solotaroff, 'The Publishing Culture and the Literary Culture' in *the Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (1984), pp. 72-80, p. 72.

³ 'Note From Philip Gourevitch' <http://www.youli.org.rw/2016/05/note-from-philip-gourevitch/> [accessed 5th September 2018]

Penguin – in conversation with little-known authors such as Mark Mathabane, whose *Kaffir Boy* was published by the now-defunct Free Press: an imprint whose ideological focus on publishing literature relating to civil liberties may have motivated the decisions of its commissioning editors beyond financial considerations alone. But whilst publishing and the conventions of trauma literature may not account for the striking aesthetic similarity these texts display, a limitation of this study in relation to the question of cultural specificity may be the individually-focalised nature of the corpus; it is certainly possible that the study of protest literature, for example, might have demonstrated a stronger cultural character given the communal concerns at its centre.

In its challenge to what Helen Finch and Lynn Wolff describe as ‘the aporia of the unspeakable’ that has ‘conditioned the culture and thought of the entire post-1945 era’,⁴ this thesis has expanded discussions around four key elements of traumatic responses and the dynamics of their literary representation. The first is resilience; a response to trauma that is currently being investigated in the Rwandan context through Nicki Hitchcott’s Rwandan Stories of Change Project. Defying the dominant theoretical conception of the survivor as a haunted individual, these texts suggest that people are capable not only of surviving violence, but of interrogating it; that trauma does not only destroy identity, but also functions as a condition of its post-violence reconstruction. This becomes exceptionally apparent in Chapter One, where a literary aesthetics of starkness emphasised Levi, Mathabane and Mukagasana’s resilience. Whilst their vividness demonstrates that trauma can enhance recall as opposed to solely inhibiting it, the self-referentiality of these narratives – epitomised by Levi’s comparison of himself with the Muselmann, Mathabane’s consciousness of race and Mukagasana’s meditations on her femininity – demonstrate a retention of the very agency and self-awareness that current tropes surrounding the survivor deny. Significantly, Levi, Mathabane and Mukagasana assert their identities in distinct ways; whilst Levi employs intertextuality to navigate his Judaism and Italian heritage, and Mathabane psychologically and physically adapts to the shocking traumas of violence that become quotidian realities, Mukagasana stresses the sensory to dialogically communicate with her readers and place herself within a framework of human experience. The resilience these texts display do not preclude the reality of their writers’ suffering. But what is extraordinary about the resilience

⁴ Helen Finch and Lynn L. Wolff, ‘Introduction’ in *Witnessing, Memory, Poetics: H. G. Adler and W. G. Sebald*, ed. by Helen Finch & Lynn L. Wolff (New York: Camden House, 2014), p. 3.

Chapter One illustrates is that it is not set in opposition to pain, but comes into being alongside, or because of, the agony of these historical moments. Opposing the perception of trauma's solely destructive power and questioning the concept of victimhood, these demonstrations of resilience suggest that in its own peculiar way, trauma can motivate as it attempts to destroy. Although violence tests processes of self-identification, these texts are evidence that a self can be sustained, and not shattered, in traumatic contexts. Resilience is also present in various other literary iterations throughout this thesis. Whilst the questions of identity with which Kuzwayo and Rurangwa wrestle, for example, are difficult, the fact of their asking is illustrative of an enduring sense of subjectivity despite their encounters with traumatic violence. Of course, these demonstrations of resilience are in no sense simple: although Kertész's B. demonstrates his capacity for resilience, his suicidal desires win out by the novel's end; although Duiker's Tshepo is able to speak freely about his traumatic past, his continued melancholic state signals the past's continued impact on his sense of identity. My argument for trauma's complexity, however, resists the collapse into absolutes; therefore, these vacillations are not evidence of a failure of resilience, but evidence of the complexity that inheres in post-traumatic states and in a resilience that manifests itself in tandem with suffering.

The retention of agency that I have argued is possible in the aftermath of trauma has been illustrated throughout this thesis by the questions and admissions of uncertainty that pervade its corpus. As has been discussed, testimony is a form that traditionally does not permit either, due to the demands of accuracy and transparency that accompany it in judicial and documentary contexts. The question of what literature brings to the study of trauma, however, is in part answered by the space that it makes for inquiry, hesitation and ambiguity – and it is here, I have argued, that the specific potential of fiction comes into its own. Fiction's relationship to trauma has largely been theorised in terms of the scandal it has traditionally generated,⁵ the complicities it hopes to expose⁶ or simply as a contradiction in terms.⁷ An insight that I have hoped to contribute to this discussion is fiction's role in representing uncertainty in the aftermath of trauma; in creating a space for ambiguities that not only signals the complexity of traumatic responses, but that allows for the survivor be understood in contexts outside of theoretical

⁵ Sue Vice, *Holocaust Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 1.

⁶ Paul Gready, 'Novel Truths: Literature and Truth Commissions' in *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (2009), pp. 156-176, p. 157.

⁷ Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 3.

discourses that so often depict them as helpless or heroes. Survival, these texts suggest, is a temperamental site of uncertainty and unpredictability: B.'s pain burns viscerally although he smiles externally; Toloki's fear of rejection is keenly felt despite his newfound bond with Noria; and Isaro's anguish is displayed alongside the ecstasy she finds in agony. In the ambiguity they permit – and, indeed generate – these texts allow the asking of questions and imagination of connections that provoke thinking around the darkest and most urgent questions of ethics, morality and the human capacity to harm. I have argued, too, that the questions these writers pose across the whole thesis are themselves markers of resilience. Employing the interrogative mode to express anger, fear and to initiate dialogic exchanges with their readers, these texts display a full range of human emotion that not only invites understandings of the survivor as a complex being, but is its own statement of defiance against the reduction and deadening that characterise and motivate genocidal, hate-based violence. Although testimony's primary aim is traditionally to establish the facts of what happened, the ambiguity that these texts permit also encourages consideration of what should have been; what might have been; and how violence of the kind their writers experienced came into being.

