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“Trauma and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel”

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A critical reading of Troy Blacklaws’ *Karoo Boy*, Susan Mann’s *One Tongue Singing*, Rachel Zadok’s *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* and Sindiwe Magona’s *Mother to Mother*

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1. Introduction

Since the earliest recordings of human history, narrative accounts have been filled with descriptions of war, cruelties and other extremes of violence. Although history should have taught creation's crowning glory a different lesson, inhumanity and cruelty have not vanished from our planet. Many parts of the world are still scenes of human suppression, fear and death. The consequences of these atrocious acts against humanity leave victims deeply wounded both in their minds and souls.

Just like the Cape of Good Hope divides the oceans, South Africa was split for more than half a century into a ruling class of oppressors and those who could not escape their destiny. In the course of their struggle for freedom and equal rights, thousands were confronted with horror and terror they might never forget. Under the totalitarian reign of the Apartheid regime the black and colored population suffered from indescribable humiliation: they were treated like cattle, dislodged from their homeland and deprived of every right. Those who stood up against the regime to fight for equal rights were arrested, tortured or killed. For more than forty years South Africa was the scene of a brutal civil war for equality in every sense, but finally, it was justice to bear the palm.

In the aftermath of Apartheid the whole country seeks a way out of its shady past by trying to come to terms with history's legacy. An attempt to do so was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). It should track down those who were to blame for barbarous and inhumane acts. Unfortunately, the Commission only partially met people's expectations, leaving many questions unanswered and thousands of crimes unpunished.

Apart from this way to cope with days gone by, another one emerged by the production of literature. In recent years, South African literature has increased immensely, raising many issues dealing with the country's yesterdays. During the Apartheid era, a great deal of literature was produced by exiles who had to flee the country. After the fall of the regime and the first free elections held in 1995, many of these persecuted novelists managed to

return to their home country, devoting their work to the nation's healing by the creation of new narratives.

This paper examines the works of four South African novelists and their attempt to come to terms with the nation's collective trauma. Since every author employs different ways and techniques to illustrate the people's collective as well as individual people's traumatic memories, this thesis focuses on ways and possibilities of trauma treatment in and by literary narratives.

To provide a basic knowledge of the term trauma, the thesis opens with a brief history on trauma studies, followed by an attempt to define this term and the consequences for those suffering from it. Since Sigmund Freud figures prominently in the development of trauma studies, special emphasis is laid on his work that has revolutionized the modern understanding of trauma and neurosis in general. Furthermore, attention is paid to the importance and possibilities of literary narratives as a cure for traumatized people. After this side trip into the fields of medicine, sociology and psychology, trauma theory is applied to the works of important representatives of contemporary South African literature, highlighting the healing qualities of literature. Therefore, the following novels are closely analyzed: *Karoo Boy* by Troy Blacklaws, *One Tongue Singing* by Susan Mann, *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* by Rachel Zadok, and finally *Mother to Mother* by Sindiwe Magona.

2. Trauma – conception and definition

2.1 South Africa: a nation traumatized

The history of South Africa poses a challenging legacy to its people. Although the physical atrocities caused by the Apartheid war have ended, the nation as a whole still suffers from the remnants of the past. With the final report of the TRC in 1998, officials hoped the time of peace and brotherhood had finally come. In the opinion of many Africans the commission failed to meet its goal, leaving thousands of war crimes unpunished. Yet, one should bear in mind that the primary target of the TRC was not the punishment of people (as long as the crimes were motivated politically), but the intention to make those hushed atrocities publicly known. As the Commission's name suggests, its purpose was to reconcile the people, rather than sowing seeds of discord. The work of the TRC was widely considered as successful. Out of a total of 7.112 petitioners, amnesty was refused to 5.392 and granted to 849 persons. Besides the people favoring the Commission's work, it met a lot of criticism since

[...] most felt the TRC had failed to achieve reconciliation between the black and white communities. Most felt that justice was a prerequisite for reconciliation rather than an alternative to it, and that the TRC had been weighted in favour of the perpetrators of abuse.¹

Unfortunately, the Commission's attempt to reconcile the nation failed in many respects. Not only did it reopen old wounds, but the scars that decades of suffering had left, still seem to be insurmountable.²

In the context of trauma, the TRC's mission was of great importance to heal the nation's collective trauma. The attempt to reach closure of this dark chapter was a major step to make the crying voices of South Africa heard. In his book *Narrating our Healing*, Professor Chris N van der Merwe from the University of Cape Town, states that these voices pose a major task to all of us, since it is only us who can "hear and [...] tell the stories of those unheard, [and] give a voice to those who have been silenced" (47). In this respect,

¹ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth_and_Reconciliation_Commission_\(South_Africa\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth_and_Reconciliation_Commission_(South_Africa)) (21.5.2008).

