Genres of Truth: Television Coverage and Memorial Literature of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

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July, 2018

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts

Abstract

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC, 1995-2003) was a unique example of a distinctly twentieth-century form of restorative justice. More than any of the sixteen commissions which preceded it, South Africa's TRC utilized public hearings and mass media to enter the realm of popular culture. Scholarship has identified this public element of the TRC as one of the key factors in its unprecedented success: it managed to preside over a national transition from an authoritarian regime (apartheid) to the liberal democracy envisaged by Nelson Mandela and the African National Party while not only preventing major communal violence and civil war, but also while involving a large portion of the national population in the conversation. These successes were not, however, solely attributable to the Commission itself. In this thesis, I explore the popular mediums through which the Commission's findings and messages were mediated. I investigate two mediating genres – the memoir and the television documentary – taking as case studies Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* and Max du Preez's *TRC Special Report*, respectively. In the first chapter, I discuss the formal features of these genres, defining them as "retrospectives," as opposed to live coverage, and examining how their formal features influence the production of official truth. In the second chapter, I discuss the ethics of mediating victim testimonies with a focus on *Country of My Skull* and its special place at the nexus of race, memory, and genre studies. In the third chapter, I discuss the nation-building rhetoric and practical consequences of the narratives pushed by media coverage and memorial literature of the TRC. Ultimately, I argue that the TRC's political and cultural complexity forced these genres to adopt equally complex (and potentially democratic) representational strategies. I also argue, however, that these genres did not transcend the TRC. Though both *Country of My Skull* and

TRC Special Report present independent perspectives on the process of transition and the TRC particularly, they do not ultimately provide a critical perspective. For better or worse, they existed as complexly interrelated pieces of the TRC process, and thus toe the line and avoid critiquing South Africa's transition to a (neo)liberal democracy on a fundamental level.

Résumé

La Commission Vérité et Réconciliation d'Afrique du Sud (CVR, 1995-2003) est un exemple unique d'une forme de justice restauratrice caractéristique du vingtième siècle. Plus que les seize commissions qui l'ont précédée, la CVR d'Afrique du Sud a utilisé des évènements publiques ainsi que des médias de masse afin de rentrer dans le domaine de la culture populaire. La recherche a identifié cet élément publique de la CVR comme l'une des raisons clés de son succès sans précédent: la commission a réussi à diriger une transition nationale d'un régime autoritaire (apartheid) à la démocratie libérale envisagée par Nelson Mandela et le Parti National Africain; non seulement en évitant une violence communale majeure et une guerre civile, mais aussi en incluant une grande proportion de la population nationale dans la conversation. Ces succès ne sont cependant pas seulement attribuables à la Commission elle-même. Dans cette thèse, j'explore les médias populaires au travers desquels les messages et découvertes de la Commission ont été divulgués. J'étudie deux genres médiateurs—le mémoire et le documentaire télévisé—utilisant respectivement, Country of My Skull de Antjie Krog et TRC Special Report de Max du Preez comme études de cas. Dans le premier chapitre, je discute des caractéristiques formelles de ces genres, les définissant comme des "rétrospectives", en opposition à la couverture médiatique instantanée. J'examine aussi comment les caractéristiques formelles influencent la production de la vérité officielle. Dans le second chapitre, je discute de l'éthique

de la médiation des témoignages de victimes en me concentrant sur Country of My Skull et sa place spéciale dans le nexus de la race, de la mémoire, et des études de la sexualité. Dans le troisième chapitre, je discute de la rhétorique de la construction nationale et des conséquences pratiques des récits poussés par les couvertures médiatiques et la littérature mémorielle de la CVR. Finalement, j'argumente que la complexité politique et culturelle des la CVR ont forcé ces genres médiatiques à adopter des stratégies de représentation aussi complexes (et potentiellement démocratiques). J'argumente aussi, cependant, que ces genres n'ont pas transcendés la CVR. Malgré le fait que Country of My Skull et TRC Special Report représentent des perspectives indépendantes sur le processus de transition et particulièrement la CVR, ils ne fournissent pas au final, une perspective critique. Pour le meilleur ou pour le pire, ils existent en tant que morceaux entrelacés du processus de la CVR, et donc ne franchissent pas complètement la ligne pour critiquer la transition de l'Afrique du Sud vers une démocratie (néo)libérale à un niveau fondamental.

Acknowledgements

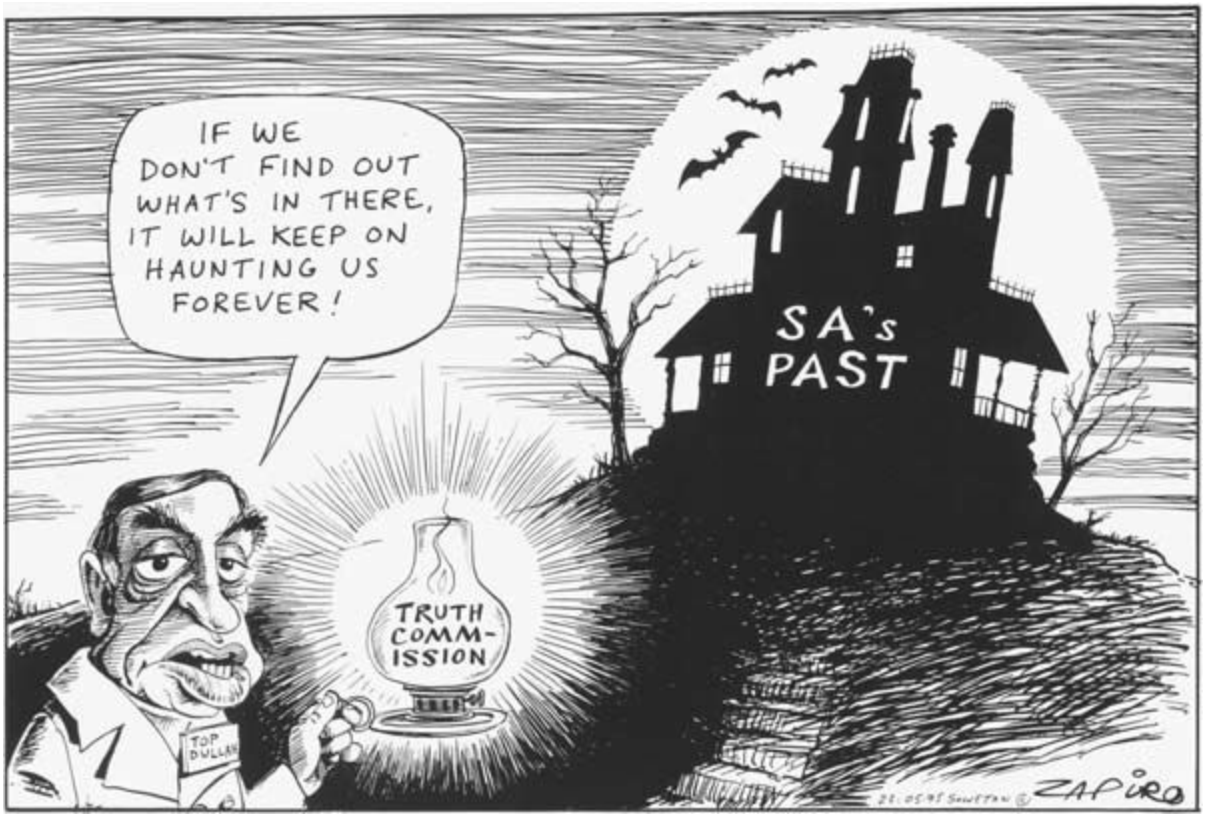
I would like to thank Professor Monica Popescu, a great friend and supervisor, for being a mentor, helping me with draft after draft, guiding me through my first conference, my first publication, and aiding tirelessly with financial support during the writing of this paper. This project emerged from a desire to understand how history is reflected in our stories, how narrative allows the proverbial victors to leave blank the pages of the downtrodden. Before Monica's classes I had little focus, only a fascination with historiography and memory. Her graduate course on South African literature and history, along with the many other courses she has taught over the years, have given me foundation.

Thanks to Professors Alanna Thain, Derek Nystrom, and Katie Zien for financial support in the form of research assistantships and graderships. Thank you to Professors Sandeep Banerjee, Ara Osterweil, Berkeley Kaite, Eli MacLaren, and David Hensley for your great courses and unwavering support. And thanks to Alice Hinchliffe for being a great translator and a better drinking buddy.

To Zain Mian, Lilika Kukiela, Bridget Walsh, Apurva Ashok, and Suvij Sudershan – your friendship has been invaluable. Love to Ellie, for always being there; you are the most important person in my life. Every time I think I have a hard day, I think about the work you do and humble myself. I could not have made it through without our daily calls.

To my father, who has been through so much and asked for so little: I am beyond grateful. To my mother, who is a rock for everyone in her life: I am beyond grateful. And, of course, to Liam and Leslie, Raphy, Robert and Sam – I would never have gotten to this point without all of you.

Introduction



Zapiro, 23 May 1995, *Sowetan*

For an embattled South Africa of 1996, at once fresh-faced in the light of "Madiba Magic," awash in "rainbow nation" rhetoric, and suffering from the scars of nearly five decades of apartheid brutality, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a conduit through which both victims and perpetrators sought to make their way into a "new dispensation" (Posel 70). It simplified things. Those, mostly black, who suffered violence at the hands of the regime or insurgent political parties such as the African National Congress (ANC), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), and South African Communist Party (SACP), were considered "victims." Those who

directly participated in or supported that suffering were considered "perpetrators."[1] The proceedings, televised nationally by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), broadcast over the radio by the SABC and various other stations, and published fervently in a plethora of newspapers, involved only a comparative handful of the South African population. In many ways, the Commission was a carefully orchestrated spectacle: its performed narrative of the history of apartheid served as much as a tool of nation-building as truth-seeking. Victims went up, faced their persecutors, tormentors, and torturers – the "perpetrators" of the binary equation – told their stories, and the nation looked on. For many it was catharsis: to bring the truth to light was just punishment for deeds carried out in the dark; brought out into the blinding sun, the testimonies of victims and even the confessions of perpetrators were purified, the horror of their visages scorched away.

Ideally, TRCs have two goals: firstly, the production of some historical consensus or, in less rationalist terms, "collective memory,"[2] about a particularly traumatic era; secondly, the reconciliation of parties based on an acceptance of that truth and the presumed repentance of the perpetrators. While these goals may, in fact, be the stated aims of all truth commissions, human rights scholarship has singled out South Africa's TRC (1995-2003)[3] as a uniquely successful case. Catherine Cole summarizes this consensus neatly: "Prior truth commissions were

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[1] The imposition of this binary was arguably a practical necessity that, though seemingly innocuous, had the effect of omitting other possible positions such as that of the "beneficiary" of apartheid, who may not have participated directly in gross human rights violations but nevertheless benefited from the structures supported by such violations.

[2] See Coullie (2014), Rothberg (2009), Wilson (2001), and Olney (1998). I discuss the differing interpretations of collective memory throughout this thesis.

[3] These are the technical bounds of the commission's tenure: after a year of fierce political debates, the commission was legislated into existence with the *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act*, No. 34 of 1995. Hearings did not begin until April of 1996, and the public Human Rights Violations hearings only went on for two years, ending in 1998. The final volume of the TRC report, a document which could merely gloss the massive amount of information presented to the commission, was published in 2003. For all intents and purposes in my study of the commission's media representation, then, the commission lasted for two years: 1996-1998. These whirlwind years produced almost all of the TRC's enduring images and most of its popular narratives.

conducted behind closed doors, and they usually became known to the public via the publication of a final report. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, by way of contrast, transpired in front of live, television, and radio audiences" (167-168).[4] That is, South Africa deployed the performative element, essential in theory but rarely realised by actual commissions, in unprecedented ways – so much so that "For many, these public hearings *were* the commission" (Cole 168).

Whether in a church basement in East London or the courthouses in Cape Town, the impromptu performance spaces of the Human Rights Violations (HRV)[5] committee hearings allowed many victims, whose voices were previously silenced by the apartheid regime, to speak, wail, sing, and generally perform memory in ways that exceed standard verbal expression (Motsemme 910). The performances also involved the audience, most if not all of whom had lived the same history, in a degree of participation not afforded by traditional juridical procedures. Cole argues that "the performative dimensions of public hearings allowed the TRC to express the inexpressible, and to humanise people's experiences of extreme dehumanization" (180). This argument represents the widely-held position that performance, in exceeding the standard rationalist, verbal juridical procedures, provides a fuller and more accessible truth to communities with disputed histories.

The TRC was history on stage, in two senses. "Performance means: never for the first time," argues Richard Schechner (36). Stories from the past were reanimated through testimonies

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[4] See Richard Wilson's *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*. Preceding South Africa, several commissions took place, primarily in Latin America. Bolivia, Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nepal, and Uganda all held commissions in the years leading up to 1995.

[5] The HRV hearings, lead by the face of the TRC, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, were the most performative and thus the most mediated of the three committees. They were the affective heart of the TRC and therefore have been the primary focus of most media coverage, literature, and academic writing since their beginning in 1996.

and thus brought back to life. In the collapsing body of Nomonde Calata, in her wail, in the tears in the eyes of Notrose Konile, in the stony disposition of Jeffrey Benzien, the HRVC[6] hearings publically re-played scenes and emotions from the not-so-distant past. This reanimating feature of live performance resisted the thrust of what Shane Graham calls "museum-ization." That is, the calcification or mummification of historical narrative, the danger that if these stories were relegated to history books alone, they would become "inert display[s] of an apparently static past" rather than living elements of present trauma (Graham 14). At the same time, the TRC was making history. Politically, the commission was a key piece in maintaining the tenuous working relationship between the ANC and NP (National Party, the political institution that designed and maintained apartheid). It may have been instrumental in preventing the country from falling into civil war. Indeed, it maintained the very integrity of the state by promising amnesty to and thus allaying the fears of the police and military, without whose cooperation the government could not have moved forward (Wilson 15).

The TRC was thus a drama all its own, a collage of historical dramas woven into the fabric of a larger whole, like a play with an ensemble cast of thousands. Cole argues that "the TRC served as a literal and figurative stage for South Africa's political transition" (xvi). In both content and form, it matched the stated goal of its nation-building project. To create "shared memory" and / through "collective identity" meant to create a unified sense of "us" by weaving together the multitude of fractious individual narratives/identities emerging from a segregated society. This "weaving" was both temporal and spatial: temporal in the sense that testimonies "reanimated" past trauma, weaving it into the fabric of the living present; spatial in the sense that

[6] Human Rights Violations Commission

the unity of the nation was conceived as a abolition of borders – borders constructed by apartheid, which mandated the categorization of populations and legislated the spaces to which those populations ostensibly belonged (i.e. the creation of "Bantustans,"and "Townships," and the implementation of Pass Laws). We might think of such "weaving" in the way James Olney does when he theorises autobiography as "the weave of life writing." To narrate the past self, Olney argues, is to create a semi-fictional self, a character. This "narrative self" goes on to inform the present self, and in this interaction between reflection and inflection we glimpse the relationship between life and art generally.

By all counts, South Africa's TRC was both astonishingly successful and generically complex. The insistence on public performance warped and expanded the generic structure of the trial to the degree that the TRC should be considered in a genre of its own. Indeed, for its first two years, from 1996 to 1998, the TRC became the center of a Rainbow Nation zeitgeist. It filled newspaper pages, radio bulletins, television imagery, and was ultimately memorialised by literature and documentary film as its monumental prominence in mainstream media wound down. The organs of established media struggled to fully represent the TRC in its sheer volume of information, let alone its significance as a watershed moment for the future of the country. Poet and journalist Krog attests that radio stations initially balked at the prospect of airing TRC news bulletins for fear that they would alienate listeners or that they simply could not represent such brutal narratives on their platforms (*Conditional* 16-19). The live coverage of the Human Rights Violations Committee testimonies often necessitated the censoring, or pure avoidance, of more violent testimonies or topics. Put simply, the content of South Africa's TRC hearings exceeded the capacities of established genres to represent them fully, pushing the media, and

later literature and film, to expand their representational strategies and, on the whole, adapt their generic structures to this awesome new task.