The notion of lack that remains bound to current theoretical understandings of trauma comes to characterise the language so often figured as one of its primary causalities: silence, from dominant theoretical perspectives, is an inevitable consequence of both the ineffable character of limit-experiences and the overwhelming, bewildering and disorienting nature of trauma itself. My thesis, however, has argued that silence represents much more – and has many more motivating factors – than repression, bewilderment and wound in the context of trauma and its aftermath. The traditional characterisation of silence as imagined by theorists such as Caruth is not totally absent from my analysis; from the *Muselmänner* described by Levi to Duiker's *Zebbron*, there are those who are silenced by the extremity they encounter. Largely outnumbering such characterisations, however, are the alternative meanings and purposes of silence that I have identified throughout this thesis. For Levi and Mukagasana, whose sensory narratives represent a conscious effort towards dialogic exchange, silence is not a consequence of their own verbal reticence but recognised as a danger generated by those who refuse to listen. For Ntarindwa's father, silence is not a consequence of the

'unrepresentability or the unsayability'⁸ of interethnic violence, but a protective mechanism intentionally employed to safeguard the innocence of his children – a silence that, in time, he breaks willingly and capably. Kertész's construction of B. further implies that silence is a choice – presenting his character as happily sociable on one hand, and melancholic on the other, Kertész presents silence as demonstrative of agency. Jonathan's absence from most of Foer's text signals his distance from his familial history, not his submission to its memory. The silence surrounding Gatore's Isaro is particularly compelling, with three distinct implications attached to it. Although Isaro perceives the silence of her adoptive parents to be an act of heinous cruelty – something of which silence is certainly capable – their silencing of her history is a benevolent one, a silence rooted in kindness and love. This silence, however, is also the motivation for her exploratory trip to Rwanda; rather than forcing her into inaction, silence is the condition on which action is taken. Finally, silencing both Niko and Isaro through suicide at the novel's end, Gatore suggests silence as a charged space for victims *and* perpetrators – though the dynamics of these silences are very different. In their various implications, these texts go beyond the suggestion that silence is the consequence of the failure of language to represent trauma or the result of its terrifying nature. Figuring silence as a mode that communicates pain, anger, benevolence, love, protection and agency, these writers level their own challenge to the theoretical discourses that equate silence with submission and suggest that silence, much like other elements of responses to trauma, are more complex and varied than these ideas imply.

Another of this dissertation's questions was if, and how, trauma might function as a site of connection between historically and geographically separated individuals. A pressing concern that arises in comparative studies, particularly in relation to violence, is that of uniqueness; how can the specificity of circumstance, victimhood and pain be retained, sceptics ask, when one historical moment is discussed in tandem with another? This thesis has argued that the case for connection has been most strongly put by survivors themselves. Across life writing and fiction, the texts I have analysed have presented traumatic history as a shared space of memory: whilst Rurangwa, for example, draws direct parallels with, and signals towards a fundamental commonality between himself and Holocaust survivors, Kertész employs linguistic similarity to create strong links between the Holocaust and the violence of

⁸ Eneken Laanes, 'Unsayable or Merely Unsaid?' in *Haunted Narratives: Life Writing in an Age of Trauma*, ed. by Gabriele Rippl et al (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013) pp. 123-128, p. 124.

the communist regime. The significance of these links lies in the fact that there is no sense of competition in the connections these writers suggest. Providing an alternative perspective on comparison to the theoretical discourses which are heavily concerned with establishing or preserving what Rothberg identifies as a 'hierarchy of suffering',⁹ these writers reach out to violence of other historical moments not to distinguish their stories, but to bind their experiences to those who have suffered comparable pain. In particular, Rurangwa's text makes clear that links to past violence of a similar kind is not only a comfort, but an assertion of empowerment; creating a connection between his experience and that inflicted on the Holocaust survivors he describes in brotherly terms, he situates himself within a network of memory and history that provides a sense of belonging and identity that are so often critical casualties of hate-based violence. Whilst it is important to acknowledge the specificity of historical moments of violence – instances of brutality that can be differentiated by context, methodology and casualties, emphases on total uniqueness often run contrary to what this thesis has demonstrated is some survivors' resistance to such framing: Levi, Kulka and Kuzwayo, for example, explicitly reject the status of exceptionality that theoretical discourses such as the celebratory rhetoric identified by Greenspan seek to attribute to them. In addition to substantiating my wider argument for an increased focus on survivor-led understandings of responses to trauma, the insistence on uniqueness does not consider that singularity, or minority status, is often the basis for discrimination. In creating a sense of community, comparative references between moments of violence contribute to a regained sense of identity for survivors and counter the singularity so closely associated with persecution.

In addition to expanding thinking around comparisons of victimhood, my thesis has also explored the connections these writers make between the suffering of victims and perpetrators. It initially seems incongruous that Mukagasana describes feeling pity for the man whose brutality she simultaneously details; that Foer presents the suffering of Alex's Grandfather in a physical way that mimics that of Jonathan's Holocaust survivor grandmother; and that Duiker reflects himself in, and invites compassionate understandings of, a dangerous and misogynistic rapist. It is precisely these strange parallels, however, that broaden my argument for the virtue of comparing literary representations of violence. In addition to functioning as foundations of post-violence identity for victims of suffering,

⁹ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 9.

connecting the pain of victims and perpetrators provokes important questions regarding the extreme possibilities of human action and the contexts that generate brutality. Going beyond the issue of competition once again, these writers' allusions to perpetrator suffering is not only a statement of their own resilience but an assertion of the urgency of considering the circumstances that give rise to such fundamental and fatal divides. My arguments surrounding these writers' presentation of comparative suffering work towards my wider argument regarding the complexity of post-traumatic response as it is represented through literature. Much like the resilience or silence I have discussed, presentations of comparative suffering are demonstrated throughout this thesis as multifaceted; whilst the pain they describe highlights extreme distress, they are simultaneously comforting and identity-building, inviting compassion and sympathy whilst instigating consideration of the depths of cruelty of which humanity is capable. As these writers represent the violation of their own human rights, they illuminate those culpable and those similarly affected in other historical moments; representations that, whilst rather different, both provoke thinking around action, guilt, shame and consequence. Redirecting the discussion around comparative analyses once more, I have argued here that comparisons of representations of violence do not have to be understood solely as a practice of potentially unethical elision, but a mode of enquiry that invites crucial considerations of human behaviour.

Whilst they have been fascinating to unearth, my dissertation's commitment to interrogating the complexity of survival as it is represented in literature has raised certain questions and issues that, although outside its scope, are promising ground for future lines of enquiry. Much work has been done surrounding female representations of genocidal and hate-based violence; earlier this year, for example, Catherine Gilbert published a monograph dedicated exclusively to Rwandan women's responses to the genocide and its aftermath.¹⁰ My dissertation's examination of how post-traumatic representations of self intersect with the stories of others, however, revealed that although the compulsion towards the representation of alterity is strong, these failed to be convincing when writers reached across the lines of gender. This was something that became particularly apparent in Duiker's attempt to give voice to Mmabatho in Chapter Four, although Gatore's connection of hysteria with his female protagonist suggests a similarly problematic literary rendering. I would be curious, therefore, to

¹⁰ Catherine Gilbert, *From Surviving to Living: Voice, Trauma and Witness in Rwandan Women's Writing* (Montpellier: Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2018).

undertake extended research into the question of if, how and why violence might preclude the possibility of representing difference in the context of gender. Another fascinating point of conclusion that I believe deserves further consideration is that of the degrees of intergenerationality identified in Chapter Four. Whilst Janet Jacobs's recent volume uses an anthropological lens to examine intergenerational transmission,¹¹ a specifically literary study that focuses exclusively on second and, where possible, third and fourth generation accounts of memory would be a compelling extension of this dissertation's enquiry into the way trauma travels, and provide exciting insight as to how narrative aesthetics might signal how people's relationship to memory, victimhood and perceptions of in/justice shift in various generational proximities to limit events.