² For further discussion see Stachelberger, 16ff.

literary narratives play a major role in the country's healing process since they lend weight to the voices yet unheard. "The role of South Africa's literature has changed from one of protest to one of reconstruction and it suggests hope of a better tomorrow." (Stachelberger, 20)

2.2 The History of Trauma Research

³The earliest records dealing with traumatic neurosis date back to the mid 19th century. Scientific research had its start with the growing number of train accidents as well as the exploration of hysteria in Paris at the end of the century. The British physician John Erichsen was the first to detect and work on traumatic symptoms. In the 1860s, he identified trauma syndromes in people who had gone through railway accidents. According to Erichsen's examination he attributed the victim's distress "to shock or concussion of the spine." (Leys, 3) From today's state of knowledge we know that Erichsen blamed wrong physical entities for trauma. It was the Berlin neurologist Paul Oppenheimer who first stated that traumatic experiences emerge from different physical entities. In the following, he named it "traumatic neurosis" and "ascribed the symptoms to undetectable organic changes in the brain." (Leys, 3) After these two approaches in the field of trauma, interest was on a decline. Just before the turn of the century, scientists and psychologists embarked again on trauma studies and added the psychological element it was lacking by then. Trauma, deriving from Greek meaning *wound*, originally referred to an injury inflicted on the body. In its later psychological definition, and above all, in the understanding of Freud, it referred to a wound not inflicted on the body but to the mind. As the most prominent scientists in this field we have to mention J. M. Charcot, Pierre Janet, Alfred Binet, Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud⁴. With these great representatives of psychology and medicine, the traumatic neurosis was finally granted to be caused by activities in the brain, especially by memories, and not by physical harm.⁵ The most common mode of treatment was hypnosis. It was respected as the most suitable mode for "retrieving the forgotten, dissociated, or repressed

³ For a detailed historic analysis see Van der Kolk et al., 71 – 93.

⁴ See Leys 3f.

⁵ Of course physical harm may lead to traumatic neuroses as a consequence; here, the stress lays on the fact that trauma is urged by activities in the psyche, and not by physical ones as scientists believed by then.

recollections [...] into consciousness and language” (Leys, 4). Later on hypnotism was rejected as therapy (especially by Freud).⁶

In the last decade of the 19th century, Freud developed his famous seduction theory. He claimed that unconsciously repressed memories, “[...] especially [of] sexual seduction or assault”, trigger off forms of hysteria (Leys, 4). His revolutionary view was widely criticized and heavily discussed. In 1897 he abandoned his seduction theory, embarking on “the effects of repressed erotic infantile wishes and fantasies” (Leys, 4). After this early research on hysteria and traumatic neurosis interest in the field declined until World War I. Thousands of soldiers suffering from ‘war neuroses’ led to a renaissance of trauma studies. Although these war neuroses were termed ‘shell shock’, similarities to traumatic neuroses were ostensible. Trying to find a way of treatment, medics turned to the early work of Freud and Breuer, dealing with ideas and concepts about the unconscious as well as dissociation. As a result, the Freud-Breuer Cathartic method was used as the most appropriate mode of treatment.⁷

After the war, trauma research once more declined. Not even World War II with its millions of shell-shocked people and survivors of the Holocaust could arouse peculiar interest in this scientific field. It was not until the Vietnam war when, after a long political struggle fought by psychiatrists, social workers, activists and Vietnam veterans, the American Psychiatric Association officially acknowledged in its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (1980) that long diagnosed, but seemingly forgotten illness under the term “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder”⁸, short PTSD. In its basic definition PTSD describes “[...] a disorder of memory [...]” (Leys, 2)

⁶ Freud had to observe that there were patients who could not be hypnotized, which he regarded as a willing refusal to hypnosis. Therefore he claimed that this must be taken into account since hypnosis conceals this refusal, or Freud rejected hypnosis as treatment due to the effects of resistance. Primarily he used hypnosis to extend the patient’s mind in order to retrieve those memories that are not stored in the normal consciousness. However, resistance as he called it, restricts the medicine’s insight into the patient’s psyche. Hypnosis does not remove or overcome this resistance but evades it, leading to wrong diagnosis.

⁷ The method consists of securing the cooperation of the patients, causing them to describe in great detail the incident of their lives, with special reference to the origin of their abnormal condition. Freud’s idea is that these emotional inhibitions are harmful, and, that the free expression of the repressed feelings exerts a sort of “cathartic” effect upon the mind removing the cause of the disorder. For a detailed discussion see: <http://www.meridianinstitute.com/eamt/files/burns3/bur3ch14.html> (18.6.2008).

⁸ [German] PTSS – Post Traumatisches Stress Syndrom.

being modeled on a “[...] physiologicalcausal theory of shock” (Leys, 19). As we shall find out in the latter, Freud’s understanding of trauma was a quite different one.⁹

Since the 1990s, the concept of trauma underwent a growing field of application. As Martina Kopf¹⁰ lines out, this may be due to the growing awareness of inter-human violence in our globalized world, as well as the growth of interest in how it works. The war in former Yugoslavia, genocide in Ruanda, never-ending civil wars on the African continent, the wars in Iraq, the conflict in Sri Lanka¹¹, terror assaults around the globe; the list is endless. The only thing for sure is that “Gewalt überschreitet nationale, kulturelle, soziale und historische Grenzen.” (Kopf, 16)¹² Fortunately, the never ending violence is accompanied by growing awareness of it around the world as well as efforts to end the conflicts.¹³