In this thesis, I argue that the TRC's generic complexity and political significance pushed boundaries of representation in media and art. I do not focus on the TRC-as-performance itself, but rather on the media coverage and memorial literature which refracted the narratives produced by the TRC through new lenses and presented those refracted narratives to new audiences. While much of the academic discourse has focused on the live attendance at HRV hearings, construing the space as a theatre, or the projection of that theatre on live TV and radio, I examine two genres which represent the TRC in retrospect – the memoir and the TV documentary. I examine how the generic features of summing up, thinking-through, and memorializing inherent in retroactive genres edited the testimonial performances of the TRC and thus influenced the production of truth and national narrative. As case studies of these genres, I compare Antjie Krog's memoir, *Country of My Skull*, with the TV documentary series, *TRC Special Report*, written and presented by Max du Preez each Sunday from April 21, 1996 to March 29, 1998 as a weekly digest of TRC activities. In light of a present South Africa which does not represent the TRC's egalitarian ideals, it is vital that scholarship addresses not only the TRC itself but also the mediums through which we remember (and misremember) it. The stakes are high: while the TRC gave voice to the silenced twenty years ago, we are left, today, with only fragments of recorded memory. We must understand these fragments and their limitations.

In 1998, Krog published *Country of My Skull*, a book which confounds generic categorization. It is simultaneously a personal memoir of Krog's experience leading the SABC radio team's TRC coverage, an account of the testimonies themselves, an historical analysis of

the TRC's politics and reception, and a philosophical treatise on "truth" and its many convergent and contradictory narratives. The book attempts, above all, to construct and deploy what Mikhail Bakhtin calls "polyphony" in the search for truth, embodying different perspectives through the lenses of reportage, poetry, novel, and, of course, testimonial. Although the memoir has numerous detractors and has generated vigorous debate, I argue that Krog is successful in creating such a polyphony, and that this multiplicity of voices constructs a potentially more democratic truth about the TRC and apartheid than other forms of media. Krog poetically suggests that the national body of South Africa must be healed. In this way, she aligns herself with the new, universalist, nationalist (and sometimes problematic) rhetoric of the rainbow nation. I explore the epistemologies and strategies of narration implied by such nation-building.

Meanwhile, on the SABC's second television channel, Max du Preez, the famous Afrikaner anti-apartheid activist and progressive reporter, hosted a documentary-style recap after each week of TRC hearings for its first two years. The *TRC Special Report* played the part of sober historian to the most turbulent years of the TRC and, indeed, the formative years of South African democracy. The final episode of *Special Report* aired just months before the publication of *Country of My Skull*, and as such both engage with the same two years of TRC hearings and politics. Working within the framework of Bill Nichols' documentary theory, I argue that the *Special Report* attempts to make official the narratives presented by HRV testimonies, corroborating or questioning their claims with the aid of independent investigative reporting and a complex, evolving blend of documentary styles. The program served a didactic function, educating South Africans and international viewers on the inner workings of the TRC, its politics, and the history of apartheid through the lens of investigative journalism and original

footage. It "performed an act of surrogation," argues Cole, "functioning as a secondary shadow commission that, similar to the TRC, took statements, conducted investigations, aired confessions (including confessions *not* heard before the TRC), made findings, and even made retractions bordering on apology" (95). That is to say, in addition to presenting the TRC, the *Special Report* constructed its own history of apartheid, erecting it alongside the narratives produced by the testimonies as a litmus test for historical accuracy.

As a weekly digest, it participated in the process of the TRC to a degree that *Country*, removed as a purer form of retrospective, could not. It informed the development of the HRVC hearings, imbricating their dramas with the sense that the whole world, or at least the whole nation, was watching. For all its differences, however, *Special Report* grapples with internal contradictions similar to those evinced by *Country of My Skull*. Whereas Krog's book attempts to construct polyphony in an inherently monophonic genre, Du Preez's documentary series employs a seemingly more democratic genre, yet participates in the TRC process to the degree that it becomes an element or appendage of the commission itself. Its proximity to the commission was such that Du Preez had to publicly announce the show's independence several times, reminding those calling in or simply watching that the SABC was not directly affiliated with the commission (Thloloe inter. Du Preez).

The first chapter of this thesis explores the formal elements and political / cultural functions of retrospective genres, with a special focus on the television documentary and its visual strategies of representation. I discuss the formal complexity of "re-mediation," or the processes by which historical narratives are re-told and memorialised, suggesting that a fundamental feature of the retrospective is to fix two historical moments: the moment of artistic

creation and the historical subject of the piece. In this way, coverage of the TRC was in the business of creating a secondary drama to frame the primary drama of apartheid. I conclude by comparing the epistemological strategies of *Special Report* and *Country*, arguing that the documentary remains within the confines of what Bill Nichols calls the "discourses of sobriety," while the memoir provides a uniquely subjective take.

The second chapter grapples with the ethics of testimonial citation, the production of truth in the subjective frame, and religious / nationalist rhetoric in *Country of My Skull*. I discuss the TRC's four definitions of truth and the ways in which Krog activates the "narrative" and "social" forms of truth they define before exploring *Country*'s complex formal features. I argue that the genre-blending aesthetics of Krog's memoir allow for a "polyphonic" representation of the TRC and its many voices, yet question the ethics of appropriating victim testimonies into what is ultimately a memoir by and for the privileged beneficiary. I conclude with a discussion of Krog's bodily poetics and their interaction with nation-building rhetoric, ubuntu, and Christianity.

The third and final chapter explores the rhetoric of nationalism and democratic transition in South Africa, comparing *TRC Special Report*'s and *Country of My Skull*'s construction of the TRC as an "operating theatre" in which the wounded national body would be healed. I begin with an overview of theories of the nation, grounding my argument in Benedict Anderson's and Etienne Balibar's work on national narratives before returning to a discussion of Krog's attachment to an ubuntu ideology colored by universalist humanism. In the final section, I argue that the SABC's balancing act of working independently from the TRC while at the same time supporting the ANC's mission was a watershed moment in the history of South African media.

The Retrospective Genre: (Re)mediation, Narration, and the Intimacy of Knowledge

> One of our most substantial achievements, however, has been to bring events known until now only to the immediately affected communities … into the centre of national life … Millions of South Africans have heard the truth about the apartheid years for the first time, some through daily newspapers but many more through television …
>
> – Desmond Tutu, quoted in Boraine 89

At the end of *TRC Special Report*'s 46th episode, aired May 4, 1997, Max du Preez gives a public service announcement to those considering applying for amnesty, reminding them of the nature of the TRC and its independence from the media, and suggesting that in order to apply they should "contact the Truth Commission's offices in your region at the numbers now on your screen. Please don't contact the *Special Report*," he tells the camera in direct address, "We are a completely independent SABC program. We just report on the commission" (SAHA, *Episodes* 46). The confusion is astonishing, as Du Preez implies that perpetrators of gross human rights violations actually sent their amnesty applications to the SABC rather than the Commission. It demonstrates the massive sway that visual culture had over the interpretation of the TRC's activities, and, indeed, over the transition to democracy as a whole. More generally, it demonstrates the proximity of retrospective genres like television and memoir to the process of truth and reconciliation itself. In public perception and even, apparently, in the perception of many involved in the process, the SABC was a piece of the Commission.

The live hearings provided an affective experience for attending audiences. The performances of witnesses, victims, and perpetrators functioned as a kind of "political theatre," drawing those present into the narratives of trauma at an emotional level and fulfilling the

Commission's call for "narrative and social" forms of truth (Motsemme 912; TRC 112). It seems only natural that both *Country of My Skull* and *TRC Special Report* felt like extensions of the Commission on this level. Television projected images of suffering with the implicit assurance of its indexical medium. These people were really suffering; they were really there, up in front of the whole nation, beamed straight into living rooms. The pages of the memoir provide a more subjective lens. Krog cites and curates the testimonies of victims, mediating the experience of the Commission for her audience. Yet, these re-mediations of the TRC were more than mere extensions of the Commission's activities. They served didactic, popularizing, and dramatic functions. They alerted people to the TRC, reminded them of its importance to the process of transition, explained its complexities, and ultimately made of it its own drama.

In this chapter, I define the functions of television and memoir (what I call retrospective genres) as processes of "remediation." The Commission, itself a process mediating the narratives of apartheid and molding those narratives into a set of new national narratives (a process of nation-building) was re-presented through the speakers of radios, the lenses of television cameras, and the pages of a whole cottage industry of memoirs and retrospectives. I discuss these retrospectives' proximity to the processes of the TRC proper: in which ways were Krog and Du Preez elements *of* the TRC, acting with it, and in which ways were they independent actors providing individual counterpoints to the Commission's functions and narratives? I suggest that one major function of remediation was to create a secondary drama: where the primary drama was apartheid itself, a drama being narrated by a chorus of testimonies on stage, a secondary drama emerged from the Commission's dramatic, theatrical, and cinematic qualities (qualities that Tutu and the other members actively emphasised and expertly deployed). The media

projections of this secondary drama, whether filtered through the relatively sober lens of *Special Report*'s documentary camera or the more visceral, embodied, subjective lens of *Country of My Skull*, come alive in such remediations. In *TRC Special Report* and *Country of My Skull*, the TRC itself takes center stage as a drama of transition. In this sense, retrospective genres mediated apartheid from a distance; they simultaneously re-presented testimonies to the nation – splicing them up, using them for emphasis, and corroborating them with evidence – and represented the TRC process itself as a narrative. Finally, I compare the distinct epistemological strategies of *Special Report* and *Country* along the lines of embodied and disembodied knowledge and in relation to the four kinds of truth outlined by the TRC. Riding the line between classic, Grierson-style documentary and news media, *Special Report* positioned itself squarely within those "nonfictional systems that together make up what we may call the discourses of sobriety" (Nichols, *Representing* 3). Its appeal to forensic forms of truth and its didactic intentions put distance between itself and the commission. *Country*, on the other hand, presents the Commission as it was experienced from the inside, without the distancing effects of sober analysis, historicism, or investigative journalism. It presents the embodied forms of knowledge that only a subjective account of the TRC process could, and thus dramatises it in significantly different ways from news media and documentary.

In the preface to *Blurred Boundaries*, Bill Nichols provides a broad but effective framework for understanding the relationships between narrative and history, fiction and nonfiction:

> Stories offer structure; they organise and order the flux of events; they confer meaning and value. But stories are not a phenomenon occurring naturally. They are themselves a

> product of history and culture. When stories set out to represent the world around us, they enter into the realm of those blurred genres like historiography and documentary that use imaginative techniques to tell the tale of actual occurrences. The occurrence does not announce its own beginning or end, its predecessors or consequences, its implications or significance. Only those who look back upon it can provide such things, and, inevitably, more than one tale can be told for any one occurrence. (ix)

There is always something lost in the retelling. But then, there is always something created as well. The very organization of events into a coherent narrative, a story, is an act which both eliminates the infinite complexity of actual historical occurrence and adds to that infinite complexity a new unifying principle. The subjects of my study, however, take this a step further. They are not merely representations of the past, once-removed from the actual event and reunited with it through memory, but representations of representations, mediations through which the stories of apartheid come to us twice-removed. *Special Report* and *Country of My Skull* are as much stories about the commission as they are stories about the stories of the commission. To put it technically, they are as much about the years 1994-1998 as they are about 1960-1994.

Remediation involves the creation of a framed narrative. The Commission sought, through its live hearings, to tell the story or stories of apartheid from 1960 to 1994 (SAHA, *Report One* 24). Media coverage of the Commission, which captured the images of suffering victims or copied down their words for national or international dissemination, thus told the stories of apartheid from a position twice-removed, as a narration of a narration. Further, remediation involved the creation of a secondary drama: that of the Commission, which

positioned itself explicitly as a dramatic spectacle. Nthabiseng Motsemme sums up the myth-making intentions of the Commission and their reliance on public performance:

> The truth body took on this myth-making function in addition to its ostensible task of addressing past political abuse. The Commission thus provided another canvas on which the discourse of the new South Africa would be written, produced and visibly shown. It then became another text about nation, or more specifically 'rainbow nation'. This remaking of a new South African society used testimonies about human rights violations. That a big part of the process was public, broadcast live or immediately after, reported widely in various local and international media, was not simply about transparency and accountability. Public testimonies were an integral part of the mythology and reconstruction of nation. (912)

In the public testimonies lay the story, cobbled together from many stories told in many ways, of the thirty-four years in South Africa leading up to the election of Nelson Mandela. That story lay the lenses of news cameras too, but the media was busy simultaneously telling the fresh drama of the present. The temporality of myth does not point solely toward the past. Benedict Anderson argues that mythologizing the nation's "immemorial past" is a necessary feature of nationalism, yet the narration of the past also implies a present which has been destined, and a national trajectory that sails toward a "limitless future" (11-12). The project of narrating transition is thus temporally complex. It must take as its object not only the shadowy past that the TRC sought to illuminate, but also the dramatic moment of the present and the possibilities for the future development of the nation.

The narrative of national transition was framed, as are all historical narratives. Stories of the past come mediated through the drama of the present, media coverage of the present sets itself within the context of a history of representation, memory's object (the past) must always be framed by its present subject. In the words of Bill Nichols, "the occurrence does not announce its own beginning or end, its predecessors or consequences, its implications or significance. Only those who look back upon it can provide such things, and, inevitably, more than one tale can be told for any occurrence" (*Blurred*, ix). Retrospective genres such as memoir and documentary share traits with other types of public memorials. Statues and museums, like books and films, contain within them the traces of two historical moments: the moment of artistic creation / curation and the moment(s) remembered by the piece.[7]

So emerges a complicated picture of historical narration: firstly, stories of apartheid brutality were remediated through the lens of popularly accessible retrospective genres; secondly, these retrospective genres created, or at least promoted, an already existing secondary drama – that of the TRC itself; thirdly, there were many types of retrospectives, each with their own particular generic features, each mediating the production of "truth" in unique ways.[8] Motsemme writes of the TRC "using" testimonies as if they were mere building blocks to the edifice of national identity. This may be harsh. Testimonies not only had significance for the nation, but individuals as well. The ability for victims to stand up and express their trauma held cathartic power for both the individuals and the wounded nation they represented

[7] See Graham (2009).

[8] For the purposes of this thesis, I compare only the memoir and the television documentary. Studies of live genres such as radio and live television, as well as other genres more thoroughly understood, especially fiction genres such as the novel, are all understandable through the lens of "remediation." They, too, filter the narratives of live testimony through a second representation, chopping them up in their own ways and proving Nichols' assumption that "more than one tale can be told for any occurrence."

(Gobodo-Madikizela 88). But of course, such catharsis on a national / communal scale is a process of narrating the national self by creating national myths. For the newly elected ANC government, the national spectacle of the TRC's live testimonies held instrumental value as opportunities to consolidate a sense of breaking with the past and entering into a new (ANC dominated) future. With this in mind, it would be naive to consider the works of Max du Preez and Antjie Krog, two people whose careers had been defined by the state-run SABC, as wholly independent actors. If nothing else, their projects are aligned in the production of the "new South Africa" out of the images of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Whatever particular strategies they employ, be they the complex genre hybrid of *Country of My Skull*, with its forays into the realms of poetry and fiction, or the sober self-reflexivity of *TRC Special Report*, with its subtle citation of old SABC footage, their goals were ultimately the same: to further the TRC's mission of uncovering "truth" and promoting reconciliation based on that uncovered truth.

Television in particular became the visual stage of transition. Images, though they contain the promise of indexical veracity,[9] can be manipulated. We know, perhaps now better than ever in our era of late capitalist advertising saturation, that images can be ordered, can be made to lie. We know that "they can be joined together with words or other images into systems of signs, and hence, meaning" (Nichols, *Representing* 9). Yet the documentary and "non-narrative" representation in general, much like its fictional cousin realism, presents a facade of impartiality. It is difficult to imagine any form of representation that is wholly non-narrative, let alone un-mediating. Even the simple act of pointing a camera at a spot and leaving it, creating

[9] Semiotics distinguishes three broad categories of sign: symbols, icons, and indexes. The index, as opposed to the icon or the symbol, bears the physical trace of its referent. The symbol (the letter, word, or national flag) bears only an arbitrary relationship to its referent, and the icon (sketch, painting, digital image) bears only a resemblance. Smoke is the index of fire, a footprint the index of a foot, and a piece of analog film the index of whatever it shows. This is because analog film literally captures the light reflected off objects and re-presents it to us.

so-called "bare film" with its roots in the original Lumiere productions, is an act of selection. It is a cinematographic choice that highlights some mise-en-scene over others, etc. In short, the indexical is always accompanied by the artistic omissions of the cinematic.