In the context of genocide and mass violence, to survive is a subversive act. The writers whose work I have analysed in this thesis, however, go beyond the subversion represented by living to fundamentally challenge dominant ideas surrounding the literary representation of trauma and its aftermath. Although genocide and mass violence have been theorised as shattering linguistic and referential frames,¹² theoretical responses to mass violence have traditionally been to reimpose these limits through critically prescribed conditions and expectations associated with its literary iteration. In their departure from the orthodoxies associated with the literary representations of extremity and survival, these texts refuse these boundaries to produce renderings of suffering and survival that are complex, varied, stark, and intricately nuanced. Whilst current trends in trauma theory link survival to a silence of submission, these texts are strikingly self-referential, vivid portraits of resilience; whilst these trends emphasise the repression of traumatic memories, these texts are testimonies not only to the retention of these memories, but of their authors' abilities to interrogate and confront them. With writing laying bare the interiority of these lives, I have argued that the value of literature's contribution to the study of trauma lies in its ability not only to humanise the survivor figure beyond often-homogenising theoretically-led characterisations, but in its creation of a space for uncertainty where questions regarding self, victimhood, memory and history can be asked and the ambiguity of survival can assert itself. Acknowledging what Lina Insana identifies as the 'zones of ambiguity, indeterminacy, and flux'¹³ in

¹¹ Janet Jacobs, *The Holocaust Across Generations: Trauma and its Inheritance Among Descendants of Survivors* (New York: NYU Press, 2017).

¹² Geoffrey Hartman, *The Longest Shadow* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 1.

¹³ Lina N. Insana, *Arduous Tasks: Primo Levi, Translation and the Transmission of Holocaust Testimony* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), p. 56.

which I have argued survivors exist is not the admission of failure in the understanding of trauma and its literary representation. Rather, embracing heterogeneity leads us to the far deeper understanding that complexity is a point of mutuality that connects people, trauma and literature; a point of mutuality that, when approached in a productive and dialogic manner, can advance not only our understandings of how we represent, are implicated in, and are affected by, violence but of how communities might be created around and between the darkest of times. I offer this work towards those ends.

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Appendix of Foreign Language Quotations

I have provided the original foreign language quotations for the texts that I was able to read and understand in their original languages; those written in French and Hebrew.

Chapter One

p. 54 “Je veux témoigner” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 107)

p. 56 “Je suis une femme rwandaise. Je n’ai pas appris à déposer mes idées dans des livres. Je ne vis pas dans l’écrit. Je vis dans la parole.” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 13)

Genocide in sights and sounds

p. 83 “Que ceux qui n’auront pas la force de lire cela, que j’écrirai peut-être un jour, me dis-je, se dénoncent comme complices du génocide rwandais. Moi, Yolande Mukagasana, je déclare à la face de l’humanité que quiconque ne veut pas prendre connaissance du calvaire du peuple rwandais est complice des bourreaux. Le monde ne renoncera à être violent que lorsqu’il acceptera d’étudier son besoin de violence. Je ne veux ni terrifier ni apitoyer. Je veux témoigner.” (Mukagasana 1997, p.107)

p. 84 “s’émouvoir sans agir” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 116)

p. 84. “le lâchete [...] la communauté internationale [...] qui nous a abandonnés” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 92)

p. 84 “la voiture longe une dizaine de cadavres abandonnés sur la route. Puis c’est une haie presque ininterrompue de cadavres [...] Hommes pour la plupart, à moitié dénudés, et sur lesquels une tache rouge témoigne de l’endroit où ils ont été frappés: le front, la nuque, les talons, les bras [...] le front ouvert d’une large cicatrice [...] quatre ou cinq jeunes garçons qui ont les bras tranchés [...] Une autre femme, violée sans doute avant d’être tuée, car sa culotte est à ses chevilles [...] Un chien tire la tête tranchée d’une adolescente, une de ses tresses dans la gueule [...] qu’on voit sur la route des mains, des bras, des pieds, des jambes, épars.” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 175-6)

p. 85 “Une forte odeur sucrée de banane me saisit, dominant celle des hibiscus alentour.” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 35)

pp. 85-86 “Nous n’aimons pas la nature, nous sommes la nature.” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 35)

- p. 86 “Il y a dans tout Kigali une puanteur insoutenable” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 139)
- p. 86 “Certains cadavres [...] exhalent une odeur forte” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 177)
- p. 86 “Je sens le beurre rance.” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 206)
- p. 86 “Ils semblent commenter dans leur jargon les impressions nouvelles que leur procurent le spectacle de la ville et sa puanteur inaccoutumée.” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 213)
- p. 86 “Le meurtre doit donner soif, car j’ai [...] grosse noix de coco, ouverte à coups de massue, sans doute.” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 137)
- p. 86 “Sa boîte crânienne explose, avec un bruit de noix de coco.” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 169)
- p. 86 “Lorsque la boîte crânienne est brisée, les coups de marteau ont une résonance plus grave, cela ressemble à un hachoir électrique qu’enrayeraient des os inattendus.” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 169)

Being female : ruin and redemption

- p. 87 “hommes n’aiment pas une femme émancipée, encore moins lorsqu’elle a de l’argent” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 21)
- p. 87 “Une infirmière en chef [...] Je suis aisée [...] Je suis fière” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 17)
- p. 87 “je suis méconnaissable.” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 51)
- p. 87 “Mon embonpoint qui faisait tenir tout seul mon jean, voici qu’il m’a abandonnée” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 67)
- p. 87 “Regarde ces boutons sur mes bras. Regarde ces fesses qui n’existent plus. Regarde mes cuisses. Je suis devenue une vieille femme. L’eau ruisselle le long de mes vergetures, elles sont devenues des crevasses semblables aux lits des fleuves. Joseph me regarde sans désir” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 72)
- p. 87 “Je suis résignée à mourir, mais pas à être violée. Et si je dois mourir, qu’au moins je meure propre.” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 71)
- p. 88 “je puisse lui couper les seins” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 49)