2.3 The legacy of Sigmund Freud

At the turn of the 19th century, Freud confronted the world with a series of hypotheses and revolutionary views and beliefs that were to change the field of psychiatry sustainably. Besides his *Theory of Seduction*, the *Pleasure Principle* and later *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, *Totem and Taboo*, *Moses and Monotheism* (covering the exploration of the unconscious), his revolutionary research on the nature of dreams, theories on neurosis and hysteria, research on the effects of sexual childhood experiences or even the development of psychoanalysis as such¹⁴, Freud turns out to be of highest importance to this thesis since he was the first to postulate a coherent theory of trauma. Therefore, he “[...] is a founding figure in the history of the conceptualization of trauma” (Leys, 18).

⁹ Following the ideas of Charcot, Freud stated that trauma, belonging to the field of neurosis, is merely caused by psychological than physiological attributes. Furthermore, he added to the development of traumatic neuroses a post-traumatic incubation period, called “latency”, of psychic elaboration. Compare Leys, 19f.

¹⁰ See Kopf, 16f.

¹¹ Fortunately, one of the few conflicts that has ended in 2009.

¹² Violence crosses national, cultural, social as well as historical boundaries. [my translation]

¹³ For example the foundation of the United Nations, the declaration of international human rights or the conviction of crimes against humanity and genocide.

¹⁴ For more details on the work of Freud see Bally (1961).

Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer in Austria, as well as Pierre Janet in France, were the leading figures in the field of traumatic neurosis. They embarked on the exploration of hysteria and, as a consequence, the exploration of the human consciousness. Janet and Freud both had gone through the school of Jean-Martin Charcot who then was the head of the Salpêtrière, a public hospital in Paris. In the course of time, the Salpêtrière advanced to be the centre of the exploration of hysteria. Charcot was the first scientist to ascribe the reasons of hysteria (or neurosis) to an illness of the human soul. While he spent his time on the classification of the various symptoms of hysteria, Freud and Janet concentrated on ways of treatment. In the following, they discovered the importance of the therapeutic dialogue as a means to reconstruct repressed memories of the patients, a treatment that still today is most important. As a consequence of their work, they found out that psychic traumas lie at the heart of hysteric symptoms and, moreover, the traumatic neurosis can most often be traced back to childhood. As a result, Freud published the *Aetiology of Hysteria* in 1896, promoting his seduction theory.¹⁵ In his early claim Freud stated that trauma consists of two scenes: one that is settled in childhood, having sexual content but no meaning, while the other scene is situated later, after puberty, having no sexual content but sexual meaning.¹⁶ Freud believed that trauma is not primarily caused by dissociated memories of childhood trauma itself, but rather by aggressive and sexual desires of the child that influence and threaten the ego. The vast rejection of Freud's hypothesis by other scientists as well as his theory's later retraction (due to doubts about the credibility of patient's stories), won his theory fame.¹⁷ From now on, Freud argued that patients' difficulties to remember events are not caused by an inability to integrate new experiences into pre-existing schemes, but rather by active repression of sexual and aggressive memories arising in the oedipal age of about 5 years.¹⁸

¹⁵ Freud's seduction theory basically states that the neurosis emerges due to experiences in the course of the child's sexual development (for further discussion see Kopf, 8f. or Bally 152ff.).

¹⁶ Cf. Caruth 1995, 9.

¹⁷ See Kopf, 7f.; in his later study *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud thought that trauma originates after a period he termed "latency", pathologically a kind of incubation period.

¹⁸ See Alexander et al., 79.

After Freud's oedipal-constituted explanation of trauma he extended his views. Having observed many cases of war neurosis, he argued that traumatic symptoms may be triggered by mechanisms of resistance. The repetition of the specific memory is caused by functions to repress it. Since the memory is repressed, the patient is urged to repeat the repressed as a present memory instead of remembering it as a past memory. Therefore, Freud observed that in cases of traumatic neurosis, there is a fixation to the moment lying at the heart of a traumatizing situation.¹⁹ In *Moses and Monotheism*, he used the example of an accident, specifically that of a train accident to define traumatic experience.²⁰ In his hypothesis Freud focused on the novel fact of an incubation period, or latency, that is in between the triggering event and the outbreak of the first symptoms. He gave the examples of persons who, having experienced an accident, got away from the scene without any harm. Then, days, weeks, months or even years later, memories of the event started to haunt the person leading to motoric or psychic symptoms. Indeed, the symptoms were due to an experience of shock that must have occurred at the time of the accident. As a consequence, the person has developed a traumatic neurosis. Freud mentioned the example to stress the curious phenomenon of unconsciously repressed and returning memories:

[...] the central enigma revealed by Freud's example, is not so much the act of forgetting that occurs after the accident, but rather the fact that the victim of the crash was never fully conscious during the accident itself. The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself. The [...] power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all. (Caruth 1996, 17)

Caruth explains further, that the example of the train accident is "[...] the exemplary scene of trauma *par excellence*" (1996, 6). It depicts a traumatizing shock triggered off by a violent occurrence. It tells of the nature of trauma that can not be found, or experienced, in what a person knows,

¹⁹ Compare Alexander et al. 80f.