All representation, including the indexical, performs the selective forgetting that Judith Coullie, quoting Renan's foundational (and controversial) text, "What is a Nation?", argues is necessary for the formation of collective memory, and thus collective (here national) identity:

> 'Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of the nation.' Is there a duty to forget? Since not everything can be remembered, clearly it is in the interests of nation-building that the aspects of the past that are selected for communal commemoration should be standardised (at least in essence) and shared. (14)

Did the TRC selectively remember? Commentators such as Coullie argue so, and TRC detractors such as Mahmoud Mamdani argue not only that it remembered selectively but that the gaps in its memory were large enough for the entire process to be considered illegitimate. Exile, for instance, was not dealt with systematically as a "gross human rights violation," and more generally, the TRC made it its goal to tell individual trauma narratives rather than drawing a picture of apartheid more broadly. I have noted that *Special Report* provided a corrective to the blind spots in live hearings, which necessarily focused most of their attention on individual testimonies. Does this fact disqualify the show from its own forgetting? By the same token, *Country of My Skull* provides commentary on the TRC. Though Krog is glowingly positive, even reverent toward the process, her removal from the position of the commissioners themselves

allows her to take on broader questions of the process' efficacy, the position of the beneficiary, and the popular reactions.

Having evolved from a news segment into a digest, *Special Report*'s complex relationship with live media manifested in a visual obsession with newsreel footage and a constant dialogue with the other forms of TRC coverage. Often, documentary segments spliced together news reports from the history of the SABC and other local channels, as well as images of newspapers, in order to outline a story. Episode 10, which aired on 14 July, 1996, begins with a segment on the murder of Griffiths Mxenge by a Vlakplaas unit including Dirk Coetzee, Joe Mamasela, and Eugene de Kock.[10] The segment begins with Du Preez sitting in his chair as always, transitioning to voiceover narration as an image of a 1989 issue of *Vrye Weekblad* – the first anti-apartheid newspaper in Afrikaans, founded by Du Preez himself – appears on screen. The headline announces Coetzee's revelations about the Vlakplaas death squad and their involvement in the murder of Mxenge, eight years after the event. Two intercut SABC clips, the first from 1989 and the second from 1990, introduce us to the story of the Vlakplaas squad. Again, we face a layered set of representations: *Special Report* tells the story not only of Vlakplaas, but also of the media coverage of Vlakplaas, highlighting the two key players of *Vrye Weekblad* and the SABC. Later in the episode, Du Preez discusses tells us that the controversy has remained hot in press coverage of the TRC through to the present.

This storytelling strategy includes in the narrative a genealogy of its telling, a corollary to the competing narratives that characterised the chaos of the period of transition. It is a strategy

[10] Vlakplaas is a farm near South Africa's capital, Pretoria, which was infamous in the apartheid years for being a torture and execution site. Special Branch hit squads such as the one lead by Dirk Coetzee and Eugene de Kock operated from the farm. The HRVC hearings of the "Vlakplaas Five" during the early months of the TRC was heavily publicized and widely viewed.

that mimics the polyphony of the Commission itself, which directly encountered the problem of multiple tellings. The public hearings of the HRVC demanded equitable treatment of all testimonies. Witnesses with jumbled stories or victims with narratives shattered by trauma were to be taken as seriously as perpetrators whose stories were streamlined by legal council. *Special Report* similarly represented competing media narratives, yet with a more personal twist. Having acted as a propaganda wing of the apartheid regime for the last half of a century, the SABC had the task of re-legitimizing itself as a fair source of news and, moreover, entirely re-aligning itself as a pro-ANC, pro-democratic outlet.

With *Special Report* as its masthead, the SABC's television coverage of the TRC was a project of self-reinvention as much as it was a project of nation-building. Max du Preez was selected strategically: his status as an anti-apartheid journalist was unparalleled, and the show's consistent visual invocation of *Vrye Weekblad* alongside apartheid era SABC footage served to undermine associations of the corporation with National Party.[11] Catherine Cole makes the forceful argument that, in its "departure from past journalistic practices" and, indeed, its total reinvention of itself, the SABC and the "*TRC Special Report* served, like the TRC, as a historical bridge between the past and the present" (100). She describes the widespread suspicion of state media that the *Special Report* sought to overcome:

[11] See Nixon (1994). It is important to note that television was only introduced to the South African people in 1971, and only after the National Party began to recognize the ideological / indoctrinating effects of the medium. Famously, the SABC used images of "necklacing," a brutal form of lynching in which the victim is restrained by a rubber tyre, doused in petrol, and burned and beaten to death, to portray the black inhabitants of the "townships" as violent and animalistic. Though the SABC claimed that necklacing was exclusively performed by insurgent political parties against suspected informants, in reality the practice was developed by the death squads of the National Party's secret police force, the Special Branch, in Botswana, and transplanted the South Africa in order to sew chaos and mistrust amongst insurgent parties in the townships. This history of deceit was well known, and underpins the *Special Report*'s project of self-reinvention.

> South Africa's apprehensions about mass media went beyond typical. In a state run by a minority that was rabidly trying to preserve unequal distribution of wealth and power at the expense of a poor, disenfranchised majority, broadcasting was widely recognised for its ideological potency. The National Party therefore tightly controlled broadcast journalism for decades … Yet if we jump ahead to 1996 – just two decades later, when the public hearings of the TRC commenced – we see a state-sponsored theatre of power that was literally overrun by broadcast journalists, not just from South Africa but also from around the world. (102)

In any nation emerging from or living under authoritarianism, it is no surprise that mass media is met with skepticism or cynicism. There is even a tendency, originating with Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's polemics against the "culture industry," to dismiss popular culture itself so long as it travels within "mass media" channels. What made the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission historically unique – distinct from the sixteen commissions that had preceded it – was precisely its popular dimension extended by remediations like *Special Report* and *Country of My Skull* (Cole xii). Such reliance on mass media was bound to stoke deep-set suspicions. But this unique capacity to enter popular culture was also the greatest success of the Commission, the distinguishing mark which gave it global renown. Even if it did not ultimately produce the reconciliation that it sought, South Africa's TRC managed a smoother state transition than any before or after. Gibson argues that it re-legitimised the state in the eyes of its population, but even more radically so in the eyes of global onlookers, both at the level of high politics and popular discourse (340).

With this crucial popularizing function of *Special Report* in mind, I read its creation of media genealogies as remarkably transparent and democratic. Though Du Preez only references the SABC's authoritarian past in dialogue a few times throughout the series, the consistent reuse of old footage has an historically solidifying effect: just by including the old SABC in the new, viewers are rendered unable to forget the station's past. The inclusions are a kind of testimonial on the part of the SABC. They confess, "yes, we existed then," and "yes, we reported for the NP." Had the SABC been an individual responsible for gross human rights violations rather than a piece of the system, even this baseline acknowledgement may have satisfied the requirements for amnesty (the Amnesty Commission did not require contrition) (SAHA, *Report One* 108). That said, there is a danger in "creating a bridge with the past" that *Special Report* retroactively legitimised the SABC of the apartheid era. For the most part, *Special Report* enters into dialogue with the SABC's history of compliance implicitly. We may not be able to forget that the SABC reported on these moments, but their particular brand of propagandistic "non-narrative" film (a form common to television news, which often presents itself as fair and balanced[12] while intricately manipulating its narratives and providing only selective coverage) is not challenged directly. Max du Preez was the new face of an old organization that, though under the control of a new party, had not removed itself from state control.

Max du Preez's public service announcement to amnesty applicants is indeed surprising, but the SABC's close connection to the ANC and to the process of transition makes it at least understandable. The origins of the *Special Report* reveal a fraught and frantic behind-the-scenes scramble to figure out how to project the TRC to the public. Originally, the SABC had televised

[12] "Fair and Balanced" is, hilariously, the current slogan of Fox News in the United States.

all of the live testimonies as they happened, just as the radio, led by Krog, had played the sounds of the Commissions. Only a month into the weekly testimonies, however, the SABC decided that live TV coverage of all hearings would be too costly or at least logistically impossible, and switched over to a weekly "digest" format (Cole 94). *Special Report* was not originally a "retrospective genre," and elements of its "liveness" remain in the format that was ultimately decided upon. Long takes of raw testimonial footage unpunctuated by the voice of Du Preez give the viewer a sense of immediacy and connection usually eschewed by classical documentary, which attempts to create a sense of "pastness" (Nichols, *Representing* 55). The show's use of the television medium, as opposed to that of feature film presented in theater, heavily influences its sense of temporality. Du Preez's appearances throughout each episode make explicit the show's "recapping" function, and the week-over-week format of the digest is distinct from that of classical documentary, which folds the whole narrative of its subject into one piece of film. In feature format, the documentary is not a "recap," but is rather expected to present a neat and ordered whole. That the TV digest is not expected to do so is advantageous to *Special Report*; it mimicked the TRC's loose format, allowing for the contemplation of multiple narratives from multiple perspectives. Generally, the show divided each episode's 45-minute runtime between five broad types of segments: (1) raw and voice-over coverage of the TRC's live testimonies, most often filled with artfully edited shot-reverse-shot sequences or faux direct addresses from testimonies; (2) short documentaries filled with original investigative reportage, intended to establish the "story behind the story" about a particular hearing;[13] (3) interviews, either live with Du Preez visible or in-studio, talking head-style, corroborating or contextualizing the content

[13] See Cole (2010). "The Stories behind the Stories" was the motto of *Special Report*. Catherine Cole interprets the motto

presented in the documentary sequences; (4) information about the TRC's functions and ongoing activities presented in direct address by Du Preez himself, usually at the beginnings and endings of episodes, but also often between segments; and (5) original content presented by correspondents of the show, interrupting standard coverage of the TRC and providing in-depth analysis of particular stories.

Special Report's function as an independent investigative unit of the TRC rendered it at once closer to the process – in the sense that it validated the Commission's storytelling by providing an outside, apparently objective perspective – and outside of it – in the sense that, in order to validate the Commission's narratives, *Special Report* had to maintain its objectivity and independence, at least nominally. Cole argues that it "performed an act of surrogation, functioning as a secondary shadow commission that, similar to the TRC, took statements, conducted investigations, aired confessions (including confessions *not* heard before the TRC), made findings, and even made retractions bordering on apology" (95). The documentary segments, which appear in nearly every single episode, are overwhelmingly supportive rather than combative. That is, when the show provided its objective, outside perspective, it never did so in order to take down the Commission. The narratives presented by testimonies often come into question with the facts brought to light by investigative journalism, but such questions of testimonial veracity are never construed to cast the Commission itself in a bad light.

For the most part, documentary sequences and interviews added information to the existing cacophony of TRC documentation. As Cole notes, the *Special Report* opens its very first episode with an original interview and confession extracted from Joe Mamasela, the infamous Vlakplaas askari. A swath of high-profile interviews – with Vlakplaas commander Dirk Coetzee,

poet Sandile Dikeni, Special Branch (SB) general Herman Stadler, F.W. de Klerk, Jonathan Shapiro (the famous cartoonist featured in this thesis, who works under the moniker Zapiro) and Several Commissioners, including Dumisa Ntsebeza, Albie Sachs, and Desmond Tutu himself – added to the digest's mystique. Here were one-on-one interviews not available from even the TRC itself, which promised to reveal behind-the-scenes details of the transition process or significantly influence the decisions of the Commission. Beyond the high-profile interviews, almost every episode features interviews with victims or witnesses, who add to their public, verbal testimonies a visual dimension. The cameras of *Special Report* revealed and broadcasted the intimate spaces where children were murdered, political prisoners tortured, and suspected informers necklaced by angry mobs.

In this way, *Special Report* went beyond the "shadow commission" function which Cole describes. It was not merely didactic, adding to the informative / investigative capabilities of the TRC: it added an entirely new dimension to the proceedings. Most episodes begin with footage from the live hearings of that week, before cutting to either documentary segments (which perform the didactic function of contextualizing the testimonies) or interviews with those either involved in the testimonies or closely related to them. In both cases, the images and stories from the live TRC, dramatic on their own, were complimented by images of those testifying in their private spaces. These were often images of the stories' referents: episode 51 begins with footage of Paul van Vuuren, the policeman who executed the young Richard Motasi and his wife, before cutting to an interview with Motasi's mother, Gloria Hlabangane, in her house, sitting on the very couch where Richard and his wife were killed. She explains where she found pieces of his skull and brains scattered, accompanied by a close-up shot of the carpet. Such images provide a

visual signified to the verbal signifier of Van Vuuren's confession. They perform their own affective work, drawing the viewer into the intimacy of the scene of trauma in a way different, though not necessarily more powerful, than the words of the testimonies themselves.

These two segments are followed by a stunningly intimate interview with the fourteen-year-old surviving son of Richard, Sediso Motasi. He describes his daily life, his sorrow, his feelings of solidarity with other orphans, the frustrations of living in Soweto, the advantages of his new school, and even his homicidal thoughts: "I feel like doing something. Go maybe to that person's [Van Vuuren's] house, and maybe kill everybody in that house. Because what they did to me, was like they killed me, because they killed my parents" (SAHA, *Episodes* 51). In these lines, presented in voiceover, Sediso's tone mingles anger and shame. Such brutal honesty on the part of a fourteen-year-old bestrides the line between victim testimony and confession. On the one hand, Sediso clearly feels angry about the murder of his father, yet we are also made to experience the shame which follows that anger in the confusion of a mingled tone. Sediso's description of intergenerational trauma appeals implicitly to an ubuntu conception of the interconnectedness of people: because his parents were killed, he too feels dead. His desire for revenge comes into conflict with the ideals of reparative justice and ubuntu reconstitution espoused by the TRC. Perhaps this informs his sense of shame, or perhaps it is simply the shame adolescents feel about their forbidden thoughts. As the segment continues, *Special Report* takes Sediso first to see his uncle Joseph, the brother of Robert, and then finally takes both of them to meet face to face with Van Vuuren. Before the meeting, Sediso recounts his homicidal fantasies during Van Vuuren's amnesty hearing. Van Vuuren is contrite to a point, but does not emote, and Sediso cannot forgive. He is, however, surprisingly, even suspiciously composed; he speaks

to Van Vuuren with the poise of someone much older, as if he had been coached by the producers of the segment or, at least, as one does when they are composing themselves for a camera, with the knowledge that they are under the gaze of the public. This is *Special Report* at its most intimate and least forensic. Du Preez presides over a potential moment of reconciliation, guiding it with the invisible hand of the documentary producer and a Grierson-style voice of God.[14] In many ways, the segment plays out like a *Special Report* version of the live HRVC hearings – the introduction of a victim, his original testimony, testimonies from witnesses and other members of the affected family, and even the drama of a face-to-face confrontation between victim and perpetrator. *Special Report* buys into the victim-perpetrator binary that defined the TRC for better or worse, eschewing its usual contextualizing role in favor of a piece about several individuals.

In *Conditional Tense*, Antjie Krog's 2013 collection of essays reflecting on the fallout of *Country of My Skull* and her time as the head of the SABC's radio division, she recounts setting only one taboo for her reporters: "to look for or initiate and then broadcast a 'live' reconciliation story" (20). Max du Preez and the production team of *Special Report* clearly had no such qualms. The Motasi segment was not the only one which independently brought victim and perpetrator together for the spectacle of a "live reconciliation." In Krog's view, "the mere presence of a journalist could interfere with and influence the process," pressuring the victim to express

[14] See Nichols (1991). Bill Nichols defines several broad "modes" of documentary, one of which is the classic "Grierson style," "expository" mode, named after the forefather of documentary film John Grierson, in which an entirely disembodied voice narrates the entire film. The body-lessness of the voice lends to the sense of veracity; the viewer has more trouble questioning a speaker without an identity. Nichols describes this potentially propagandistic form of voice-over as the "voice of God." While *Special Report* is by no means a Grierson-style production (it is consistently self-reflexive, and for the most part it reveals the presence of Du Preez and the effects of its camera in interviews and documentary segments, putting it closer to the "direct cinema" genre of documentary), it does sometimes slip into long periods of disembodied voice-over, as with the Motasi segment.

forgiveness in front of the camera" (20). Such stagings are potentially cynical, scripted dramatizations of the TRC's intended reconciliatory function. From Krog's perspective, *Special Report* enters into the kind of directorial strategy seeking to "elicit highly naturalistic performances that convey the vivid impression of 'people being themselves'" (Nichols, *Representing* 13). It is clear from the episode that Sediso was not *forced* to forgive Van Vuuren, yet his composure does not match up with the violent anger toward Van Vuuren he expresses in his interview, suggesting at least that the camera's presence had a powerful effect.