- p. 88 "sa femme a été violée, alors qu'elle était enceinte. On l'a ensuite éventrée pour voir comment un bébé tutsi couche dans le ventre de sa mère. Puis on lui a tranché les tendons, des pieds. Elle est morte, finalement, lorsque quelqu'un s'est décidé à lui loger une balle dans la tête."
(Mukagasana 1997, p. 84)
- pp. 88-99 "j'avais peur qu'elle se détache toute seule." (Mukagasana 1997, p. 73)
- p. 89 "C'est peut-être la peur d'être violée qui me donne des forces." (Mukagasana 1997, p. 134)
- p. 89 "J'ai envie de me regarder [...] Je regarde le creux de mon ventre. Trois pointes émergent, les deux apophyses du bassin et le pubis proéminent, surmonté de poils noirs. On dirait les volcans Virunga. Je vis un moment dans cette intimité retrouvée. Quoique décharnée, je suis encore une femme. L'espoir me gagne à nouveau." (Mukagasana 1997, p. 143-4)
- p. 89 "Je suis le Rwanda." (Mukagasana 1997, p. 96)
- p. 89 "je suis redevenue une femme. Une femme à part entière. Une femme qui aime séduire"
(Mukagasana 1997, p. 221)
- p. 89 "j'ai volé une grenade que je caresse par moments sous mon pagne comme une femme enceinte caresse son ventre" (Mukagasana 1997, p. 223)
- p. 90 "je sens une espèce de déchirure dans le ventre. C'est comme si j'allais accoucher [...] je me mets avec obsession à me remémorer mon premier accouchement. Il y a en moi comme un détachement de ce monde [...] Le travail est long. Mon fils ne montre aucune envie de venir voir comment est le monde, tout comme moi, courbaturée, entortillée, recroquevillée sous mon cher évier, je n'ai plus envie d'aller voir comment est le Rwanda [...] Je crois reconnaître le premier cri de mon fils. Je suis heureuse. Je viens d'accoucher pour la seconde fois de mon enfant [...] J'ai envie de hurler que je suis capable d'accoucher deux fois du même enfant. Que la mort n'existe pas." (Mukagasana 1997, pp. 104-106)
- p. 91 "Cela vaut peut-être mieux que mes enfants ne me voient pas pleurer." (Mukagasana 1997, p. 67)
- p. 91 "Maintenant je sais pourquoi je m'habille: pour eux." (Mukagasana 1997, p. 78)
- p. 91 "Nous nous embrassons, nous pleurons. Spérancie geint dans un coin de la pièce. Ses sanglots m'entrent dans la chair comme autant [...] elle se lève, disparaît dans le jardin, me laissant à ma douloureuse intimité de mère entourée de ses malheureux enfants [...] la

communauté internationale, sans doute, qui nous a abandonnés [...] Lorsque Nadine m'embrasse, j'ai l'impression de sortir d'un cauchemar [...] Je regarde ses jambes ensanglantées, des lambeaux de chair pendent comme des drapeaux en berne. Christian s'est assis en tailleur en face de moi. Sa tête plonge dans mon giron. Sandrine s'assied à côté de moi et me passe un bras autour des épaules. J'ai l'impression de recevoir plus de mes enfants, en cette seconde, que j'ai pu leur donner en quinze années. J'ai l'impression d'être une de ces *pietà* vues dans les livres de religion, mais qui aurait eu trois enfants de douleur [...] Nous restons je ne sais combien de temps dans cette intimité. De temps à autre, je caresse la tête d'un enfant, ou lui prends la main. Quelques grenades éclatent sporadiquement au loin.” (Mukagasana 1997, pp. 92-95)

p. 91 “Je respire comme un noyé sauvé de justesse.” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 101)

p. 91 “Si mes enfants sont morts, à quoi bon vivre encore?” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 147)

Emotional Questions, Ambiguous Answers

p. 92 “d'un sentiment de compassion pour mon ennemi [...] je passe la nuit à me demander quels curieux sentiments éprouve une victime pour son bourreau. Est-ce du dégoût? Est-ce un mélange des deux? Et pourquoi n'y a-t-il pas moyen de se départir de l'idée que le bourreau est un être humain?” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 194)

pp. 93-93 “je n'aurais pas plus le courage d'achever cet homme mourant. Nous abandonnons l'homme à ses souffrances. Pour la première fois depuis l'assassinat du président Habyarimana, il m'apparaît que la victime n'est pas moins lâche que son bourreau. Eh! Que ferais-je, si j'étais mise en situation de devoir tuer sous peine de mort? Au Rwanda, en avril 1994, les bourreaux sont victimes d'être bourreaux. Mais s'ils ne sont que des victimes, pourquoi ce goût du sang?” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 90)

p. 93 “J'ai peur.” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 147)

p. 93 “La peur est revenue” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 147)

p. 93 “Il pleure comme un enfant, abattu, impuissant, abasourdi de tristesse.” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 25)

p. 94 “c'est moi qui dois le calmer.” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 27)

p. 94 “ne perdons pas courage” (Mukagasana 1997, p. 29)

- p. 94 "Me décourager? Suis-je quelqu'un que l'on peut décourager?" (Mukagasana 1997, p. 31)
- p. 94 "J'eclate de rire." (Mukagasana 1997, p. 45)
- p. 94 "Nous rions presque. Nous sommes heureux." (Mukagasana 1997, p. 57)
- p. 94 "je suis presque joyeuse" (Mukagasana 1997, p. 185)
- p. 94 "Je ris intérieurement." (Mukagasana 1997, p. 185)
- p. 94 "Je suis ivre de bonheur et de tristesse en même temps [...] je suis si triste que j'ai l'impression que je vais éprouver un orgasme de tristesse." (Mukagasana 1997, p. 106)
- p. 95 "J'ai peur? Donc je vis!" (Mukagasana 1997, p. 150)
- p. 95 "Il n'y a plus d'espoir" (Mukagasana 1997, p. 30)

Chapter Two

Between the public and the personal : breaching genre's bounds

- p. 104 "הקוראים של פרסומי ההיסטוריים מזהים את דרכי באורח חד־משמעי עם עמדת הריחוק המחקרית [...] אך מעטים מודעים לקיומו של ממד השתיקה, להפרדה שבה בחרתי בין העבר הביוגרפי והעבר ההיסטורי. [...] אני מודע לכך שהספר הנוכחי חושף מתחים אימננטיים של דיכטומיה בין הזיכרון הרפלקטיבי ותבניות הביטוי של המחקר ההיסטורי." (Kulka 2013, p.15)
- p. 104 "אולי לא בדיוק זיהיתי אותם ורק דימיתי לעצמי שזיהיתי אותם, אבל אין זה משנה." (Kulka 2013, pp. 22-23)
- p. 104 "אני חוזר לכך לא מעט [...] אם כי לעולם איני מזכיר את האפיזודה הזאת במישרין" (Kulka 2013, pp. 50-51)
- p. 105 "אינני יודע מה היו שיקוליו או נימוקיו - אולי זע בו משהו ואולי ביקש להימנע מן המטרד של ספירה מחדש - זה בוודאי לא רלוונטי להתנסות הפנימית שלי" (Kulka 2013, p. 62)
- p. 105 "ואני הלוא חוקר עכשיו את הזיכרון, ולא כותב זיכרונות" (Kulka 2013, p. 66)
- p. 105 "גטו במחנה השמדה: "מחנה המשפחות" של יהודי טרזינשטט באושוויץ" (Kulka 2013, p. 143)