²⁰ See Caruth 1996, 16f.

but rather, by experiences someone can neither grasp nor understand. It is the incomprehensibility of events that urge our mind to repress certain memories unconsciously: "What returns to haunt the victim, [...], is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known" (1996, 6).

Notwithstanding the first published theory of Freud, the most important discovery concerning traumatic neurosis was that trauma is not caused by a single physical harm, but merely horrible, terrifying encounters. Consequently, not the event's occurrence is decisive, but the experience itself. In contrast to normal memories which can easily be processed, traumatic memories do not share this quality. They, as Freud commented, lie at the heart of hysteria and are made up of memories which have not been processed or "abreagiert" (Bally, 22ff.) properly. In this respect, Freud for the first time added the existence of the sub-consciousness to his theory. He claimed that traumatic memories are not to be found in the patient's *normal* consciousness, or mind, but only in the hypnotized consciousness. Freud did not yet explicitly use the term of the sub-consciousness, but he was well aware that something similar exists.

At the turn of the century the interest in trauma studies was on a decline and regained interest by the treatment of shell-shocked soldiers of World War I. Following his early conceptions of traumatic neurosis due to libidinal experience, Freud had to apply his theory to these war neuroses. After treating several patients he came to observe, or rather suggest, that war neuroses were caused by a conflict within the soldier, specifically between his "old peace-loving ego [...]" and his new war-loving ego" (Leys, 22). Freud defined these egos either sexually or libidinally charged. Therefore, he claimed that these neuroses were caused by regressions of earlier stages of libidinal development. In the following, he worked on this theory, adding to it his newly developed theory of the death drive, or 'thanatos' (1916). Already back then, Freud thought that the term 'traumatic' was used in a rather economic way since it described an experience "[...] which within a short period of time presents the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to

be dealt with or worked off [...].”²¹ It is exactly the problem of repetition that concerned Freud in this respect. Freud states that the primary purpose of dreams is to fulfill pleasures and inner-most desires. Yet, traumatic memories surely do not consist of memories or desires that someone wants to dream of.²² As a result he embarked on *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), acknowledging a ‘beyond’ of pleasure, or death drive, working counter to the pleasure principle. Freud postulated the existence of a ‘stimulus barrier’ that should protect the organism from stimuli that may harm it, or as Leys has put it, “that threaten[ed] to destroy the psychic organization” (Leys, 23). As a consequence, trauma was defined as a “[...] rupture or breach in the ego’s protective shield [...]” which in other words can be defined as “[...] mimetic or imitative identification” (Leys, 33). As with many of Freud’s theories, Leys stresses the fact that “[...] everything he [Freud] wrote about the ego’s defenses in the traumatic neuroses of war was marked by hesitation and contradiction” (25). Especially concerning reasons and definitions of traumatic neurosis, Freud’s point of view remained highly ambiguous, not sure which of his theories were the most appropriate ones.²³

The work of Freud, especially the attempt to analyze it and bring it to a focal point, has been the subject of countless works by now. This is not only due to the fact that Freud’s researches are of highest complexity, but the result of claimed theories, their recall, revised theories etc. as well. In many respects, Freud’s work proves to be highly ambiguous, leaving scientists and psychologists leading hot debates until today.²⁴ In order to briefly summarize, as far as this is possible, Freud’s basic views on trauma, the words of Caruth will provide more insight:

Throughout his work, Freud suggests two models of trauma that are often placed side by side; the model of castration trauma, which I associated with the theory of repression and the return of the repressed as well as with a system of unconscious symbolic meanings [...]; and the model of traumatic neurosis [...] which is associated with accident victims and war veterans [...] and emerges within psychoanalytic theory [...] and is linked, not to

²¹ Freud, 1915-17 quoted in Leys, 23.

²² For further discussion see Leys, 24.

²³ See Leys, 277ff.

²⁴ Compare Leys, 298ff.

repression, unconsciousness or symbolization, but rather to a temporal delay, repetition and literal return. Freud generally placed his examples side by side ... and admitted ... that he was not sure how to integrate the two. (1995, 135)

2.3.1 The healing power of words

While today's psychiatric modes of treatment are manifold, ranging from artistic methods to chemical ones, it was Freud who first noticed the importance of the dialogue as a healing method. Since Freud distanced himself from hypnosis (in its common usage) as the appropriate treatment for forms of hysteria, neuroses or trauma, he believed that patients could only be healed by recapitulating and remembering their memories.²⁵ Due to the work with patients he observed that:

[...] die einzelnen hysterischen Symptome sogleich und ohne Wiederkehr verschwanden, wenn es gelungen war, die Erinnerung an den veranlassenden Vorgang zu voller Helligkeit zu erwecken, damit auch *den begleitenden Affekt wachzurufen*, und wenn dann der Kranke den Vorgang in möglichst ausführlicher Weise schilderte und *dem Affekt Worte gab*. (Freud quoted in Bally, 17) [emphasis added]²⁶

In this process, it is most important to connect the affect with the patient's narration. A therapeutic dialogue that does not focus on this circumstance would not heal the victim's suffering since the psychological process causing the neurosis needs to be relived as authentic as possible. Indeed, this process is a very painful one for the patient, but in most cases the symptoms would vanish forever. Furthermore, Freud stresses the different qualities of narrated experiences, which only then have a healing potential if the experience is narrated as vividly as possible. Freud regards the dialogue as treatment as the most appropriate one. The experience that is tied to the affect is voiced, and language, as he believed, is the adequate means of utterance of the conscience.²⁷

²⁵ Freud's reasons for rejecting hypnosis see p. 4.