Aside from the ethical implications of *Special Report*'s decision to stage moments of reconciliation, the difference in opinion between Du Preez and Krog in this instance points toward a more fundamental difference in approach: whereas *Special Report*'s documentary camera captures its subjects with the semblance of objectivity, *Country of My Skull*'s authorial narrator actively inserts herself into everything she remediates to the reader, rendering the memoir both a more intimate and emotionally complex experience. Throughout her memoir, Krog provides a deeper and more pervasive metacommentary than any weekly digest could possibly hope to do. With its implicit genealogy of media coverage, *Special Report* was by no means oblivious to its position within the landscape of political transition. Yet, the memoir genre provides a unique framework by presenting the authorial narrator front and center. The documentary camera cannot escape the presumptions attached to what Nichols calls the "discourses of sobriety" – the viewer expects objectivity, a commitment to forensic accuracy, and most importantly a lack of emotion or personal opinion – in short, Du Preez cannot take center stage. Krog, on the other hand, *must* take center stage in *her* memoir, otherwise it would not be her memoir. On these grounds, Laura Moss has criticised *Country* for its tendency to

evoke the homogenised "'essence' of the commission" filtered through the eyes of a single individual (Moss 2006; quoting Krog).

We might say that documentary and memoir, generally, exist on either side of the division between "embodied" and "disembodied" knowledge, or what Ursula K. Le Guin calls the father tongue and the mother tongue:

> The essential gesture of the father tongue is not reasoning but distancing – making a gap, a space, between the subject or self and the object or other [...] in its everyday uses in the service of justice and clarity, what I call the father tongue is immensely noble and indispensably useful. When it claims a privileged relationship to reality, it becomes dangerous and potentially destructive. Using the father tongue, I can speak of the mother tongue only, inevitably, to distance it – to exclude it [...] The mother tongue, spoken or written, expects an answer. It is conversation, a word the root of which means 'turning together.' The mother tongue is language not as mere communication but as relation, relationship. (152)

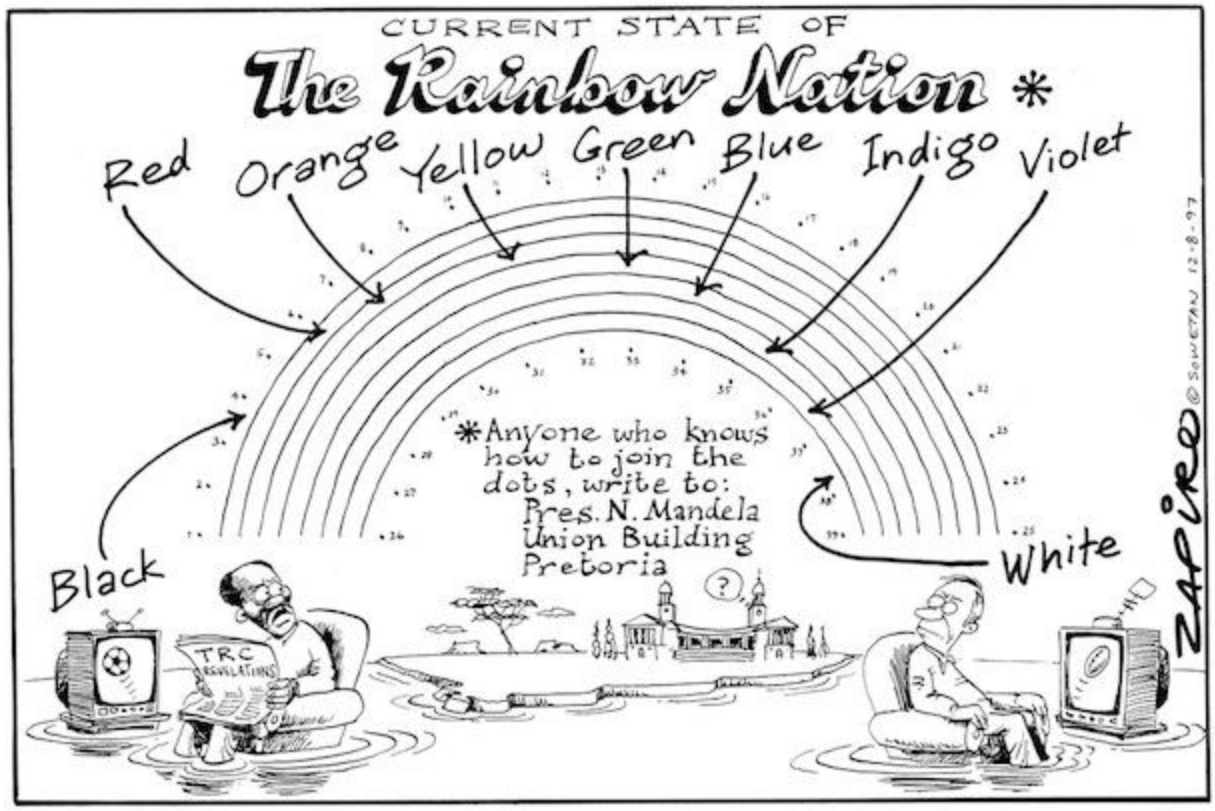
I do not suggest this because of Max du Preez's and Antjie Krog's genders; their respective ouvres are evidence enough of such a split. Before becoming famous as a journalist, Krog was famous as a poet who filtered the Afrikaner experience in apartheid South Africa through her body. Her poetry obsesses over the body. Everything, ultimately, comes back to feeling; she subordinates all rational knowledge to the dialogic nature of one-on-one conversation, drawing readers into a relationship with her poetic speaker through direct address and appeals to common physical feelings. In *Country of My Skull*'s very title we encounter a bodily metaphor. From the outset, she hints to the reader that these pages contain the inner workings of her mind –

representations of her subjective experience – not the objectively encountered, sober reality of ethnographic journalism (Nichols, *Representing* 201). "Extraordinary reportage… Antjie Krog breaks all the rules of dispassionate recounts" announces a blurb by Nadine Gordimer on the cover of the 1999 edition. In short, Krog promises to speak to the reader in the mother tongue. None of this is to denigrate *Special Report*'s father-tongue sobriety, a mode which Le Guin lauds for its "justice and clarity," but only to recognise the nature and potential of the memoir approach. Krog's mother-tongue blend of autobiography, philosophical reflection, historical account, and even fiction allows the reader an intimacy not captured by *Special Report*, an intimacy that is nearly as problematic as it is progressive.

Two statistics are of paramount importance at this stage: most of *Country of My Skull*'s audience was white, while most of *Special Report*'s audience was black (Moss 80; Cole 106). Though presented with the impersonal veneer of the documentary father tongue, *Special Report* took black South Africans into the intimate spaces of their fellows' trauma. It provided a set of common images, an imagined meeting ground for the victims of systematic racial oppression to congregate. *Country of My Skull*, on the other hand, provided an embodied experience of the commission by a white person for white people, an identity position not at all safe from criticism. Perhaps partly by accident (you can't fully choose your audience) but also clearly by design (Coullie argues, for instance, that Krog's book is aimed at Afrikaners, a relatively unassailable position), *Country of My Skull* provided a nexus within which the complex emotions of South African whiteness could be negotiated. Through the heart, eyes, skin, and skull of one guilty Afrikaner beneficiary of apartheid, *Country of My Skull* grapples with issues and feelings relevant to all guilty beneficiaries of apartheid. Though it is potentially racially exclusive in a

way that goes against the TRC's foundational principles, this platform is not necessarily a bad thing. Spaces in which to negotiate guilt were also necessary for the ultimate goal of negotiating reconciliation. If the suffering of black South Africans was to be negotiated within black communities, the guilt of whites would need to be internally negotiated as well. It is crucial to bear in mind, however, that this is the function of *Country of My Skull* – a negotiation of the place of whiteness in the post-apartheid South Africa primarily internal to the Afrikaner community but also more generally plausible for the international settler community. To turn an ironic phrase from the blogosphere, *Country of My Skull* contemplates the "unbearable whiteness of being."

Struggles over Voice: Polyphony and Appropriation in *Country of My Skull*



Zapiro, *Sowetan*, 12 August 1997

Easier thought than done. Nothing forms in my mind. No story. My Limuru and Kenya remain a land from which I have escaped, but I want to write about it; I want to make sense of it. … I have lived in a landscape of fear, but I am unable to write about it. I know terror, but I can find no words to express it. I have seen villages razed, but I cannot find the images to capture the desolation. I seem helpless in the face of a reality that I have lived, that is still being lived by thousands in concentration camps and villages. How can the world fail me in my hour of need?

– Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Birth of a Dream Weaver* 88

"Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles."

– Proverbs 21:23

In that it was intended to produce reconciliation, the TRC's truth-telling process contained a cathartic element. In the first volume of its final report, the commission defines "personal and narrative truth" as one of its four "forms" of truth, suggesting that it "contributes to the process of reconciliation by ensuring that the truth about the past included the validation of the individual subjective experiences of people who had previously been silenced or voiceless" (112). The positive take on the TRC, which asserts its direct influence in the "miraculous" turn "from apartheid to democracy" which was made "with minimal bloodshed and political instability," (Gibson 341) presupposes a certain notion of collective "truth." It supposes, firstly, that a shared truth emerges from the testimonies of a series of individuals, and moreover that truth and language are intimately linked, that language is a kind of embodied truth. Secondly, it supposes that this linguistically manifested truth, in the form of the testimony, leads to reconciliation.

The relationships between identity, voice, memory, and truth have been hotly debated within the social sciences and legal studies since the beginning of the Commission's tenure, yet, I will argue, become sharpest and most heated in literature. Antjie Krog's 1998 book, *Country of My Skull*, provides a nexus for the various ethical discourses surrounding the TRC.[15] I return to her seminal text as a case study for such struggles over voice, analysing her engagement with multiple voices through Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of "heteroglossia" and "polyphony" and Michael Rothberg's concept of "multidirectional memory" to reframe the scholarly debate over the book and its ethics of memory. In particular, I explore Kim Rostan's take on the book's form as an "audio-collage transcribed into text" (27) and Judith Coullie's analysis of the relationship

[15] See Asmal, Asmal, and Roberts (1996), Gade (2017), Gibson (2005), Gibson (2006), Stanley (2001), and Wilson (2001).

between the individual and the collective and respond to charges of appropriation from several commentators.

Krog, an Afrikaner poet and journalist who covered the TRC throughout its duration, writes the book – an enigmatic amalgam of autobiography, philosophical reflection, historical account, and even fiction – from the equally enigmatic and embattled position as "beneficiary of the structural violence of apartheid" on the one hand and pro-victim TRC advocate on the other (Schaffer and Smith 1578). Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith explicate her position well: she writes from the point of view of an Afrikaner, a "resisting daughter of a complicit Boer family," who deliberately recalls the "conservative past" while experiencing first-hand the "daily grind of witnessing the horrors of apartheid" (1581). *Country of My Skull*, which is narrated in memoir form in the fraught voice of its author, also incorporates other voices: an "audio-collage" (Rostan 27) of the TRC in the transcripts of victims, perpetrators, and commissioners, anecdotes from Krog's family farm, transcripts of news broadcasts, pervasive intertextual references, and occasional breaks from prose into poetry. Krog has been rightly criticised for her appropriation of the voices of victims in her own narrative, an act which reifies, however inadvertently, the hierarchies which allow an Afrikaner woman to write a successful book about the TRC while black victims often were only afforded testimonies (Moss 2006).

I argue, however, that the result of this massive panoply of voices is a successful deviation from the monophonic structure of the memoir toward a more democratic genre collage. By disrupting the standard narratorial patterns with an often-cacophonous multitude of voices and literary forms – prose, transcript, anecdote, intertext, poetry, and even fiction – *Country of My Skull* succeeds in creating an entry-point into the kind of polyphonic nation-building

narrative that the TRC strove towards. The TRC distinguished between "four notions of truth: factual or forensic truth; personal or narrative truth; social or 'dialogue' truth … and healing and restorative truth" (SAHA, *Report One* 110). Factual or forensic truth was, as might be expected, the process of "obtaining accurate information through reliable (impartial, objective) procedures" (111). The Commission was remarkable, however, in its willingness to go beyond the "objective" in considering subjective "forms" of truth. Indeed, if we believe Cole's suggestion that the public hearings "*were* the TRC" for many, then this fact takes on great significance. The public hearings at the HRVC provided the popular imagination with "narrative" and "social" truth – forms of truth that could not be factually verified, but which allowed the public to grasp individual/subjective trauma narratives and "*the truth of experience that is established through interaction, discussion, and debate*" (Albie Sachs qtd. in TRC 113; emphasis in original). In this way, the Commission explicitly legitimised communal forms of memory and narrative over and above the individual and rationalistic. The fourth form of truth, "healing truth," was slightly dubious in that it was not exactly a definition of truth, per se, but rather a mechanism for rhetorically linking the truth-seeking process to reconciliation. Nevertheless, the claim that contextualising trauma narratives "both amongst citizens and between the state and its citizens" promoted reconciliation is hard to argue with (114). This healing truth project, which amounts to the construction of a "collective memory" about apartheid, "permits a sense that there were shared tragedies in our collective past which enable us, together, to rise above the traumatic past and an uncertain present" (Coullie 19).

Though it represents the beneficiary position and thus goes beyond the binary imposed by the TRC, *Country of My Skull* also struggles with the internal contradiction between, on the one

hand, the heteroglossia which Krog employs through the use of multiple voices, modes, and languages, and, on the other, the appropriative impulse which leads her to take the testimonies of others and incorporate them into her individual memoir. Bakhtin spoke of heteroglossia in the novel as the conflicted-yet-united set of differing (polyphonous) voices of author, narrator, and character:

> The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types [heteroglossia] and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel. (263)

Heteroglossia is thus, to use Bakhtin's terms, a centrifugal impulse (an entropic force which pushes away from the centre, away from order and toward chaos) which is checked by the inherent unity of the novel, which is centripetal (the opposite of centrifugal, the force which pulls things toward an ordered centre). *County of My Skull* perhaps serves as a more extreme example of the clash between the centrifugal and centripetal forces of language than any of Bakhtin's primary examples.[16] The book grapples with the conflict between authorial perspective (Krog), narratorial voice (a version of Krog), and "character" voice (the voices of victims, perpetrators, Desmond Tutu, Krog's brothers, and the multitude of others). It goes further, however, complicating Bakhtin's trio by literally quoting the words of others. That is, the victims whose

[16] I have briefly discussed the issue of genre in *Country of My Skull*, but it is a worthy topic on its own. The book is part historical reportage, part memoir, part philosophical reflection, part theatrical production, and even part novel. Its resistance to singular definition is a prime example of heteroglossia in and of itself, for Krog's genre-bending amounts to a confusion of different languages (genres, Bakhtin will argue, each have their own languages). See his essay, "Discourse in the Novel."

voices Krog transcribes are not simply fictional characters, but real people with individual identities of their own, speaking for themselves and only later being incorporated into Krog's polyphony of voices. Still further, Krog does not stick to prose, adding to "those fundamental compositional unities" (Bakhtin 263) poetry, transcript, and frequent asides that read like epigraphs inserted into the middle of pages (e.g. "*To seize the surge of language by its soft, bare skull*") (38).

In the spirit of breaking formal constraints, let us begin at the end of Krog's book by considering the poem she leaves us with. For all her polyphony, this final, short set of lines acts as a compact manifesto for the book, summing up her conception of the relationship between language and the body, and how that sense of the body metaphorically extends to the space of the nation. She dedicates the poem, "For us all; all voices, all victims," and writes:

because of you
this country no longer lies
between us but within

it breathes becalmed
after being wounded
in its wondrous throat

in the cradle of my skull
it sings, it ignites
my tongue, my inner ear, the cavity of my heart (Krog 364)

Krog performs metaphorical alchemy here. She links together "voice," "breath," "song," and "tongue" as implicit references to language, but also to spirit. The "becalmed" "breath" of the nation harkens back to the Christian notion of the Holy Spirit or Paraclete, which literally "inspires" (read: breathes into) the body of the person it saves.[17] She links this image of the linguistic spirit to the "country" to the degree that the "country," itself, "sings," and "ignites / my tongue, my inner ear." Further, the country has been internalised in the skulls of individuals, for it "no longer lies / between us but within." Within what? "Us," presumably, that is, inside our minds or, in the more bodily and grotesque version, inside our skulls. In this line, Krog answers one of the central ambiguities of the title: the "of" in *Country of My Skull* begs the question, is the skull in the country or the country in the skull? That is, does Krog write, in this book, about South Africa as it is, giving an historical account in the dispassionate mode of reportage, or the South Africa of her imagination and the collective imagination encountered in the TRC?