p. 105 "חלק ממיטולוגיה פרטית [...] שהיא קיימת כמיטולוגיה שאני יצרתי אותה" (Kulka 2013, p. 111)

p. 106 "השניות הפרדוקסלית הזאת של חקר התקופה תוך הימנעות עקבית, מוחלטת, משילובו של כל פרט של מעורבות ביוגרפית בזירת ההתרחשות של אותה היסטוריה" (Kulka 2013, p. 117)

p. 106 "לאמיתו של דבר, כך נראה לי כעת, רק ניסיתי לעקוף כאן את מחסום השער ההוא, להיכנס בו בכל עוצמת ישותי, במסווה, או במטמורפוזת של, אולי, סוס טרויאני, שנועד לבסוף לנפץ את השער ולנתץ את החומה הבלתי-נראית של העיר האסורה עלי, שגזרתי על עצמי את ההישארות מחוץ לעיבורה. שהרי באותה כתיבה מדעית צרופה, מחמירה, טמונים מטענים ומתחים אדירים, ממדים ומשמעויות "על-ממדיים", פתוחים איכשהו לעל-זמני. כאן, לאותו נתיב בטוח וסלול של דיסציפלינה מדעית, האמנתי שאוכל לצקת את תודעת העוצמה של חוויית ההתרחשות ההיסטורית ההיא, את תודעת על-ממדיותה, את תודעת הא-פרסונליות הכבירה שלה שחווייתי דרך הפריזמה של ההווה ההוא ושל הזיכרון והדמיון שלו, שעמם נרתעתי וחרדתי, אולי תת-הכרתית, להתמודד במישרין." (Kulka 2013, pp. 117-118)

Between the "I" and the Other

p. 108 "לא בזכותי, אלא בשל איזושהי גזירה" (Kulka 2013, p. 39)

p. 108 "אף שהם מעוגנים באירוע היסטורי מוגדר במקום ובזמן, חורגים מתחומה של ההיסטוריה." (Kulka 2013, p. 17)

p. 109 "שלא הייתי שם מעולם, משום שרגלי לא דרכה בחצרות האלה, לא עברה את סף המבנים האלה. סובבתי סביבם כמו פרפר לילה סביב להבה וידעתי שבלתי-נמנע ליפול לתוכה, אבל נשארתי סובב בחוץ, מרצוני או שלא מרצוני - זה לא היה בידי - בשעה שכל חברי, הפרפרים, לא כולם, אבל כמעט כולם, היו שם ולא יצאו משם." (Kulka 2013, p. 27)

p. 109 "זה לא היה בידי" (Kulka 2013, p. 27)

p. 110 "ולא יצאו משם" (Kulka 2013, p. 27)

p. 110 "רבבות-רבבות - שראיתי נבלעים בטורים אינסופיים" (Kulka 2013, p. 29)

p. 110 "רבבות המגורשים בקרונות הבקר" (Kulka 2013, p. 32)

p. 110 "ערימות של גופות" (Kulka 2013, p. 43)

p. 110 "החיסול ההמוני" (Kulka 2013, p. 46)

p. 110 "נעלי הנרצחים, הנספים" (Kulka 2013, p. 99)

p. 110 "מכתב הפרידה שכתבה אמי בליל 30 ביוני 1944, כאשר חשבנו שלא ניצל מהחיסול הסופי של המחנה ההוא." (Kulka 2013, p. 77)

p. 110 "היא מתקוממת על האכזריות של הגזירה - מדוע חייו של ילד חף מפשע חייבים להגיע אל קצם ביד האכזרית הזאת?! ובמשפט הבא מופיעה כהד התביעה לנקום את הדם הנקי, את דם הנקיים שנשפך שם. [...] נדמה לי שהיה במשפט זה משהו מאותה תחושה של קריאה לצדק [...] שאי-אפשר להתמודד איתו במישרין. רק בהמחשה אישית של התייחסות אלי - ילד קטן שנגזר עליו למות באותו לילה, באותה גזירה גדולה - היתה מסוגלת להעלות את האומר הזה של הקריאה לנקם, לדין של צדק" (Kulka 2013, pp. 77-78)

p. 111 "אמא נשאה עמה ברחמה עובר של אחי, עובר של אושוויץ, מפגישה עם אבא שם, וגם את החלטתה הנחושה לנסות לצאת לפחות איתו, אם אנו שנינו נישאר ונאבד[...] ובדרך נס [...] הגיעה עד לשעת הלידה [...] חברותיה והעובדות בבית החולים שאליו הובאה לקראת הלידה הבטיחו לקיים את העובר אם אכן לא יבוא מצב חירום ולא ייכנס מישוה [...] התינוק היה בריא וצרח כמו תינוק בריא, ואנשי האס-אס שקרבו הביאו לקצו: אותן עובדות בית החולים שמו קץ לחייו." (Kulka 2013, pp. 88-89)

p. 111 "כאן נסגר המעגל" (Kulka 2013, p. 92)

Voices Past and Present

p. 112 "אני קולט את הדרך הזאת. אני חש פתאום שבמקומות האלה - אני כבר הייתי פעם. אני מכיר את השלטים, את הבתים האלה." (Kulka 2013, p. 20)

p. 112 "הקומפלקס הזה [...] שממנו אין יוצאים לעולם." (Kulka 2013, p. 21)

p. 112 "ככל שהמסע התארך אפסו גם כוחותי והלכתי והתקרבותי יותר ויותר אל השורות האחרונות, לאלה שמי שכשל בהן, מי שהתעכב - נורה והפך לכתם שחור לצדי הדרך. היריות נעשו תכופות יותר והכתמים הלכו ורבו [...] השיירה נעצרה [...] אינני מתכוון לתאר כאן את מצעד המוות" (Kulka 2013, p. 22)

p. 113 "זה היה כמובן אבסורד. הרי לא הייתי במקום הזה, מעולם לא הייתי, לא יכולתי להיות, אבל הוודאות היתה סוטאלית, לא היה אפשר לטעות בה." (Kulka 2013, p. 105)

p. 113 "אכן אותו מקום, העזובה של הר הבית, היה טעון מאין כמוהו בהתרחשות של טראומה היסטורית, במוות ובקץ, בכל מה שיצא משם או שזרם לשם, וההליכה על פניו היתה הליכה בדממה [...] ובתוכו חוט התיל החלוד המקשר בין המקום הזה למקום ההוא [...] כשהבנתי את הדבר הזה, חזרתי לאושוויץ. לא מיד. עזבתי את הר הבית, פיזית, אבל בתודעתי חזרתי לאושוויץ [...] כנראה החלטתי אז [...] לשוב." (Kulka 2013, pp. 106-107)