²⁶ [...] that the single hysteric symptoms had vanished all of a sudden and for good, if we were able to fully enlighten the memories of the triggering event, hence to give rise to the accompanying affect after the patient had told the event in every detail, finding words for the emotion. [my translation].

²⁷ Compare Bally, 17f.

When we talk about Freud and his use of hypnosis, one fact revolutionizing its usage needs to be stressed. In the understanding of Freud, hypnosis was not something he used to force his will upon the patient (as many other medics did). Freud merely used hypnosis to get access to deeply concealed memories in the mind of his patients. In this state of hypnosis, they were advised to utter everything that came to their mind. After the patients had been awoken, they were confronted with the memories they had told under hypnosis. Freud and Breuer observed that confronting the patients with their 'hidden' memories relieved them from their pain. Hence, Freud had discovered the healing potential of narration. However, the unreliability and uncertainty of Freud's early studies led him to abandon influencing patients by suggestion and hypnosis. Rather, he wanted the patient to be awake and to become an equal part in the therapeutic conversation that should take place within a relaxed and open-minded atmosphere. By doing so, Freud had developed the pioneering therapeutic technique of free association.

Er behandelt ... seine Kranken, indem er sie ohne anderweitige Beeinflussung eine bequeme Rückenlage auf einem Ruhebett einnehmen lässt [...]. Eine solche Sitzung verläuft also wie ein Gespräch zwischen zwei gleich wachen Personen, von denen eine sich [...] jeden ablenkenden Sinneseindruck erspart die sie in der Konzentration ihrer Aufmerksamkeit auf ihre eigene seelische Tätigkeit stören könnte. (Bally, 216)²⁸

Since Freud abandoned total hypnosis, he had to replace this gap in order to add a therapeutic effect to his treatment. He quickly found a substitute in the utterances of his patients, more specifically, in those that seemingly came up as disturbing and senseless. Freud advised his patients to tell everything that came to their minds, even the most unimportant detail. He wanted to get access to his patient's memories, no matter if these shared shameful, embarrassing or even humiliating qualities. At this point he made a most important observation that had decisive influence on his work: he noticed that the narrations of his patients contained gaps or distortions in their

²⁸ He treats his patients after advising them to accommodate themselves comfortably backwards on a couch, hence creating an undisturbed and relaxed atmosphere [...]. Such a session takes the form of a normal conversation between two equally awake persons, enabling one of them to focus completely on their mental work, without any disturbances and distractions that may interfere with their concentration. [my translation]

timeline. When he asked them directly to retell the missing or wrong pieces, he was confronted with reservation and refusal. In the end, the patient was filled with uneasiness when the missing memory had come up. Freud concluded from this observation that these amnesias were due to a process he called resistance (*Widerstand*). The feelings causing this resistance were due to the fact that the patient unconsciously refused to remember certain memories. Hence, Freud observed and analyzed the first symptoms and processes leading to the repression of specific memories. In the following, Freud's work focused on many more details and other observations that unfortunately would go beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, the next chapter is based on Freud's observation, providing a basic overview of traumatic neurosis, symptoms, memories and processes.²⁹

2.4 Defining Trauma

The following chapter analyzes and defines traumatic neurosis, describing different psychical symptoms and mechanisms that trauma evokes in the human being.

Basically, the most striking feature of traumatic experience is the fact that the human mind seems to be unable to handle extreme situations. It is something human beings are not used to in their daily routine. After being confronted with traumatizing events, they appear that incomprehensible, that inconceivable and unbearable that the mind can not integrate them into its ethic value system. Traumatic experiences turn out to be too difficult to be understood by the human mind. As a consequence, they leave a rupture, a break in it that is filled with seeming emptiness, or rather distorted information.

[...] owing to the emotions of terror and surprise caused by certain events, the mind is split or dissociated: it is unable to register the wound to the psyche because the ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are destroyed. [...] the victim is unable to recollect and integrate the hurtful experience in normal consciousness; instead, she is haunted or possessed by intrusive traumatic memories. (Leys, 2)

²⁹ Compare Bally, 214ff.