At the closing of the book, the poem seems to suggest the latter. That the country "no longer lies / between us" implies the removal of boundaries between "you" (the victims of apartheid to whom Krog, as a privileged beneficiary, feels her complicity sharply) and Krog's implied "I." The line is a declaration of solidarity. With it, Krog pledges allegiance to the process of Truth and Reconciliation, allowing in the denouement a note of cathartic optimism. The Commission has succeeded in uniting her with the victims of apartheid, and so the country "breathes becalmed / after being wounded / in its wondrous throat" by the horrors of the last fifty years. The condition of the nation is told in the condition of the throat, or that through which the

[17] "Inspiration." Oxford English Dictionary. "Inspire" derives from the root "spire," which in turn derives from the upward motion of a flame commonly associated with the inherent ascension of the "spirit." To "In-spire," then, is literally to "put the spirit into." In its etymological relationship to fire, the word "ignites" also becomes meaningful: to "ignite" the "tongue" is to spark the flame of inspiration.

nation speaks. The ability or inability to speak is thus symptomatic of the nation's spiritual and bodily health. On the simplest level, Krog finally feels connected to the victims of apartheid. The internalisation of the "country," however, implies a closer connection than the lines at first seem to imply. The country has not simply ceased to impose boundaries, but rather has entirely ceased its existence as a separate entity distinct from "us." The country has become immaterial or even unreal, the object of collective imagination rather than a literal space. Krog's desire – and her project, in *Country* – is to find a place within that imagined nation. The country is "within" "us," that is, collectively imagined by the newly-united Rainbow Nation. Here, the utopian rhetoric of Madiba Magic and the New South Africa seeps in, lending to a conception of the nation which has been successfully consolidated into a shared consciousness. With its Christian undertones, we might even say that Krog buys into a narrative of salvation – however subtly, the TRC was a sacrifice which cleansed the nation.

In that the poem celebrates a projected dissolution of the distinction between the individual and collective, it foregrounds the inherent incongruence between the two – the difficulty of the individual to comprehend collective memory or narrative and the ephemeral nature of the collective, unable to be located apart from its warped form in the locus of the individual. Stuck in a subjective frame of reference, the individual cannot comprehend the historical narratives and feelings of the collective from an objective point of view. By the same token, narratives emerging from collective discourse – the imagined community of the nation,[18]

[18] See Anderson (2016). In his seminal book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson argues that nations are imagined rather than "real" entities, built primarily by the rise of print capitalism and the consolidation of national communities around shared language. He argues that one of the primary nation-building exercises is the creation of a national narrative. The national narrative – the nation's past, present, and future plotted along a (for Anderson, infinite) linear trajectory – is bound inextricably to the nation's identity. I will suggest later in my argument that individuals narrate their lives and construct their identities in similar ways.

the collectively constructed identities of groups, the collective memory of apartheid – are only abstract ideas before they are expressed by the citizen, artist, speaker, author, politician, etc. Judith Coullie has argued that the crux of *Country of My Skull* is the relationship between individual and collective memory (Coullie 2014). She evaluates the ethical stakes of the individual author memorialising a national process of healing. Here, my analysis diverges from Coullie's in considering the relationship between the ethical and the aesthetic in Krog's problematic memoir. As I have noted, Krog places herself within a collective "us" (an "us" deeply connected to a sense of the nation, but not entirely separate from a universalist discourse of "common humanity") which, having emerged successfully on the other side of the TRC, imagines the nation together rather than apart. At the same time, the country also "lies" "in the cradle of *my* skull," singing to and igniting "*my* tongue, *my* inner ear, the cavity of *my* heart" (emphasis added). As much as Krog identifies the New South Africa as a collectively constructed space, its individual relationship to her remains intact. The country is at once a real place filled with bloodshed and sunshine and people and so on, a collectively imagined place whose form is shifting rapidly in the wake of democratisation, and an individually imagined place with a particular relationship to each and every person.

It is useful, here, to "upset the commonsense opposition between individual and collective memory." For this, Michael Rothberg invokes Maurice Halbwachs, summarising his thoughts on the matter:

> all memories are simultaneously individual and collective: while individual subjects are the necessary locus of the act of remembrance, those individuals are imbued with frameworks common to the collectives in which they live. The frameworks of memory

> function something like language – they provide a shared medium within which alone individuals can remember or articulate themselves. (Rothberg 15)

In this conception of individual and collective memory, Krog simply acts as a "necessary locus of the act of remembrance." She is, after all, a journalist recounting a lived experience. *Country of My Skull* is a synthesis, from the perspective of one individual, of a "shared memory," which "integrates and calibrates the different perspectives … into one version" of the nation (Rothberg 15). Krog writes the disparate voices of "us all; all voices, all victims" into a single book on the basis of her privileged position. That said, she recognises this fraught positionality and thematises it, hence the contradiction in her final poem between the nation as internal to "us" and the nation "in the cradle of my skull."

The collective memory of the nation constructs a singular, shared "truth" woven together out of many individual truths. We might assume that there is some "real" nation, but we can only understand it as it is mediated through imagination and its manifestation, language. Coullie takes the production of collective truth from another angle, arguing that

> The goal of the Commission and of Krog and of other TRC memoirists is for collective memory to inform the ways in which individual members of the fledgling nation recollect the past – for collective memory to become national memory – by becoming part of South Africans' autobiographical memory. (5)

In this conception, collective memory is actively constructed. It is a strategy of nation-building as much as it is a naturally-emerging product of discourse. Memoirists such as Krog along with the media disseminated a panoply of TRC narratives, each a version of events that contributed to

the construction of an "autobiographical memory" of the nation.[19] In that the TRC's live HRV hearings invited victims and perpetrators to stand up and share their memories, the Commission itself acts precisely as Halbwachs predicts: it "provided a shared medium within which alone individuals" "remembered" and "articulated" themselves, and in the process developed the grounds for common memory and the subsequent articulation of a common historical truth. Individual stories of suffering and cruelty were woven into a collective historical fabric yet retained their individuality as entry-points into a collective imagination. Each individual "enacts remembrance" on his or her own, simultaneously interpreting old and developing new "frameworks common to the collectives in which they live." In this context, *Country of My Skull* is only one of millions of individual perspectives on the "truth" of South African history. It is at once an interpretation of the collective memory of apartheid, constituted by the multitude of voices at the TRC, and an addition to that collective memory.

All of that said, language is not always simply and straightforwardly a manifestation of an internal truth, and even when it is, it often does not come easily. Words come out garbled, stories mangled and contradictory. We must question whether it is the testimony that is contradictory, or the latent "truth" itself, or whether, in fact, the "truth" is nothing but the story (an extreme and dangerous form of historical relativism which we would do well to reject). The victims of apartheid brutality – threatened, tortured, persecuted, driven underground, having

[19]The ontological status of national/collective memory presents a major question in and of itself that I do not have space here to cover. Firstly, the paradox I have mentioned persists: collective memory exists only in abstract until instantiated by the individual. Secondly, Coullie draws an implicit distinction between collective and national memory. While this distinction is valid, I would add that the national is only one category under the umbrella of the collective. Groups formed by kinship ties, race, gender, or class, communities brought together by geographical location, and endless other types of collectives can and must form collective memories and narratives. As a nation-building strategy during the transition to democracy in South Africa, the memories formed by the state-mandated collective of the TRC/SABC and independent books such as *Country* were explicitly intended to become national memory.

witnessed the deaths of their close friends and family – struggle from the depths of silence to breach the surface and speak.[20]

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's account of a similar difficulty in his memoir *Birth of a Dream Weaver*, though referring to writing a novel rather than testifying, is informative. For him, the same barrier exists between the truth of violent events in the past and their representation in the present. "My Limuru and Kenya," he writes, "remain a land from which I have escaped, but I want to write about it; I want to make sense of it. … I know terror, but I can find no words to express it. I have seen villages razed, but I cannot find the images to capture the desolation" (88). Indeed, he frames the disconnect in the spatial terms of escape and return. In order to represent the truth of history, one must literally, shaman-like, return to that historical space and bring it forth in the present. One is reminded of Saint Augustine's famous space-time metaphor: "[I] fall into the past [and] enter the province of my memory" (Augustine 11.28). The knowledge of "terror," the existence of "Limuru and Kenya" and "villages razed" – these internal truths are not in question. The difficulty is, rather, how to express them. One might say that Kenya is the country of Ngũgĩ's skull. Diving into the country of the past, the province of his memory, may not be an issue (though sometimes, of course, this first step is equally impossible), but plundering its treasures and bringing them to the 'surface' of the present is something beyond Ngũgĩ's power.

[20]See Motsemme (2004), Ross (2002), and Cole (2010) for discussion of silence and extra-linguistic outbursts (crying, screaming, collapsing) as performance. Those who have studied the TRC from the angle of performance theory have argued convincingly that such forms of communication are productive rather than reductive. They constitute forms of communication, and, of course, storytelling, and are at the heart of the TRC's dramatic project. We must be careful not to slip into an easy binary between the absolute negativity of silence and the absolutely liberating effect of speech.

Krog dedicates much of *Country of My Skull* to the testimonies of victims who undergo similar difficulties, diving through the barriers of trauma and time, into the provinces of memory, in order to retrieve lost truths. One unnamed victim recounts the discovery of her child lying in a thicket of tyres after having been necklaced: "sleeping among tires … and he was foaming in the mouth and he was … already dead … Then they pulled him out and threw him on the ground … And I looked at him … And he was dying … and they won't allow me to hold him" (38; ellipses in original). The halting voice, evoked by Krog's elliptical transcription, mirrors the halting and contradictory events of the story. At first, the child "is already dead," then "he was dying," then the woman switches tenses, telling the Commission that "they won't allow me to hold him." The story is not straight; "the truth" either cannot be expressed or cannot be recovered. Instead we are left with two truths: the boy is both dead and dying at once, and we are never made privy to the answer. Some violence happened, a necklacing no doubt, yet its details are hazy. It has not been fully translated into the present, and we cannot be sure whether it is the memory in question or the words. The final ambiguity of the testimony engages precisely this temporal liminality. What does she mean when she says, "they won't allow me to hold him"? The present tense implies an inability to hold him in the present, yet the statement would make more sense in the past. Perhaps she is saying that the men in the story did not let her hold him back then, perhaps that her son's killers have taken him from her and she cannot hold his living self in the present, or perhaps that she can no longer "hold" the idea of him, that a nebulous "they" has created a distance between her and the idea of her beloved son. We cannot be sure. The truth of the events is lost in translation, and indeed there may be no single truth about the last sentence, for she may mean it in all three senses.

In the very next testimony that Krog quotes, another unnamed victim invokes the metaphors of language, body, and truth that I have discussed in regard to Krog's poetry: "This inside me …" he or she says, "fights my tongue. It is … unshareable. It destroys … words. Before he was blown up, they cut off his hands so he could not be fingerprinted … So how do I say this? – this terrible … I want his hands back" (39). Here, it is the memory itself that "is unshareable," that "destroys words," rather than some distance between the truth of the memory and its retelling. Indeed, it is not a battle between the speaker and the distance, as it is with Ngũgĩ, but rather a battle between the speaker and the memory itself. "This inside me," he or she calls it, is the enemy which resists retelling, or in the speaker's words, "fights my tongue." Like the man whose hands were cut off, the memory has lost its identity. It has become only "this terrible…" nothing; he or she trails off. In the image of the embattled tongue we again encounter the connection between language and the body evoked by images of the "wounded throat," the "singing skull" in *Country of My Skull*'s final poem. The metaphorical linkage between language and the body indicates a desire to concretise the merely conceptual: to imagine memories as physically fighting the tongue is to legitimise the struggle to speak in the arena of "the real." It is, in the words of one of Krog's many italicised, poetic asides, "*To seize the surge of language by its soft, bare skull*" (38).

Kim Rostan describes Krog's style of citation as "testimonial collage," relating these peripatetic sets of testimonial quotations to cinematic montage (26). "[Krog's] writing displays both techniques," she argues: "it cuts, cites, and decontextualises through découpage as a means of expression, at the same time as it reassembles, recontextualises and aggregates through assemblage" (26). Within the metaphor of collage, the centrifugal impulse of Derridean

"decontextualization" battles against the centripetal unity of the work of art as a reassembled "aggregate." Rostan suggests that the collage form is democratic in the sense that it is anti-representational, a Brechtian "combination of realities, [an] adjacency of voices and sliced experiences" (27). However, if we do not consider *Country*'s form to be purely utopian, how do we account for its potentially conservative features? The metaphor of curation, related but not equivalent to collage, comes to mind. If we consider Krog a curator rather than a modernist collage-maker, then her panoply of "sliced experiences" have the potential to museumise the testimonies, making of them "inert display[s] of an apparently static past" (Graham 14) rather than living elements of present trauma. Laura Moss takes up this line of criticism, arguing that Krog "distills testimonies," using them either as "national allegories" or "backdrops to [her] emotional journey" (Moss 85). The testimonies themselves lose their life, becoming static monuments, either metonymic of something greater or simply representative of "the essence of the Commission" (Moss 85; quoting Krog).

Rostan's appeal to Derridean decontextualisation raises ethical questions for Krog's use of citation, but also for this analysis. If Krog's transcription of uncredited (or perhaps even credited) witness testimony threatens an "infidelity" to the original context and voice, my citation and interpretation of these testimonies, now twice-removed, seems a callous if inadvertent reproduction of the original duplicity. For his part, Ato Quayson encounters these very same uncredited testimonies from *Country* and chooses not to interpret them, though he does quote pages 38 and 39 in full: "The extracts are best left underinterpreted," he contends, "to allow them to 'speak' their truths directly to our imagination" (Quayson 92). Nevertheless, he enters the fraught territory of secondary citation. What are the ethical implications of choosing

not only to quote these testimonies for a second time, but to explore them as one would any other text? What, precisely, is quoted? Already removed from their original contexts as live, public testimonies at HRVC hearings, these pieces of "audio transcribed into text" (Rostan 27) have become part of Krog's narrative project to at least some degree. Insofar as autobiography is a process of self-narration, the included words of others become building blocks for the edifice of narrator's subject.

As a memoir of both national and personal transitions, *Country* constructs the identities of its author and, by extension, the new nation into which the autobiographical narrator inserts herself, primarily through memory. James Olney reminds us that "in the Middle Ages memory was called the interior sense," functioning as "that which transforms the rich but disordered experience of the external sense … into the stuff of selfhood" (17-18). Laura Di Summa-Knoop, drawing on Marya Schechtman, describes the relationship between memory and identity in terms of the creation of a "narrative self": "Broadly, the idea behind the notion of a narrative self is that the delineation of identity depends upon our ability to see our lives as unfolding stories" (6). Stories, as Bakhtin understands them, are always centrifugal impositions, or restructurings, of the chaotic truth. In this way they are always partially untrue, at least in the sense that they remember selectively. Coullie discusses the "duty to forget," noting that it is in the "interests of nation-building that the aspects of the past that are selected for communal commemoration should be standardised" (14). She generalises this argument to include all acts of narration, individual and collective: "when we narrate the past, we cannot avoid the selective effects of plot" (19). Thus, the act of narration itself is akin to curation, in which the narrator must select those elements of history, those events or feelings or people, to include, and those to omit. In

defence of *Country*, Coullie notes that Krog attempts to revive several histories, focusing on women victims and the history of Afrikaner suffering. Again, however, we run into a contradiction: just as Krog reminds us of certain, forgotten, collective histories, she uses those histories as elements of her individual memoir. Krog's refusal to document the supporters of Winnie Mandela, for instance, "signals the drama of the narrator/protagonist's inner turmoil" as much as it intends to create an historical record of those women.[21]

To memorialise is necessarily to narrate and rationalise, to "shape and pattern" the chaos of lived experience into a knowable whole (Summa-Knoop 6). We come to know ourselves and, indeed, create ourselves in the act of narrating our lives. It is a curation of the self, a selection of which elements to build identity with. The *poiētik*[22] character of the past self, distinct from the autobiographical narrator of the present, thus moulds the identity of that present narrator. Beyond the mummifying, museumising thrust of decontextualisation, then, there is a danger that the testimonies cited by Krog could be incorporated so thoroughly into what Olney calls the "weave of life writing" that they become partially-fictive building blocks for the *poiētik* self of memoir. *Country*'s powerful fictive elements – in particular, the fictional extramarital affair which Rostan

[21] The special hearing of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, wife of Nelson Mandela and first lady of South Africa, was a major flashpoint of the TRC and the transition generally. Mandela, affectionately called "Winnie" by her supporters, was accused of ordering the kidnapping and death of teenage United Democratic Front activist Stompie Seipei during her time as an ANC militant leader. She was also implicated in multiple other high-profile deaths, including the killing of Doctor Abubakar Asvat. She denied all involvement. At stake during the hearing were two issues that plagued the TRC: should the gross human rights violations of anti-apartheid parties be considered in the same category as the crimes perpetrated by the state? Should the TRC be supportive of the ANC or remain entirely impartial? The image of Mandela and the new ANC stood to be tarnished by the revelations of the hearing, an outcome which the Commission was politically motivated to avoid. In this moment, Krog seeks to avoid questions around Winnie's honesty because she cannot bear them.