The Elegy

p. 124 "comment transmettre l'intransmissible?" (Rurangwa 2006, p. 9)

- p. 124 “Appolinalie se tient au centre, bien sûr, élancée, gracieuse sous son voile de tulle, dans sa longue robe blanche [...] Ma tante a une grâce figée [...] C’est mon oncle Jean, précisément, le grand frère d’Appolinalie [...] mon oncle Faustin Mahigigi [...] C’est ma grand-mère, Berancilla Nyirafari [...] Elle se nomme Pascasie, c’est la femme de Jean.” (Rurangwa 2006, pp. 16-18)
- p. 124 “Sylvélie Nyirabicuba, 13 ans [...] Olive, 11 ans; Pierre Célestin Bukuba [...] âgé de 9 ans; Marie Ntakiruntinka [...] 7 ans; et ma petite sœur Claudette Byukusenge, 5 ans.” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 39)
- p. 125 “le meurtre de ma mère fut la pire atrocité à laquelle il me fut imposé d’assister.” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 47)
- p. 126 “je vois ma mère, celle qui m’a donné la vie, comme je ne l’ai jamais vue, entièrement nue” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 48)
- p. 126 “demeurent en liberté, impunis et imposent la loi du silence aux rescapés” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 71)
- pp. 126-127 “Cet abattage de neuf Tutsi sur dix – soit un Rwandais sur sept – s’est déroulé dans un silence assourdissant, au moment même où le musée de l’Holocauste était inauguré à Washington et où les chefs des grandes puissances occidentales célébraient le cinquantième anniversaire du Débarquement allié en Normandie en s’adjurant unanimement: « Plus jamais ça ! »” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 12)
- p. 127 “j’accuse ces femmes de non-assistance à personne en danger. Elles n’ont pas même daigné cacher un enfant de notre famille lors du génocide” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 21)

The Fraternity of Pain

- p. 127 “Il n’est ni facile ni agréable de sonder cet abîme de noirceur, et je pense cependant qu’on doit le faire.” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 9)
- p. 128 “cercles de l’enfer” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 12)
- p. 128 “Après celui des Arméniens en Turquie, en 1915-1916, et celui des Juifs en Europe, en 1941-1944, le génocide des Tutsi au Rwanda, en 1994, est le troisième génocide du xx^e siècle. Ou le quatrième? Certains puristes dénie l’appellation « génocide » aux crimes des Khmers Rouges perpétrés au Cambodge” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 11)

- p. 128 “le génocide gravé dans ma peau, comme un tatouage sur l’avant-bras des condamnés d’Auschwitz” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 91)
- p. 129 “le train stoppe devant son butoir dans des hurlements d’acier et des jets de vapeur qui balaient les quais. C’est la fin du voyage, tout le monde descend. Des portes se ferment, d’autres s’ouvrent. Des hommes armés aboient des ordres gutturaux, des chiens tirent sur leur laisse [...] Les épouses arrachées à leurs maris, les enfants à leurs parents [...] À gauche [...] les vieillards, les jeunes pas encore pubères, les femmes trop fragiles, les enfants, les maladies. Et tout de suite, pour beaucoup, la mise à mort.” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 121)
- p. 129 “le symbole du Génocide, le paradigme du Crime contre l’humanité.” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 122)
- p. 129 “un lieu où tous les rescapés se retrouvent en quelque sorte chez eux [...] cette étrange fraternité que je viens de partager avec une trentaine d’autres rescapés de génocides” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 122)
- p. 129 “un survivant n’a pas d’âge. Si nos langages sont différents, une complicité s’est créée entre nous qui se passe de mots lorsque nous découvrons les monticules de chaussures, les tas de cheveux coupés, les galeries de portraits, les traces de pieds nus dans le terre gelée...” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 122)
- p. 129 “j’ai l’impression de me glisser dans la peau de ces vieux, de ces femmes, de ces enfants qui pénètrent dans les fausses douches où ils vont être gazés au zyklon B” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 127)
- p. 130 “À tous les rescapés qui ne peuvent ni pleurer ni parler. Que mes larmes soient leurs larmes, que mes mots soient leurs cris” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 7)
- p. 130 “Gratia Musabende [...] venait d’accoucher, la veille, de garçons jumeaux. Ces petits innocents gisent sur l’autel de l’église, dans le chœur, avec leur mère, coupée et allongée sur la pierre du sacrifice. Des survivants attesteront que les tueurs, après avoir fracassé le crâne des deux bébés contre la muraille rose de l’édifice, ont plongé le visage de la mère dans le sang de ses enfants avant de l’immoler.” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 61)

Who Am I ?

- p. 131 “Je suis secrètement obsédé par une question: va-t-on me reconnaître avec ces lunettes médicales qui cachent mon œil vide, ces cicatrices qui me boursoufflent le visage, cette démarche claudicante que provoque mon épaule fracassée, ce moignon de bras? [...] Je ne

ressens que gêne et honte. Défiguré, certes, mais suis-je pour autant devenu un autre homme? Définitivement, un étranger? Ou un être invisible?” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 76)

p. 132 “j’ai souvent l’impression qu’une part de moi-même s’est arrêtée pour toujours à l’âge de 15 ans, comme une aiguille se bloque sur le cadran d’une horloge lors d’un séisme; et qu’une autre part de moi a vieilli trop vite et trop tôt. Je vis ainsi en décalage avec moi-même.” (Rurangwa 2006, pp. 92-93)

p. 132 “un cadavre vivant.” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 66)

pp. 132 “Ce que je vois est horrible mais je ne peux éviter cet affrontement: un visage qui n’est plus mon visage [...] Tout miroir est un ennemi [...] Je n’ai qu’une envie, bien sûr, c’est briser la glace. Mais est-ce moi que je veux détruire ou ma nouvelle tête ? Ou seulement ces plaies fichées en moi et leurs souvenirs ? Comment s’accepter alors qu’on a tellement de mal à s’aimer ? Il me faut chaque matin oser me regarder en face, et je n’en ai pas toujours le courage. Il n’est pas facile d’apprendre à coexister, plus ou moins pacifiquement, avec ce que je surnomme mes « cauchemars de jour ».” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 89)

p. 133 “J’ai refusé tout net, sans même peser le pour et le contre. Même si elle est ravagée, ma figure est celle que m’a offerte ma mère. Et même si je supporte difficilement ma propre image, je désire garder gravées dans mon corps les marques du mal.” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 91)

p. 133 “Enfermez vos sentiments dans des armoires et bouclez-les.” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 87)

p. 133 “Que l’on me comprenne bien : ce n’est pas tant ma vie personnelle que je cherche à préserver, mais celle de l’unique rescapé d’une lignée de mon peuple. À travers moi, c’est ma famille qui doit survivre.” (Rurangwa 2006, p. 87)

pp. 133 “Je ne peux pas me dérober au devoir de mémoire et de transmission. Ce serait devenir complice de notre génocide [...] Les Hutu ont nettoyé les églises, les prairies, tous les lieux du génocide, mais ils ne peuvent m’enlever mes balafres” (Rurangwa 2006, pp. 90-91)