Traumatic experiences create a void in the mind of the victim, consequently causing its shattering as well as that of the person's self. This break, this distortion, may further lead to "[...] the tearing apart of the integrity of the self" (van der Merwe, 25), which again affects the way the traumatic information is encoded. Traumatic memories are not encoded like normal memories: the lack of information, the inability to remember the relevant information, due to fragmented and dissociated storage in the mind, poses the cardinal problem in the treatment of traumatized people. In many situations people try to fill this gap, with acts of revenge that represent symbolic acts. To heal trauma victims means to transform these feelings and actions into something positive by integrating them into the life narrative of the person.³⁰

³¹As mentioned before, the earliest and most prominent leading figures in this uprising psychological field - Charcot, Breuer, Janet, Freud - were driven by various motives and approaching the field of neurosis from different perspectives. Yet, they shared some common and basic assumptions about the nature of trauma. For example, that all kinds of trauma may lead to "[...] psychic rupture and a fragmentation of traumatic memories in ways that resist integration and may dominate the mental life of many victims [...]" (van der Merwe, 39). The morbid character of trauma derives from the circumstance that trauma does not only cause a loss of language, but also the loss of the person's meaning of life as well as of the structure/order in it. It is a rough break, a distortion, a shattering of the governing and basic principles of life. Therefore, Janet suggested to differ between ordinary memories (or narrative memories) and traumatic ones. Narrative memories have a social function, are easily integrated in a person's mind as part of their life and can easily be narrated and told about. This fact is of highest importance to human beings since the ability to integrate our experiences, to talk about and derive meaning from them, is responsible for psychological health. Traumatic memories on the other hand are strictly "[...] inflexible and

³⁰ Van der Merwe observes the circumstance of trauma creating an abyss in the mind of the victim. The "life- narrative" that makes up every human being's life is distorted by the traumatic experience; hence, the experience can not be integrated in the life narrative and is never fully grasped (see van der Merwe, 22ff.).

³¹ See van der Merwe, 39ff.

invariable” (Caruth 1995, 163). They lack any social component, resist integration in the mind and are made up of seemingly unspeakable, untellable events our mind avoids, memories that can or do not want to be remembered:

Sie [traumatische Erinnerungen] widersetzen sich einer Integration in Sprache und Erzählung und verweisen uns an die Grenzen des Erfahr- und Mitteilbaren. [...] Jedes Bemühen nach Erzählung verweist uns auf die ursprüngliche Abwesenheit von Sprache als integralem Teil traumatischer Erfahrung, auf ein Fehlen von Worten und Bedeutung. (Kopf, 4)³²

Rather, traumatic memories come up as dreams or flashbacks, “[...] accompanied by intense emotions, vivid images, nightmares and somatic symptoms such as sweating palms” (van der Merwe, 56), as well as “emotional numbing, depression, guilt, explosive violence or tendency to hypervigilance.” (Leys, 2) Furthermore, Janet observed that traumatic memories are evoked under specific conditions that share certain qualities with the traumatic experience. Therefore he claimed that traumatic memory is caused by a process he called “restitutio ad integrum”.³³

Remembering is the only way that enables treatment and healing. As a consequence, traumatic memories must be dug out of the subconscious mind of the victim and restored in their active memory. The person must be able to integrate the trauma in their autobiography, to talk about it like any other memory, to assert some meaning to it and accept it as part of their life. “The road to the cure of trauma is one that is paved with memories that were lacking the appropriate words to narrate them.” (van der Merwe, 45) Yet, the problem is that there seems to exist no place where one could integrate and store those memories. Normal experiences, or narrative memories, can easily be integrated in the mind since they have a specific meaning that is regarded as part of one’s life narrative. “This process includes the selection

³² They [traumatic memories] resist integration by speech and narration and send us off to the limits of what can be experienced and communicated. [...] Every endeavor to narration refers to the elementary absence of language as an integral part of traumatic experience, a lack of words and meaning. [my translation].

³³ Janet, 1928 quoted in Caruth 1995, 163. [Latin] complete recovery to the original condition; in this context it refers to the circumstance that “When one element of a traumatic experience is evoked, all other elements follow automatically” (Caruth 1995, 163).

of relevant data, the construction of causal chains, [...] and the drawing of conclusions to make sense from an event [...]”.³⁴ Traumatic memories do not share these qualities at all. They are left in the brain as inconceivable events that lack the words for representation. In the worst case, they are only remembered subconsciously and triggered off by associations. “The key to psychological recovery from trauma is the assimilation of the traumatic experience into a coherently organized narrative.” (van der Merwe, 41) This process turns out to be that painful for victims since traumatic memories shatter these mental schemes.³⁵

According to this ‘failed experience’ of traumatic events, van Alphen mentions an important point concerning the traumatization of cultures as a whole: the fact that traumatic memories lack any experience and therefore do not create meaning in these mental schemes, has on the one hand consequences for individuals, but on the other hand even for societies and cultures. Failed experience may cause the effect that nation’s collective histories are distorted by the lacking memories since “[w]ithout the integration of traumatic events into cultural discourses, individuals as well as society in general stay traumatized.”³⁶

Another point worth mentioning concerns different levels of trauma.³⁷ According to van der Merwe, it is crucial to differ between historical and structural trauma. While historical trauma refers to single disastrous events, e.g. the destruction of New York’s World Trade Center or the Tsunami catastrophe in 2004, structural trauma comprises a series of, or rather repetitive traumatic events that have become the normality for its victims. In the aftermath, both kinds of trauma have different effects on their victims. Structural trauma, besides its primary pain, is harmful since the patient leaves their framework of normality, of ordinary life, whereas historical trauma “[...] causes its pain by the shattering of a protective framework that

³⁴ Wigren, 1994 quoted in van der Merwe, 56.