[22] See George Whalley's commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics* (1997). I use the Greek *poiēsis* here to refer to that which is made or constructed, as opposed to something which simply exists or is created from nothing. Whalley notes that "the root of *poētikē* – *poiein* (to make, do, fashion, perform) – is a strongly active verb that will dominate the whole discussion in the sense 'to make.' (Emphatically, it does not mean 'to create')" (44). In this sense, the past self of the memoir narrative is a construct; the act of life-writing is (1) a process of organising memory into a narrative structure and (2) using that structure to consolidate a self-identity.

explores – threaten a slippage between the real and the fabricated beyond the narrativisation common to memoirs. Perhaps, at some level, memoirs narrate subjective historical experience, yet we do not pick up a memoir expecting to read material that has been entirely fabricated. That is, even if the genre heading of memoir allows for a certain level of subjective historical narration, it promises a story based in real, past events, a story that is faithful to memory rather than invention, even if that memory is warped by the subjectivity of individual experience. In the American edition of *Country of My Skull*, published a year after the South African edition, Krog slips into this fictional narrative without acknowledging it as such. The editorial choice to remove the explanatory footnote seems to purposefully elide the distinction between the real and the imagined. Noting this, Rostan argues that "the genre within which Krog … innovate[s]" is a "mixture of imagination of citation" (35). No doubt "Krog's deliberately fictional space inside the memoir and testimonial space offers a removal, or self-distancing" (Rostan 37), but so long as the move from the "province of memory" (Augustine 11.28) to the province of imagination goes unacknowledged, we risk losing the distinction between a real, living, present sense of trauma embodied by testimony and a vague "backdrop to [Krog's] emotional journey" (Moss 85).

Returning to the image of the fighting tongue in the second cited testimony, we encounter again the relationship between language, embodiment, and "the real" in Biblical allusion. Later in the book, Krog quotes from the *IFP Communicator* (subtitled "*The Inkatha Freedom Party National Assembly Whip's Internal Weekly Report*"), finding within it, on the first page, "some advice from Proverbs: 'Whoso keepeth his tongue, keepeth his soul'" (133). That is to say, do not speak out of line. Krog discusses Buthelezi's role in the TRC as a "spoiler at worst and a

reluctant participant at best" with veiled disdain, listing at length the "five honorary doctorates" for which the *Communicator* celebrates him (133). The IFP's anti-TRC stance is obvious: in the context of the TRC, advice to keep thy tongue and not to speak out of line amounts to a rejection of the process of truth-telling. Krog's choice to cite the communicator reveals the extent to which Christian rhetoric was employed in arguments over the TRC's validity. Just as the Mandela government implicitly legitimised Christian conceptions of salvation and forgiveness by electing Archbishop Desmond Tutu as the chair the Commission, oppositional parties rallied against the TRC with the Christian logic of modesty and constraint. The tone of this passage makes clear that Krog's memoir, indebted as the poetry is to Christian narratives and iconography, works against this anti-TRC, Christian rhetoric.[23] Coullie notes the authorial narrator's alignment with the TRC's project of collective memory creation:

> Collective memory (and *Country of My Skull* contributes to that) tends to create iconic heroes and villains, representing broadly characterised forces of good and evil. The narrative is charged with the authorial narrator's ardent, unwavering respect for Archbishop Tutu (resulting more than once in self-abasement), with her ultimate admiration for the commissioners (after having been highly critical of many of them) and with reiterated identifications with repentant Afrikaners. (19)

As a contributor to collective memory, Krog is not only a supporter of the TRC and the methods of memorialising, truth-telling, and nation-building that it employed, but a participant in the TRC process. *Country of My Skull* is, in this sense, a piece of the overall TRC project, at least as a

[23] See several of Krog's other works: *Begging to Be Black* (2009), *There was This Goat* (2009), and *Conditional Tense* (2013). Also see Shore (2009). Krog acknowledges and explores the mystifying, ideological power of Christianity throughout her work, especially in her post-TRC books and articles. Of course, even as she espoused the Christian rhetoric embodied by Tutu, she must have recognized the nefarious racial-nationalist purposes Christianity had been put to in the Afrikaner community.

kind of paratext and at most an integral part. In its overview of narrative truth, the Commission's final report even quotes an article of Krog's to help describe the positive effects of subjective narration.

Country's close proximity to the official TRC process renders it an important counterpoint to a publication such as the *IFP Communicator*. Where the *Communicator* argued for silence as a method of preserving the soul, the tenets of the TRC which Krog promotes, so attached to the power of speech, imply the opposite: in order to maintain the internal self, the "true self" of the soul, one must be able to testify to its existence and speak in its defence. For the TRC, and for Krog, the "tongue" – the collective voices of the TRC and its commentators – *was* the soul of each individual and of the budding nation. The story constructed during the project of digging for the truth became that an "autobiographical memory" of the nation, at once reflecting and inflecting the historical development of South Africa (Coullie 5).

Christian logic, however, was not the only dominant force in the discourse around the TRC: this interpretation of the TRC's importance (much of it accurate, though the overall positive impact of the Commission is debated)[24] hinges on the same impetus toward "collective memory" and collective identity which I, along with Coullie, have argued constitutes the crux of *Country of My Skull*. Notice the subtle distinction between the individualistic language of the proverb – "*whoso* keepeth," that is, "whoever" or "any*one* who" – and the discourse of the TRC, dominated by calls for shared memory, communal reconciliation, and collective identity. Such collectivist rhetoric draws not from the Christian tradition, but largely from the Southern African tradition of ubuntu, a concept invoked powerfully by Tutu throughout the Commission's tenure

[24] See Stanley (2001), Gibson (2005), and Gibson (2006).

to tie the TRC's mission back to African philosophy and conceptions of social organisation (Krog, *Conditional* 207).[25] Krog, citing Mark Sanders, defines ubuntu in terms of hospitality: "hospitality and reconciliation were synonyms; it was a way of becoming, in a limited sense, the one who was not one's own … One was a person through others and became a person through the stranger" (Krog, *Conditional* 213). Thus, to torture or kill another person does not simply produce a harm to the victims, but also a loss of "humanity" for the perpetrator and a wound to the body of the community, the social whole. The TRC's project of remembering becomes a project of figurative "re-membering," or sewing the limbs back onto the body, an etymological coincidence employed deftly by Krog. In *Country of My Skull*, the site of remembrance is relocated from the ephemeral, placeless idea of the "mind" to its physical embodiment, the skull or implied brain. In Krog's bodily poetics, the project of nation-building, becomes a project of reconstructing the wounded body of the national community. It becomes a medical procedure, the commissioners a team of surgeons and the global audience a nervous but hopeful class, sitting around in the operating theatre.[26] The tension between collectivist and individualist rhetoric within the TRC informs and reflects the central ethical tension between (centrifugal) polyphony and (centripetal) appropriation – between "our story" and "my story" – that I have defined within *Country of My Skull*.

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[25] Also see Gade (2017). The importance of ubuntu, Christianity, and general philosophical / religious rhetoric to the TRC has been debated in recent years, with some diminishing their importance and others emphasising it. Whether or not such rhetorical structures provided groundwork for the TRC, however, it cannot be denied that their constant invocation by commissioners and commentators shaped public discourse about collective vs. individual culpability, punishment, and identity.

[26] See Cole (2010). The medical, legal, and theatrical metaphors are endless. Much has been written about the dramatic nature and inherent theatricality of the courtroom and operating room; no wonder the field of television drama is saturated by legal and medical procedurals. That these dramatic metaphors coalesce in the rhetoric and structure of the TRC demonstrates its highly effective and affective performative intentions. In the next chapter, I further explore nation-building rhetoric and its appeals to the body and stage.

In both *Country of My Skull* and the TRC itself, the internal contradiction between pervasive heteroglossia and the appropriative steps taken in search of a singular "truth" acts as the tipping point at which they either fail or succeed. Though providing a platform for individual testimonies of individual narratives, the TRC nevertheless constructed its own, singular narrative of apartheid. Their central claims are a testament to this fact. Firstly, they claimed that apartheid was a crime against humanity; secondly, that acceptance of a singular historical truth, a "'complete picture' of gross violations of human rights" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1) was necessary for reconciliation; and thirdly that "a therapeutic model of reconciliation" (Schaffer and Smith 1577) would lead to the successful democratisation of the county (as opposed to some other method, such as the avoidance of amnesty and the pursuit of individual civil suits). As Mahmood Mamdani argues, the reliance upon a victim-perpetrator binary which left out the troubled position of "beneficiary" amounted to a "diminished truth," one which "embrace[d] the legal fetishism of apartheid" in its inability to critique the state at a fundamental level (Mamdani 60; 61). Schaffer and Smith note that "actual persons at once were interpellated into the discursively produced and institutionally authorized stances and, in their participation, tested, stretched, evaded, and exceeded the limits of these positions" (1578). Even during the TRC's tenure, then, these battles between the centripetal impulse of the TRC and the centrifugal individuality of its participants were being fought. Oftentimes, as with members of the ANC who claimed their inherent positions as victims of the apartheid system as a justification for brutal crimes committed during the struggle, the lines between the two poles were blurred. Was Winnie Mandela a perpetrator of gruesome crimes? Probably, but she was also a victim who had lost her husband to the regime and had been harassed daily by police, argue her defenders.

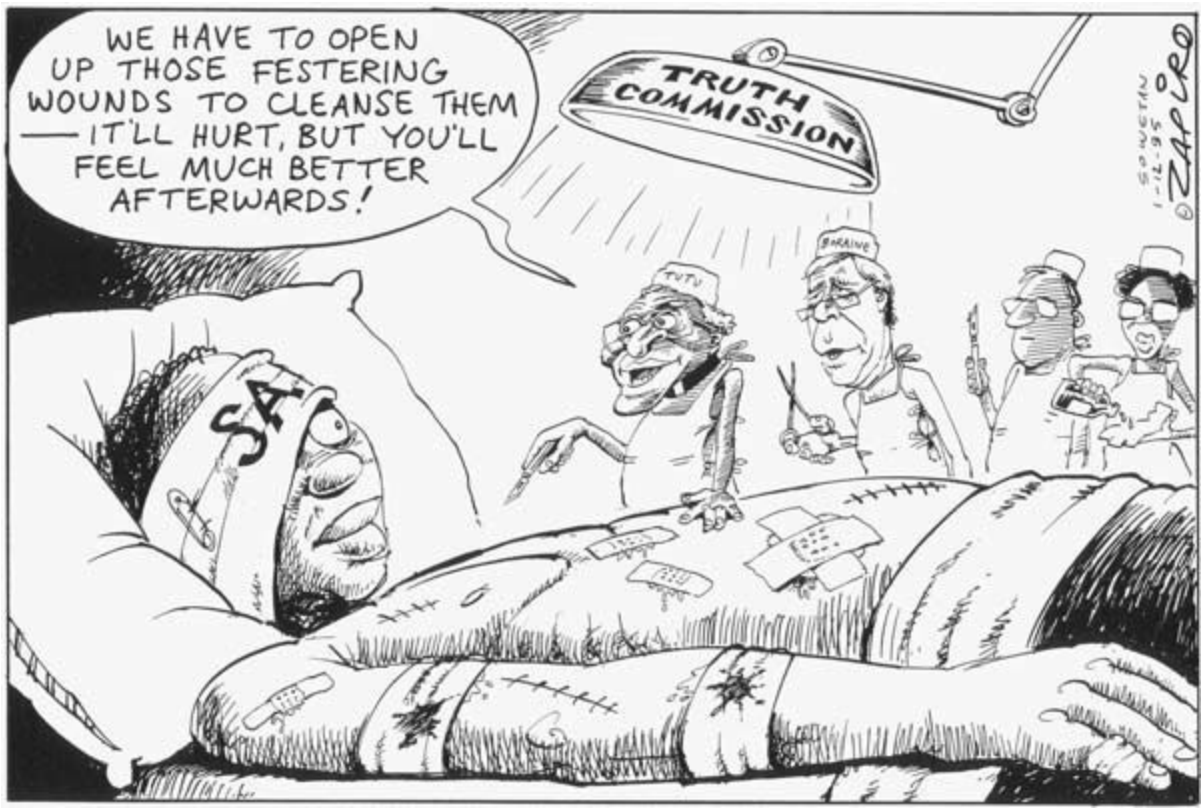
Though, through citation, she rips testimonies from their original contexts, Krog's insistence upon letting the subaltern speak in their own words – without paraphrasing – resists the monologic thrust of the memoir form. That said, Moss' criticism of *Country of My Skull* remains potent: "it seems irresponsible," she writes, "to disembody the testimonies in the service of the larger good, and yet [...] Krog presents some victim testimonies without a name, place or date" (Moss 94). Krog's polyphonic take on the memoir form still remains a memoir, *her* memoir. The woman whose son was necklaced may well have written a book of her own, yet she is only afforded an uncredited snippet in the memoir of a privileged person. What can we glean from the internal contradiction between polyphonic representation, on the one hand, and appropriation on the other? Where do we find "the truth" in this jumble of voices? In *Country of My Skull*, Krog presents her truth. In a sense it is singularly hers, yet it provides an entry-point into the "shared medium" of collective imagination and memory (Rothberg 15).

Perhaps this conflict is simply a necessary symptom of inequality: the powerful write history, and we can only hope that they include the voices of the subaltern. Yet, we might still find a solution in Michael Rothberg's concept of "multidirectional memory." Rothberg poses the concept in direct retaliation against a conception of memory as "competitive." Working within a framework of competitive memory, we "assume that the public sphere in which collective memories are articulated is a scarce resource and that the interaction of different collective memories within that sphere takes the form of a zero-sum struggle for preeminence" (Rothberg 3). To work within a framework of multidirectional memory is to assume the opposite, that there is space enough in the collective imagination for many histories, and that comparisons between them are not always reductive, but often productive of new knowledge and new perspectives.

Rothberg is working on a broader scale in considering the apparent "competition" between the shared memory of the holocaust and other tragedies, yet his argument works on the smaller scale equally well. The assumption that Krog's usage of victim testimonies is necessarily an act of appropriation relies upon an underlying logic of competitive memory in which the attention of the collective imagination is a scarce resource.

I do not want to belittle the concern over *Country of My Skull*, but only suggest that its conflictory attempt at heteroglossia is both a site of success and failure. Where it fails, it is simply another instance of history written by the victors. Where it succeeds, the polyphony of Krog's project shines through, allowing us to understand apartheid, democratisation, and the TRC multi-directionally, as "truths," rather than monolithically, as "the truth." Such successes are both aesthetic and ethical: Krog's ability to confound standards of genre through the use of a diverse set of voices and styles is both a major aesthetic feat and an act of democratisation. The Commission, like Krog, attempted to resist the impulse toward telling a single, monolithic story of apartheid with its multiple definitions of truth and commitment to projecting a plurality of voices. They attempted to narrate a national autobiography capable of propping up a new dispensation just as tens of thousands of individual victims attempted, as parts of the same process, to narrate their disparate experiences, to construct for themselves a place within the newly imagined and realized nation. These struggles over voice, over who would come to control the narration of the new nation, were and are battles between subjective, sometimes semi-fictional narration, and the apparently objective modes of politics, social science, and journalistic reportage. Perhaps the most admirable feature of *Country of My Skull* is the attempt, however fraught and problematic, to reconcile these forces.