Chapter Three

p. 138 “elle n’était pas venue voir des paysages et des animaux, mais des gens” (Gatore 2008, p. 107)

Fiction : A Place to Feel

- p. 172 “elle s’enfonça dans une solitude totale” (Gatore 2008, p. 62)
- p. 170 “Elle s’y tient immobile et il faut une attention particulière pour être sûr qu’elle n’est pas un mannequin” (Gatore 2008, p. 24)
- p. 170 “ce passage du journal qui s’était jeté sur elle, comme un criminel saute sur sa proie [...] Elle tomba dans sa tête, aussi encombrante et douloureuse que serait une brique dans un estomac. Les sucs de son cerveau s’acharnèrent à la réduire, en vain [...] Tout ce qu’elle en entendait lui donnait la nausée [...] l’immobilisait.” (Gatore 2008, pp. 27-28)
- p. 170 “c’est cela qui l’avait choquée : l’obscénité du monde [...] l’attitude de ceux qui ne trouvent rien d’autre à y redire que « c’est terrible, mais bon » [...] Soudain, cette attitude à laquelle elle a été si amoureusement dressée et dans laquelle elle s’était confortablement vautrée pendant des années l’écœura [...] Combien de gens n’ont et n’auront jamais d’autre réaction que celle-là ?” (Gatore 2008, pp. 42-43)
- p. 171 “l’objectif de cette aventure est précisément de mettre en lumière la subjectivité, car c’est là-dessus que se fondent la haine et la violence. Je crois qu’il ne faut pas chercher à tirer vers nous l’horreur de ces événements mais à aller vers elle.” (Gatore 2008, p. 77)
- pp. 171 “ce que la générosité de ses parents lui a enlevé, c’est de pouvoir être orpheline, de l’être sans circonstance atténuante ; d’en être anéantie ou d’en renaître. Ils l’ont privée de la possibilité d’être submergée par la tristesse et d’en émerger [...] Peut-être leur en voulait-elle de l’avoir distraite du deuil [...] Elle dut s’accrocher à ce silence et à cet oubli comme une façon de dire sa gratitude [...] Pour l’anniversaire de ses dix-huit ans, ils lui avaient offert deux classeurs de photographies [...] Tout y était sauf ce qu’il n’y avait pas, c’est-à-dire ce qui avait eu lieu avant la première photo [...] c’est que cette consignation soignée et systématique de ses faits et gestes depuis qu’elle était là ne faisant que souligner ce qui était omis” (Gatore 2008, pp. 52-55)
- p. 172 “c’est de ne m’avoir rien dit sur ce qui s’est passé, sur les événements qui vous ont amenés à me recueillir, au fond, sur qui je suis” (Gatore 2008, p. 108)
- p. 173 “elle entama de se détacher de l’autre. Cela ne fut pas difficile car il donnait une large prise aux trombes de caprices, de reproches et de frustrations qu’elle déchaînait contre lui. Assez vite, il ne fut pas qu’une marionnette qu’elle convoquait, manipulait et rejetait à sa convenance. Trop épris d’elle, il s’en contenta. Trop ivre de son pouvoir, elle en abusa [...] Ce fut ensuit la tour se ses amis.” (Gatore 2008, pp. 54-55)

- p. 173 “Elle ne regrette pas d’avoir été aussi vicieuse” (Gatore 2008, p. 90)
- p. 174 “Elle prit plaisir à se sentir perdue, écrasée, rattrapée” (Gatore 2008, p. 29)
- p. 174 “Elle eut besoin de sentir et de montrer la cicatrice qu’elle s’était tant appliquée à couvrir” (Gatore 2008, p. 53)
- p. 174 “Elle gémissait de douleur, mais jouissait de se sentir enfin dans son rôle [...] Quelques fois, ses yeux se détachaient d’elle pour la regarder ; et ce qu’ils voyaient ajoutait à la volupté de la douleur à laquelle elle s’accrochait comme un talisman. Elle en avait besoin.” (Gatore 2008, pp. 62-63)
- p. 175 “Son état et le geste qu’elle commit n’étaient pas une négation du sens, tout au contraire. Elle cherchait à infliger au monde et à elle-même le spectacle de son étrangeté trop longtemps retenue, refoulée [...] Secrètement, elle espérait que sa disparition fit scandale [...] Incarner l’horreur et faire éclater aux yeux des tous son malheur, indiscutable et gênant ; voilà, à quoi elle pensait” (Gatore 2008, p. 63)

Interrogating the Grey Zone

- p. 176 “pour comprendre ce qui s’est passé, s’approcher de ce qui en a été la cause” (Gatore 2008, p. 175)
- p. 176 “un flot de souvenirs qui l’écœurent et le crispent, violemment, au point de faire revenir tout ce qu’il vient de manger.” (Gatore 2008, p. 39)
- p. 177 “qu’il faisait un deuil étonnant certes, mais de la seule façon qui pût donner une idée de ses souffrances, par le silence.” (Gatore 2008, p. 80)
- p. 177 “qu’il s’agissait d’une forme rare de mutisme totale qui ne permet même pas de crier, de pleurer ou de gémir” (Gatore 2008, p. 81)
- p. 178 “Jamais appelé puisqu’il ne pouvait pas répondre. Niko resta longtemps sans nom. Pour l’interpeller, tout le monde, lui criait « Niko ! » qui ne signifie rien d’autre que « hé ! » ou bien encore « toi là-bas ! »” (Gatore 2008, p. 81)
- p. 178 “Alors qu’il marchait à peine, Niko, rejeté de la cuisine par sa belle-mère qui avait toujours mieux à faire que de lui consacrer une seconde, titubait en direction de son père. Ce dernier écartait d’une geste précautionneux mais ferme l’enfant qui l’empêchait de vivre comme un homme digne.” (Gatore 2008, p. 82)