³⁵ Ernst van Alphen (Van Alphen, quoted in van der Merwe, 56f.) stresses the importance of humans’ mental schemes since they set up the frame into which our experiences are integrated; therefore, he regards traumatic memories as ‘failed experience’ since they can not be incorporated into pre-existing mental schemes or narratives (see van der Merwe, 56f.).

³⁶ Van Alphen, quoted in van der Merwe, 58.

³⁷ See van der Merwe, 10f.

had seemed so safe.” (11) Especially for deeply religious people who believe in the will of God, in his benevolent nature and his infallibility, such events can leave gashing wounds in a person’s soul and belief and cause severe crisis in the person’s life. In the worst case, structural trauma leaves its victim with a loss of meaning of life. Only when a person is able to fill that gap and attach some meaning to these events, they may overcome their trauma.

2.4.1 The paradox of trauma

The question to turn now to is: what happens to traumatized people who do not want to talk about their memories, their past, their experience? Under these circumstances one comes across what Judith Herman had termed “dialectic of trauma”.³⁸ On the one hand, victims try to forget the events and do not want to talk about it. On the other hand, forgetting turns out to be impossible since sooner or later the traumatic memory needs to be told and therefore erupts from the person’s mind:

Was schmerzt ist nicht *Etwas*, das nicht gesagt werden kann, sondern vielmehr dass nichts gesagt werden kann: Nicht der Schmerz ist unsagbar, sondern im Unsagbaren liegt der Schmerz. (Kopf, 26)³⁹

Narrating the experience and such giving rise to silenced voices from the past is essential to cure the trauma. The attempt to forget is understood as an act of survival since people do not want to twist the knife in their wounds. They are seemingly afraid of past events and refuse to open their minds and inner feelings (either to themselves or to other persons). The goal is to integrate these memories into their life-narrative, to translate those terrible events into narrative memories. In her book *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), Cathy Caruth states that “trauma will out” (1996, 4). Since trauma is “[...] always a story of a wound that cries out” (ibid, 4), she argues about the impossibility to suppress traumatic memories. These memories are continuously in the mind of the victim and will not vanish, not stop to haunt

³⁸ Cf. Merwe, 32f. & Kopf, 23ff.

³⁹ What aches is not something that *can not be told*, but rather that *nothing can* be told: not the pain is unspeakable but it is the *unspeakable itself* that hurts. [emphasis added], [my translation].

them until the silence is broken. Caruth's argument of an "unclaimed experience", or a "failed experience"⁴⁰, poses a challenging task to its victims. Since it is an experience that lasts on and can not be completed, it can not be forgotten as well. Traumatic experience can not be compared to a horrific situation. It is not related to an event that is completed in space and time, to something that exists, but to something that seemingly does not exist.

Another paradox situation emerges from the treatment of traumatic neurosis. Symptoms such as numbing, refusal or resistance are mechanisms that protect the most inner-self, the 'I', from the overwhelming traumatic experience and should guarantee its psychological health. Unfortunately, these protective devices constitute a barrier in the course of the healing process. The protective shield of the mind runs counter to mechanisms that try to incorporate the traumatic experience into the narrative consciousness. This self-protection mechanism of the victim, blocking memories of the experience, most often worsens the trauma. It may lead to a narrowing of the consciousness and, as a consequence, to emotional numbing or retreat from social life.⁴¹

2.5 Experiencing trauma

⁴²What happens to people who had to go through traumatic events? There are many proposals and various suggestions of the psychological effects of trauma. One thing for certain is that traumatized people have to experience an act of humiliation. The victims are totally at the mercy of their perpetrators and completely under their control. This takes away the very core of the victims and leaves them with a feeling of complete powerlessness. In the course of trauma treatment, victims are urged to repeat their trauma, enabling them to relive it from another perspective. Consequently, they face the opportunity to go through the trauma as the one who is in control, and not vice versa. "[...] it is the reclaiming of their power and the sense of

⁴⁰ Van Alphen quoted in Kopf, 25.

⁴¹ See Kopf, 28.

⁴² Cf. van der Merwe, 35f.

control that was taken away from them by the perpetrators” (van der Merwe, 35).