The Operating Theatre



Zapiro, December 1, 1995, *Sowetan* (appearing in Graham).

Ideally, memory acts as the connecting tissue between the body and the physical places it has occupied, providing at least the perception of a stable basis for identity and a sense of community. Yet the whole history of colonization, modernization, and apartheid has served to rupture the connections between people and places in South Africa. … In this context, memory bears witness not to any straightforward, cogent sense of collective identity, but to a pervasive sensation of loss, dispossession, and bewilderment.

– Shane Graham, *South African Literature After the Truth Commission* 29

If we accept Benedict Anderson's seminal claim that the nation is imagined, some pressing questions emerge: who imagines it? Is there nothing "real" about the nation? Is the concept of the nation a universal idea, or simply a contentless form waiting to be filled with

national myths – of "Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan," or the "American Dream," or the "Rainbow Nation"? Who, ultimately, defines the nation, and what processes of definition are legitimate? These questions reveal an underlying theme: one of the primary nation-building exercises is national narration. To imagine is to define in terms of particular stories, or plots, complete with characters, settings, dramatic action, and, on the whole, narrative arcs. In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson describes the mythologizing power of nationalism, which distinguishes the nation from the state, as an act of narration:

> If nation states are widely conceded to be 'new' and 'historical,' the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future. It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny. (11-12)

Nationalism is, in this sense, a project of narration and a kind of magical force. It tends toward the consolidation of national history into a singular, linear plot with an ancient past and a point of *telos* located in the present. We were meant to end up here, says nationalism, and now that we have gotten to where we were destined to be, the future is "limitless." Of course, nation-states are not this way in "reality." They are contingent entities, both "new" and "historical" in the words of Anderson. They are not limitless, nor immemorial. They are not, entirely, their national myths.

There is, perhaps, no national moment more suited to the paradoxes described above than South Africa in the early 1990s, a nation which had suddenly – shockingly – emerged from the depths of apartheid into the sunlight of Nelson Mandela's new liberal democracy. Such a transition necessarily reveals the contingent nature of the nation-state. The collapse of apartheid

entailed the reorganization of civil society, law, and (nominally) economy (Wilson 26). It recalled the colonial origins of South Africa to national attention, highlighting the arbitrarily-drawn borders and the internal chaos of a "nation" forged from tens of distinct societies. Yet, it also entailed the weaving of new national narratives. The newly-elected African National Congress was tasked with filling the narrative void left by the apartheid regime's National Party, which had spun the yarn of segregationist Afrikaner nationalism for fifty years.

Shane Graham argues that both British colonial administration and apartheid relied upon absolutist ideas of the nation: "The National Party (NP) government, and the British Union administration before it, refused to accept the ephemerality of collective or national memory, and instead tried tirelessly to impose their own narratives onto the landscapes and people around them" (5). By contrast, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) stressed the danger of forgetting the national wounds of the past. "There can be little doubt," argues the first volume of the TRC's Final Report,

> that gross violations of human rights and other similar abuses during the past few decades left indelible scars on the collective South African consciousness. These scars often concealed festering wounds that needed to be opened up to allow for the cleansing and eventual healing of the body politic. (115)

The fragility of the national collective, in lieu of national unity, became fundamental to the ANC's narrative of transition. It was the TRC's job to put the nation back together by remembering the past. In an East London church basement, the courthouses in Cape Town, and indeed locations all over the country, the impromptu performance spaces of the Human Rights

Violations Committee[27] became a national operating theatre in which the eminent Desmond Tutu, attended by a cohort of medical peers (Commissioners), transfixed students (audience/media members), and public onlookers (the nation; the globe), delved into South Africa's "festering wounds," removed the hideous infections, and held them aloft.

In this chapter, I focus on the TRC as a process of nation-building. I argue that retrospective genres, more so than the rhetoric of the commissioners themselves, were the primary modes by which the narratives of the TRC entered the realm of "national memory" and thereby became building blocks for new foundational myths – "Madiba Magic," the "Rainbow Nation," the "New Dispensation," etc. In her memoir *Country of My Skull*, the first significant retrospective book on the TRC, Antjie Krog deploys her bodily poetics to link the bodies of individual victims, traumatized by the apartheid regime, to the body of the nation. Simultaneously, she contemplates her position within the newly reconstructed national body. She is plagued with guilt, but desires above all else to be included, to become physically part of the new unified whole. As the first progressive television program put out by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), a state-run media body that, under apartheid, acted as the right hand of the NP, *TRC Special Report* was a watershed moment in the history of South African media. Presented by Max du Preez, the Afrikaner journalist and anti-apartheid activist who had started the first anti-apartheid Afrikaans newspaper (*Vrye Weekblad*), it explicitly attempted to reframe the role of the state in the national consciousness, leveraging the elated sense of "Madiba Magic" to contrast the African National Congress against the NP. Ultimately, both *Country of My Skull* and *TRC Special Report* serve to re-legitimize the relationship between

[27] The HRV hearings, lead by the face of the TRC, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, were the most performative and thus the most mediated of the three committees. They were the affective heart of the TRC and therefore have been the primary focus of most media coverage, literature, and academic writing since their beginning in 1996.

the state and the nation by imagining new national myths in which a "Rainbow Nation," under the ANC's guidance, could re-unify the national body and atone for the sins of the past.

In *Race, Nation, Class* (1991), Etienne Balibar draws on Anderson's imagined community model of the nation, yet reframes the debate to more seriously consider the relationship between the nation and the state. He pushes against what he sees as Anderson's over-reliance on the category of "the real": "let us dispense right away with … the antithesis between the 'real' and the 'imaginary' community," he contends, and goes on:

> *Every social community reproduced by the functioning of institutions is imaginary,* that is to say, it is based on the projection of individual existence into the weft of a collective narrative, on the recognition of a common name and on traditions lived as the trace of an immemorial past (even when they have been fabricated and inculcated in the recent past). But this comes down to accepting that, under certain conditions, *only* imaginary communities are real. (93)

For Balibar, all institutionally-reproduced communities such as nations are necessarily, from the outset, imaginary. They may be partially and temporarily based on "real" communities, but in the interests of producing (imagining) a particular idea of the people, such communities necessarily fall to the wayside. This is not to say that imagined communities are somehow meaningless. Rather, Balibar argues that the category of the imagined is both real and important. The imagination, collective or individual, influences and is part of the real world. In order to create a sense of unity, institutions must discursively "produce the people," that is, define the category of "the people" for the collective imagination. For the NP, "the people" became Afrikaners – the idealized "real South Africans" (Posel 89). For the more radical anti-apartheid parties, "the

people" became the proletariat (South African Communist Party or SACP), the Zulus (Inkatha Freedom Party or IFP), or all black Africans (Pan-African Congress or PAC).

Proceeding from the analyses of Anderson and Balibar, we might consider the project of narrating the nation as a struggle for hegemony over national identity. The combatants in this struggle are many: the state, as a legislative entity and a wielder of military power; religious institutions, as entities of social clout whose narratives often already wield great influence with the national population; and minority communities, such as those defined by kinship ties, territory, language, or other indicators of identity, which offer to the nation pre-formed communal memories and narratives, constitute a broad list. Beneath and between these major actors exist the media, celebrities, and the novelists, painters, poets, filmmakers – the artists in general – who contend to push their disparate perspectives into the dominant/hegemonic position in popular culture and discourse. Out of such a struggle, dominant narratives of national history inevitably emerge. South Africa's TRC successfully married several of these parties, uniting regular people (the actual victims, witnesses and perpetrators who testified), poets, novelists, journalists, and famous academics under the umbrella of a state-sponsored commission. This endeavor alone was enough to render the Commission a remarkable process. Proceeding under the public eye in a way that no other Truth Commission before it had, South Africa's TRC became more than a lifeless, legalistic final report. In engaging the popular imagination, the TRC distinguished itself as a nation-building narrator over and above its basic function as an element of state transition (Cole xii).

For the more liberally minded anti-apartheid parties, which is what the ANC became as soon as it entered power, "the people" became "all South Africans" (Posel 74; TRC 22, 48, 103,

110). One might spot the circularity here: the people of the nation are defined, simply, as the people of the nation. South Africans are imagined as South Africans by virtue of being, yes, South African. This voiding action is key to the maintenance of the secular, (neo)liberal-democratic vision that the ANC adopted at the outset of the transition. Balibar contends that it is the goal of the state, in order to legitimize itself, to produce a people out of these disparate and competing imagined communities. So far, I have suggested that this was the goal of the budding "new South Africa," and that the TRC was the key institution in charge of such a production. In *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation*, Richard Wilson contextualizes Balibar's theoretical supposition, arguing that "constitutionalism, state-building and the creation of what is termed a 'culture of human rights' cannot be separated so easily from classic, communitarian forms of nation-building" (3). In the case of a nation in the midst of both revolutionary[28] state transition and a revolutionary reconstitution of national mythology, such processes must inform each other. The state legitimizes itself via its hegemony over national mythmaking and the nation reasserts itself as an entity via its newly legitimized state.

Wilson stresses the importance of "human rights talk," constitutionalism, and ubuntu in the ANC's struggle to "manufacture legitimacy" for a state which had just emerged from fifty years of authoritarianism (17). "In the 'new South Africa,'" Wilson suggests, "national personhood became tied up in how to respond to past human rights abuses. Being authentically

[28] See Popescu (2010) and Westad (2006). Revolutionary in that the transition at the end of apartheid reconstituted some fundamental elements of civil society in South Africa. To be sure, Mandela's government did not usher in the socialist constitution that the ANC had been planning for years. After the fall of the Soviet Union, this seemed like a practical impossibility. The U.S. and Britain propped up apartheid so long as there was a threat that South Africa could "go red," and once this was not in the cards, let it fall. There is no space in this analysis to fully examine the position of South Africa in relation to the global Cold War. Suffice to say that the concrete geopolitical reasons for the end of apartheid were tied up, inextricably, with the trajectory of the Cold War and the simultaneous fall of the Soviet Union.

South African comes to mean sharing the traumas of apartheid and uniting in the subsequent process of 'healing the nation' (14). That is, national personhood became an exercise of questioning the previous NP-led state, of drawing out the distinction between the new state and the old. Nation-building, in this way, simultaneously constructed new national myths (the multicultural, secular "Rainbow Nation" and, crucially, the "new South Africa" which stressed a break from the past) and legitimized the "new" state. In line with Anderson, Wilson's critique of the TRC as a "liminal institution" of transitional justice emerges from a distinction between the imagined and the real: "Nations do not have collective psyches which can be healed and to assert otherwise is to psychologize an abstract entity which exists primarily in the minds of nation-building politicians" (15). Though insightful about the influence of the state in narrating the nation, Wilson's perspective is clouded by a focus on high politics which tends to attribute all nation-building to top-down state control. Though ultimately accountable to the state, the TRC was, for the most part, an independent institution which promoted a form of history from below that belies Wilson's cynicism. Moreover, as I contend, the constellation of media and art nominally separate from the TRC but practically part of it extended the boundaries of representation and the strategies of nation-building available to it.

The TRC's truth-telling process, intended to produce reconciliation, was presented by the Commission as both cathartic (in the religious sense) and unifying under the umbrella of secular "human rights talk" (Wilson 5). The Commission's commitment to go beyond the objective/forensic in considering subjective "forms" of truth allowed for a polyphonous nation-building process. Cole's suggestion that the public hearings "*were* the TRC" for many implies that the public hearings at the HRVC provided the popular imagination with individual

narratives of apartheid that often differed from or exceeded state-approved visions of the new dispensation. Such "narrative" and "social" truth – forms of truth that could not be factually verified, but which allowed the public to grasp individual/subjective trauma narratives and "*the truth of experience that is established through interaction, discussion, and debate*" – were primarily filtered through the media and popular literature (Albie Sachs qtd. in TRC 113; emphasis in original).

There is a subtle ambiguity in the title of Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*: it implies a spatial relationship between the skull and the country, yet the word "of" is an unclear preposition; is the skull in the country or the country in the skull? The ambiguity is intentional. The answer is both. With this anatomical metaphor, the "country" becomes both an idea in her mind and the physical home of her body. Krog's struggle over her conflictory identity as a beneficiary of apartheid on the one hand and anti-apartheid activist on the other registers as a struggle over the mapping of the nation. In *South African Literature after the Truth Commission*, Shane Graham summarizes this fundamental attachment to spatial metaphor with a series of questions: "How does one map the intimate networks of memory, identity, body, time, space, and place?" (49). Mark Sanders argues that the recurring titular metaphor performs a "turning of the authorial self out of its house" (158). In the wake of the TRC, the country suddenly becomes an idea, alienated *from* the subject, rather than the natural home *for* the subject. Published in the wake of the "transition to democracy," at a moment in South African history when the whole world was watching, Krog's "authorial homelessness" was an international spectacle of national identity crisis. Through her memoir – at times testimonial and others confessional – Krog renders the national discourses of memory, guilt, and difference as struggles over space, over who gets to

call South Africa home and who must, in attempting reconciliation, recognize their alienation (Coullie 16).

Krog's authorial homelessness registers not only a moment of transition in South Africa, but also an epochal shift in world history. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Cold War paradigms of "East" versus "West," capitalism versus socialism, communitarianism versus individualism, and (from the perspective of the intercom, at least) imperialism versus internationalism, were suddenly rendered obsolete, and a whole discursive framework with which a conception of "the world" had been structured for decades suddenly crumbled. In *South African Literature Beyond the Cold War*, Monica Popescu argues that Zoe Wicomb's *David's Story*

> stages a mood of confusion and epistemological uncertainty specific to the end of the Cold War in South Africa. In the early 1990s, South Africa was turning into a postcolonial polity, a culture in transition under the influence of a post-Cold War global configuration. This cultural environment left its imprint on the way history was being conceived. The official Afrikaner mythology had already come under attack from various radical historiographic trends, some influenced by official forms of Marxism, and others with a grassroots perspective. [...] The end of the Cold War and the fall of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe further shaped the tensions between the various historiographic approaches. The "retreat from communism and anti-communism," as Rob Nixon dubbed this period (2013), challenged Marxist orthodoxies at the core of the struggle and the teleological vision of revolutionary triumph. The Cold War and the reassuring dichotomies that had shaped the years of the struggle – black against white,

> communist against capitalist – were followed by the uncertainty of transition. If Alex La Guma had looked for inspiration to the socialist world, at the beginning of 1990s these models were shattered by the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. (56)

I have argued that *Country of My Skull* wrestles with the same "confusion and epistemological uncertainty" as Popescu argues *David's Story* does. In its complex generic structure, its commitment to representing polyphony, and its forays into fiction, Krog's memoir evokes the mood of a nation unsure of its identity and abroil in historiographical conflicts centering around the TRC. But such conflicts, as Popescu shows, were evidence of global political and epistemological struggles. With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, so too collapsed the possibility of a socialist alternative. Mandela's ANC changed its tune from the revolutionary socialism of the anti-apartheid years to the neoliberalism of seeking foreign investment and making free trade deals with western powers (Wilson 58).[29] The TRC was itself a liberal process in that it did not seek to prosecute perpetrators of gross human rights violations. The TRC's commitment to amnesty, to healing the national body through forgiveness rather than punishment, restorative rather than punitive justice, was underpinned by an essentially anti-revolutionary politics. It attempted to re-legitimize the state in the way Anderson predicts rather than re-constituting the state entirely in the way Balibar describes.