- p. 178 “tout ce que ses parents faisaient pour l’enraciner dans la vie l’éloignait de la seule chose essentielle à ses yeux.” (Gatore 2008, pp. 44-45)
- p. 180 “figée telle une image” (Gatore 2008, p. 13)
- p. 183 “Ses yeux [...] laissent défiler, sans trahir aucune émotion, ces images qui jadis le défaisaient [...] Son corps, réduit à une ossature immobile, paraît étranger à tout ce qui peut remuer son esprit. Il est devenu insensible au souvenir.” (Gatore 2008, pp. 156-157)
- pp. 180-181 “Un meurtrier peut-il revenir à sa vie d’avant [...] Reprendre son activité habituelle, purger de soi et de l’extérieur tout rappel du crime que l’on a commis permet-il de redevenir un homme normal ? Prendre la vie de quelqu’un interdit-il de disposer de la sienne ? [...] Ces yeux. Ces corps. Ces cris dont il a ignoré les mots. Ce sang. Plus il s’en défendait, plus il en était assailli [...] Sa propre existence le regardait avec des yeux déçus [...] Être le plus loin et le plus seul possible lui parut urgent et vital. Le monde ne pourrait lui inspirer que des souvenirs insoutenables. Il fallait donc qu’il s’en extraie.” (Gatore 2008, pp. 140-143)
- p. 181 “les mots se bousculèrent alors dans son bras [...] Elle sent encore dans ses veines la trace de leur afflux violent et acide [...] Elle s’est vidée des mots et des pensées qu’ils disent, comme on se vide de son sang.” (Gatore 2008, p. 12)
- p. 181 “Seules lui vont, cela saute aux yeux, la marginalité, la souffrance, et la mort.” (Gatore 2008, p. 164)
- p. 182 “de fermer les yeux [...] elle doit lutter contre ses réflexes [...] rester droit et ne pas desserrer le poignard pointé sur son cœur” (Gatore 2008, pp. 183-184)

Chapter Four

- p. 217 “Il n’est pas toujours facile de parler de certaines choses aux enfants. Il y a comme des sujets tabous, notamment à propos de l’histoire familiale. Surtout quand cette histoire est jalonnée d’événements comme la persécution, les massacres, l’exil, l’extermination, le génocide [...] Vous voulez ménager vos enfants, vous n’en parlez pas. Vous souhaitez sauvegarder l’enfance qui est en eux.” (Ntarindwa 2009, p. 7)
- p. 218 “Il ne m’a même pas laissé finir” (Ntarindwa 2009, p. 8)

- p. 218 “Sur la colline, j’ai trouvé tout le troupeau de vaches complètement décimé. Les bêtes étaient en train d’agoniser. On leur avait coupé les mamelles [...] Cette image du lait et sang se mélangeant dans la boue, elle m’a tellement traumatisé [...] Et la nuit même, on a quitté Rwanda.” (Ntarindwa 2009, p. 18)
- p. 219 “Les valeurs du Rwanda feront de vous des hommes qui pourront vivre debout [...] même dans l’hostilité, comme les juifs” (Ntarindwa 2009, p. 9)
- p. 220 “C’est de la propagande, des mensonges, de l’intoxication, des contrevérités [...] Prenez vos cahiers et écrivez le titre: L’histoire précoloniale des royaumes de l’Afrique des Grand Lacs.” (Ntarindwa 2009, p. 13)
- p. 221 “le sous-développement de l’Afrique.” (Ntarindwa 2009, p. 11)
- p. 221 “l’Afrique [...] régresse de manière apocalyptique [...] ‘tous les peuples de la terre, ont apporté quelque chose à l’humanité [...] sauf bien évidemment les peuples d’Afrique noire [...] L’Afrique noire est un continent “récepteur” et non “conceptuer”” (Ntarindwa 2009, p. 12)
- p. 223 “Evènements marquants ayant conduit à la décision du départ pour l’armée” (Ntarindwa 2009, p. 20)
- p. 223 “Monsieur le Président, nous sommes les réfugiés rwandais vivant au Burundi; nous voulons rentrer au pays.” (Ntarindwa 2009, p. 20)
- p. 223 “le pays est trop petit” (Ntarindwa 2009, p. 20)
- p. 223 “les réfugiés rwandais vivant en Tanzanie, au Zaïre, en Ouganda [...] les plus anciens réfugiés d’Afrique, laissez-nous rentrer au pays!” (Ntarindwa 2009, p. 20)
- p. 223 “Australie, il y a de l’espace. Et pourquoi pas en Russie? La Sibérie est pratiquement inhabitée. Soyons sérieux quand meme: qu’est-ce que je dirais aux touristes? Que j’ai vidé le pare pour accueillir des réfugiés? M’Enfin! [...] Et ces pauvres gorilles, vous y pensez un seul instant? Où iront-ils? [...] Et ces pauvres éléphants, ils ont besoin d’espace [...] Ayez quand meme pitié d’une espèce en voie de disparition.” (Ntarindwa 2009, pp. 20-21)

Violence in the First Person

- p. 225 “Pourquoi ces corps mutilés sur d’aussi belles collines ? Si nos yeux ont du mal à supporter ce spectacle étrange, ceux des vautours au contraire semblent s’en délecter. Dans ce ciel si beau qu’ils remplissent de leurs cris, ils ne semblent pas embarrassés d’en être les seuls spectateurs

satisfaits [...] Quelque temps après [...] les narines sont habituées à la puanteur qui s'invite par moments comme pour rappeler à tous que la mort rôde dans les parages" (Ntarindwa 2009, p. 25)

p. 225 "Soldat, aujourd'hui est un grand jour pour toi [...] ton nom sera gravé à jamais dans l'Histoire des tiens. La véritable Histoire, la Grande Histoire, soldat. [...] L'histoire du Rwanda commence avec vous aujourd'hui" (Ntarindwa 2009, p. 29)

p. 226 "jamais! j'ai bien dit jamais!" (Ntarindwa 2009, p. 32)

p. 226 "Quand tu seras connu, tu parleras de tout et de rien et comme tout le monde, tu ne parleras jamais de nous. Tu feras comme les autres, n'est-ce pas ?" (Ntarindwa 2009, p. 32)

p. 226 "témoignages de bourreaux" (Ntarindwa 2009, p. 32)

p. 226 "la tombe du soldat inconnu." (Ntarindwa 2009, p. 32)

p. 227 "aller à Kirengo voir la colline où je suis né" (Ntarindwa 2009, p. 33)

p. 227 "Papa, chante, tu n'a pas encore fini. Reviens chanter pour ta colline, ta paroisse [...] Viens papa, ne te laisse pas emporter par l'émotion. Viens chanter, papa." (Ntarindwa 2009, p. 35)