Country of My Skull exists, therefore, outside of the "reassuring dichotomies that had shaped the years of the struggle" (Popescu 56). It emerged from a world in which the obvious antipathy of "black against white" had been elided by the multiculturalism of rainbow nation

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[29] See Graham (2009), Wilson (1998), and Posel (2008). The ostensible inevitability of the ANC's shift is a topic of debate. Graham and Posel caution against the chalking up the ANC's centerward shift to the some global-political inevitability, whereas Wilson (writing during the transition ten years earlier) recognizes concessions to western powers as necessary for South Africa's survival. I do not have the space here to discuss these positions in full, but it is important to note that the Cold War does not explain everything.

rhetoric. In the new South Africa, black and white were to live together. But how? Only the most naive optimists could have seriously held such a dream of reconciliation. Even Tutu and his fellow commissioners recognized the TRC's mission as only a "starting point for reconciliation in South Africa" (SAHA, *Report One* 94). Krog's poetry turns to the bodily metaphor that appears in *Country of My Skull*'s title. She extends the intimate space of the individual body to represent the national community, and joins Tutu in the mission of ubuntu encapsulated by the "operating theatre" Zapiro cartoon that appears at the beginning of this chapter. Here, *Country of My Skull* and *TRC Special Report* converge: though both add a layer of mediation to the TRC, neither challenge its core principles; as such, they construe South Africa's transition as a process of *healing* rather than, say, revolution. The rhetoric of the operating theatre demands not that South Africa change fundamentally, but rather that it reconstitute and relegitimize those elements of its essential self, of its collective national body, that were wounded by apartheid. Such rhetoric assumes that there exists some essential national self. The rhetoric of the transition toes the line of a truly critical or revolutionary understanding of the South African nation and its history. The Zapiro cartoons which applaud the TRC's model of transition the most, such as the one featuring Dullah Omar that opens this thesis or the one featuring Tutu's "operating theatre," imply that the secrets of "SA's Past" or the "festering wounds" of South Africa's giant body run only as deep as apartheid. Yet, the divide between white and black in South Africa, and indeed all around the world, extend back through half a millenia of colonialism.

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin introduce the essays on nationalism in *The Postcolonial Reader* by stating that "one of the strongest foci for resistance to imperial control in colonial societies has been the idea of 'nation' [...] which has enabled postcolonial

societies to invent a self-image through which they could act to liberate themselves from imperialist oppression." On the contrary, Lewis Nkosi argues that the issue at the heart of Mandela's South African "miracle" is not that apartheid tarnished the legitimacy of the South African state, but rather that the South African state, and indeed the South African nation, is inherently illegitimate as a "modern bourgeois state, which now seeks to 'educe a moment of identity out of the disparate populations and individuals that constitute the people" (Nkosi 130; quoting Lloyd). In other words, the national narratives of "Madiba Magic," the "rainbow nation," the "new South Africa," the "new dispensation," and so on, fail to address the concrete problem of communal disunity stemming from deep-set colonial capitalist hierarchies. The aim of the state is to produce the people discursively, yet the discursive "production" that Balibar describes often does little to actually unify communities whose grievances extend through centuries of colonialism. Popescu puts it succinctly:

> While it is obvious that South Africa has managed to accrue a stunning array of nation-building narratives over the past two centuries, the question remains whether these narratives were subnationalisms, ultimately channeled into an overarching national mythology after 1994, or whether competing nationalisms have clashed for decades and are tenuously and superficially being brought together in narratives that legitimize an inclusive post-apartheid polity. ("War Room" 192)

Perhaps the fact that South Africa produced such a "stunning array of nation-building narratives" is evidence of the difficulties of consolidating a singular sense of national identity in postcolonial spaces. Popescu suggests that, whether or not successfully, the ANC aimed to bundle together this conflictory set of communal narratives in the moment of transition. Such bundling, however,

inevitably leaves out the narratives of marginalized groups. It is, after all, the business of nationalism to perform selective forgetting.

In this light, Antjie Krog's appeals to universalist humanism and her desire to heal the national body appear naive if not disingenuous. Consider her account of singing the anthem in the aftermath of the Lekotse hearing, held in the rural, conservative, Afrikaner-majority town of Ladybrand in the Free State:

> The proceedings are concluded with the anthem. I stand, caught unaware by the Sesotho version and the knowledge that I am white, that I have to reacquaint myself with this land, that my language carries violence as a voice, that I can do nothing about it, that after so many years I still feel uneasy with what is mine, with what is me. The woman next to me looks surprised when I sing the Free State version of "Nkosi." She smiles, holds her head close to mine, and shifts to the alto part. The song leader opens the melody to us. The sopranos envelop; the bass voices support. And I wonder: God. Does He hear us? Does He know what our hearts are yearning for? That we all just want to be human – some with more color, some with less, but all with air and sun. (285)

Having grown up in the Free State in Kroonstad, a similarly conservative town to Ladybrand, Krog feels particularly guilty in this setting. The melding of Sesotho and Free State versions of South Africa's new national anthem, "Nkosi Sikelel iAfrika," thus provide her a particularly powerful sense of emancipation here. Standing together in a bigoted town singing songs of unification: an undoubtedly beautiful moment, but one with echoes of U.S.A.[30] for Africa's famous charity single from 1985, "We Are the World." While moving, such gestures of

[30] United Support of Artists, not United States of America, though it is difficult to believe that the ambiguity was not intended.

"we-are-all-human" unity tend to ring hollow where the concrete reality of race-based inequality and exploitation continues to benefit wealthy white people at the expense of the black majority's suffering. As Shane Graham puts it, the brutal history of South Africa "bears witness not to any straightforward, cogent sense of collective identity, but to a pervasive sensation of loss, dispossession, and bewilderment" (29). Unity, like the nation itself, had to be imagined, and the dissonance between the imagined world and the real one threatens to alienate our ideals and our actions, our theory and our praxis.

TRC Special Report's was not guiltless in this sense. Its coverage of the live hearings employs filmic techniques common to courtroom (and medical) dramas: frenetic shot-reverse-shot sequences between the speaking members of the Commission and those testifying build suspense and a sense of dramatic conflict; stationary long takes of testifying victims constitute tableaus, transfixing the viewer upon the tragic image. Such formal techniques blur the boundaries between the "real" TRC and the TRC as it was imagined in popular consciousness. The distinction here between fiction and nonfiction corresponds to the distinction between the real and imagined community: we may presume that the basis of the nation is some solid community based on ethnic, religious, or kinship ties, but ultimately the distinction between those actual communities and the "peoples" they produce becomes difficult to define (Balibar 95). Recall that *Special Report* staged, at several points, "scenes of reconciliation" which Krog, during her tenure as lead SABC radio reporter, rebuked. It was this dramatic potential of the live HRVC hearings, televised in documentary form, that defined its ability to weave narratives about national transition. Cole reports that "three leading authors of the Commission's summary report – Janet Cherry, John Daniel, and Madeline Fullard – admit that broadcasting the story of a single

victim on television 'had more impact upon national consciousness than any number of volumes of the [final] report' (94). The affective capacities of the camera – beaming the tortured faces, the wails, the tears, and voices of the TRC testimonies directly into living spaces of ordinary South Africans – captivated audiences. The *Special Report* dedicated an equal amount of time to the TRC's "narrative" and "social" forms to truth as it did to producing its own "forensic truth" through original investigative journalism.

Ultimately, the struggle between narratives of national unity and the concrete reality defined by disunity and communal tension refers back to the fundamental structure of the nation as an imagined entity. By necessity, there are gaps between the (relatively) simple narratives which bind people into communities and the complex realities of communal groups. Selective forgetting – citation, curation, and collage – defines the relationship between the thing and the story about the thing. In pushing its narratives of unity, the ANC risked falling into the same pattern of state-defined nationality that Graham reminds us the NP and colonial authority had practiced when they "refused to accept the ephemerality of collective or national memory, and instead tried tirelessly to impose their own narratives onto the landscapes and people around them" (5). I do not suggest this to morally equate the ANC and the NP, but only to argue that the TRC, with its objective to impose a narrative of national healing, carried out a nation-building function of the state which threatened to leave marginalized communities behind, vulnerable to exploitation in the future.

Though it too dabbled in staging emotional scenes of reconciliation and healing, the sober, "father tongue" approach of *TRC Special Report* was ultimately its dominant mode. Here, the advantages of sobriety over the intimate, embodied reckonings presented by Krog in *Country*

of My Skull are clear. Du Preez opens the final episode (episode 87, aired on 29 March 1998) with a cautiously evaluative tone: "We are going to look back over the two years in this program, and we're asking Archbishop Desmond Tutu to reflect on the process. We also ask the question, 'have we begun to create a new moral order in South Africa'" (SAHA, *Episodes* 87)? Notice the difference between Krog's intensity and the measured, even meek demeanor of Du Preez. Though the discourses of "healing" and "putting the past behind us" appear throughout *Special Report*'s two-year run, reappearing forcefully during the interview with Tutu at the end of episode 87, the absence of a focalizing authorial narrator allows the television program to avoid the embodied experiences of guilt and jubilation. *Special Report* excels, even during its own sentimental moments (the final episode is also a recap of show's entire two year run), at the distancing gesture that Le Guin lauds the "father tongue" for: its ability to create "a gap, a space, between the subject or self and the object or other" (Le Guin 152). Whereas Krog's text, presented as a personal journey, uses the moment of singing in unity as the climax of its narrative arc, *Special Report* ends by questioning if the healing has even begun. Even if it was unable to critique the South African transition at a fundamental level, the SABC's flagship documentary series managed to remain a dispassionate messenger of the TRC.

This is not to say that *Special Report* was perfectly objective; the series was, ultimately, a mouthpiece in favor of the transition toward (neo)liberal democracy. As the SABC's main television coverage of the TRC, *Special Report* bore the weight of visually representing the new nation to the population of South Africa, and, indeed, the world, at a moment when Francis Fukuyama revelled in the supposed "end of history." Cole's suggestion that, for the larger national and ultimately international audience, television coverage *was* the commission places a

huge responsibility upon the head of Max du Preez (94). With the socialist option gone and the ANC newly committed to the international economy (just years earlier, it would have been unthinkable for Mandela to have courted foreign investment, yet in 1994 it became a motto), *Special Report* toed the line.

Today, the *Special Report* exists entirely online. As archival resources go, the South African History Archive has made TRC documents, including the documentary series, as accessible as possible. Every episode has been uploaded to YouTube and compiled into a convenient playlist by SAHA. They are also available through the SAHA's website along with every volume of the final report, every publically available live hearing transcript, and several more resources. Every episode has thousands of views, with some important episodes such as the special hour-long piece on Winnie's hearing breaching the tens of thousands. The continued popularity and accessibility of the series demonstrates the massive sway that visual culture had and has over the interpretation of the TRC's activities, and, indeed, over the transition as a whole.

In the introduction to his seminal book on documentary, *Blurred Boundaries*, Bill Nichols discusses the slippage between fiction and nonfiction in representations of history:

> Stories offer structure; they organize and order the flux of events; they confer meaning and value. But stories are not a phenomenon occurring naturally. They are themselves a product of history and culture. When stories set out to represent the world around us, they enter into the realm of those blurred genres like historiography and documentary that use imaginative techniques to tell the tale of actual occurrences. The occurrence does not announce its own beginning or end, its predecessors or consequences, its implications or

> significance. Only those who look back upon it can provide such things, and, inevitably, more than one tale can be told for any one occurrence. (ix)

These general observations on the nature of narrative apply equally well to all three of the "narrators" discussed in this chapter – *TRC Special Report*, *Country of My Skull*, and, of course, the TRC itself. In the end, all three were elements of a national transition that demanded the creation of new national narratives. The Commission provided thousands of individual trauma narratives, attempting to weave them into a collective story of apartheid atrocity. Antjie Krog provided an individual testimony of the TRC process itself, linking her own bodily identity crisis to those traumas being narrated all around her and attempting to find some unity between herself and those who she desired to see as fellow South Africans. On the surface, Max du Preez's *TRC Special Report* was a neutral, invisible medium through which Desmond Tutu's dramatic operating theatre was beamed into houses. Underneath, however, *Special Report* was doing its own operating: the SABC, which had been known only as a propaganda wing of the apartheid government for fifty years, had to delve into its "festering wounds." In several episodes, the *Report* aired footage originally broadcast by the SABC during apartheid in order to correct the record and explicitly distance itself from the past. "The very airing on the 'new' SABC of archival footage shot by the 'old,' apartheid-era SABC in a new critical context" Cole suggests, "performed transformation [...] transformation of civil society, of public discourse, of the role of journalism in the old and new state (100). The *Special Report* may have steered clear of the unifying Christian and ubuntu rhetoric deployed by commissioners and Krog, but it nevertheless attempted to legitimize itself in terms of a break from the past. It offered a narrative of its own

development as a corollary for the narrative of the nation's development and the people's development.

Such narratives offer structure. They organize the past, and thus attempt to organize the present and the future. To memorialize is necessarily to narrate and rationalize, to "shape and pattern" the chaos of lived experience into a knowable whole (Summa-Knoop 6). We come to know ourselves and, indeed, create ourselves in the act of narrating our lives. Narration is a curation of the self, a selection of which elements to build identity with. Whether or not we agree with Wilson in deriding the idea of a national psychology, national narratives work the same way as personal ones: they necessitate an ordering of the past into a "autobiographical self" (Coullie 5) which explains and legitimizes the nation's present condition and projects its future success. We were meant to end up here, says narrative, and the future waits to be told.

Conclusion

This thesis emerged from a fascination with stories. How do the stories we tell define us? How do the conditions of the telling – its social, cultural, and political environments or its formal structures such as medium and genre – influence the way we receive them? And what is "us"? Whereas the autobiography has been traditionally understood as a method of self-creation through self-narration, our contemporary forms of mass-media and popular literature can be understood as creating communities through narration. Some events we chose to enshrine in public monuments, documentary reels, or memoir pages, while others we conveniently forget or misremember. Our desire to heal the wounds of the past butts up against a complicated dilemma: what we omit from public memory may return to haunt us, yet to publicly remember may render illegitimate the structures – be they governmental, sociocultural, or economic – that keep us grounded in a solid identity. My choice to focus on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was not random. There is, perhaps, no historical event in recent memory more relevant to such theoretical questions. In the transition from apartheid to democracy, Tutu, Mandela, Boraine, Ntsebeza, Krog, Du Preez, and the South African public that they performed for, encountered each of these dilemmas head-on.

The case of South Africa is unique in the history of Truth Commissions because of its intense focus on making hearings public. Indeed, the Commission was committed to integrating itself into public life as a process of communal reckoning rather than an apparatus simply intended for successful state transition. In doing so, figures such as Krog and Du Preez became as integral to the Commission's mission as Tutu himself: they were the town criers who

announced to the public the results of Amnesty Hearings and re-played for them the intense emotions of victim, witness, and perpetrator testimonies. They provided discursive spaces in which ordinary South Africans, beneficiaries and survivors alike, could congregate and reckon with their past. The intimacy with which Krog presents her most problematic feelings and dissects her own guilt allowed and continues to allow white South Africans, and indeed the white beneficiaries of colonialism around the world, to reflect on their subtle involvement in racist structures. The sober distance with which Du Preez presents the SABC's documentary findings allowed and continues to allow the masses to experience the Commission. It replicated the Commission, both making its own historical discoveries and dramatic moments and editing the discoveries and dramas of the TRC itself.

These public media events were central stages for the drama of national transition. Through them, twenty years after the Truth Commission, we glimpse South Africa's past and its present, a present which has not fulfilled the lofty goals of Tutu and Mandela. We also glimpse a moment in world history defined by the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and with it the elimination of the socialist alternative for South Africa. One cannot help but wonder what the country would look like today had the ANC's socialist constitution been put in place rather than the neoliberal, though admittedly progressive, one that stuck. How would the rhetoric of the "rainbow nation" differed had the regime change been harsher toward perpetrators and beneficiaries? Within the last few months, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), a minority leftist party, have successfully pushed through legislation in favor of uncompensated land reform. The decision has been met with jubilation from the left and ire from moderates and right-wingers. How would such socialist revolutionary policies been applied differently had

South Africa's transition to democracy also been a transition to a more egalitarian economic system? The rhetoric of healing the wounded national body, coupled with the dominance of human rights and constitutionalist discourse employed throughout TRC, reveals the extent of the concessions made to neoliberalism during the transition. If we have forgotten the extent of South Africa's colonial past in our jubilation over the "miracle" of democratic transition, we might explore the roots of that jubilation in media coverage and memorial literature which marked that breathless moment.

TRC Special Report and *Country of My Skull* exist on the bridge between politics and art, between the personal account and the national narrative, between that which is decided in the back rooms of government buildings and that which is negotiated in the living rooms and courtyards of regular people. Each mediated and remediated the narratives of apartheid and the commission in their own ways, and each encounters complex ethical questions in doing so. Ultimately, these forms of retrospective art are the most concrete and popular memorializations of history. In order to understand histories of great importance – of individual trauma, of national division and transition, of the relationship between the state and the nation at crucial moments in their developments, of trajectories in global geopolitics – we must understand that which mediates them to us.

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