Van der Merwe notes an important fact concerning repetitions of traumas: he stresses the importance of finishing with the past. By remembering a personal or cultural trauma and fitting it into the lives’ narratives, people are ought to work through it and then look at it as a thing of the past. No future generations should lead conflicts and struggles for reasons that are long forgotten. “No more should we say, my forefathers fought against your forefathers [...] that’s why the anger is still there” (36). He focuses on the importance of going through trauma, working it up and transcending it to a new situation, to the present, in order to learn from it, rather than to do the same mistakes again. “[...] traumas [...] should help us find a way of remembering that does not increase the divide but bring us together” (36). The most difficult part in this process is on the victims.⁴³ As a consequence of this process, the victims must prove an inner strength to put their feelings aside to find a way of forgiveness for their perpetrators. Although they had to endure unbearable suffering they must find a way to forget their accusatory feeling and look at their enemies as human beings.⁴⁴ This process is equally important for perpetrators since the act of forgiveness of their victims enables and allows them to forget and look at themselves as human beings again. Only on this basis of humanity a peaceful common future can be built on and guaranteed:

It is critical [...] to re-find our identities of humaneness [...]. If victims continue to wear the cloak of victimhood, it closes language and dialogue; but if they shed this cloak, the door is opened for engagement with others as fellow human beings. (van der Merwe, 37)

Although this approach is remarkable, the question remains if all trauma victims can that easily forgive their perpetrators, forget what they had to endure and live together happily ever after. The case of South Africa has taught a different lesson. Indeed the nation has been ‘reconciled’, but in many cases at the expense of the victims.

⁴³ See van der Merwe, 36f.

⁴⁴ This situation is portrayed in Sindiwe Magona’s *Mother to Mother*. Compare Chapter 7.

2.6 Trauma and Narrative

Following Freud's theory, the central hypothesis in van der Merwe's book *Narrating our Healing* is that trauma and language are interrelated. The rupture that is caused by trauma reaches far down in the psyche to a level that is superior to language, a level on which language is built on and derives its meaning from.⁴⁵ Van der Merwe states that a person's search for words is an integral part of their healing process. Only by retelling their story, by reconstructing it into narrative form, the event can be integrated in the life narrative. This process of retelling the traumatic event has been termed "bearing witness" (Kopf, 26) by trauma scholars. Trauma means a loss of words; it makes it hard for the person to talk about the event. The narrative healing uses language, either spoken or written, to catch up with the past by finding new words, by expressing the past and bridge the abyss caused by the traumatic event.⁴⁶

Language offers the possibility of the transformation of trauma into narrative. The significance of narrative lies not simply in remembering trauma, but in its transformation through language. (van der Merwe, 25)

Concerning the translation, the transformation of traumatic experience into narrative form or text, Tal mentions an example from the field of linguistics, comparing and explaining it in terms of the dual semiotic and semantic functions of language: 'the sign' must be recognized while 'the discourse' must be understood. If these conditions are not given, the traumatic memory may never have a healing function for the community and may be wrongly conveyed. This circumstance stresses the responsible role of both listeners as well as the creators of narratives.⁴⁷

Although language is regarded as the most prominent way to heal trauma, the problem arises from the search for words. Victims of traumatic events struggle with remembering and uttering their experiences. "Extreme trauma is "unspeakable" precisely because of the lack of the inadequacy of

⁴⁵ Compare Kopf 32f.

⁴⁶ Compare van der Merwe, 10f.

⁴⁷ See Tal, 15f.

language to fully convey victims' experiences." (van der Merwe, 26) The lack of words arises from various facts: victims do not seem to understand what has happened to them and consequently face a lack of appropriate words to narrate their experience. Moreover, there is the feeling that there is no use in telling the event, especially to another person. This mental state could be described as "a great silence" or as "a state of being frozen". The horrible events lead to the person's inability to engage and interact in a normal way. "Trauma is a loss of control, a loss of understanding, a loss of identity [...]" (van der Merwe, 27). Hence, special ways of treatment are necessary to enable the cure of the victims.

As Freud had already found out more than a hundred years ago, one of the most suitable and widespread modes of trauma treatment is achieved by narrating and listening. This dialogue requires the participation of at least two persons, a victim (patient) and a psychologist (or another listener). The special situation about trauma telling is the very unique and responsible role of the recipient. The listener is not expected to merely sit and listen passively but rather to be actively and sympathetically involved in the patient's narration. Laub⁴⁸ coins the term of the "empathic listener", whose primary task is to receive the patient's story. He outlines that by communicating the traumatic event to an empathic listener, victims have the opportunity to externalize their memories and, furthermore, are provided with footholds along their narration, "[...] so that in the words and gestures of those [...] listening, they derive encouragement to re-find [...] the language to talk about what has happened to them" (van der Merwe, 27). Concerning empathic listening, Erika Apfelbaum⁴⁹ grants the job of the empathic listener responsibility and above all, courage. Imagining the position of a listener leads to the assumption that this job is a real challenge. Psychologists and other people are confronted with unbearable memories and narratives. The only way to help the person is to listen and re-live with them these moments of indescribable terror and suffering. In this case, the listeners may face the most acute danger of getting traumatized themselves; a condition Terr has

⁴⁸ Felman, 70; compare van der Merwe, 27; Kopf, 35.

⁴⁹ Apfelbaum 2002, quoted in van der Merwe, 27.

titled “the trauma’s contagion”.⁵⁰ According to Caruth, narrating the event means the survivor’s departure from it. Therefore, the challenge of the therapist lies in the difficulty of “how to listen to departure” (1995, 10). Listeners are travelers along a journey of the patient’s re-finding and re-identification process. “[...] we need an audience - a person, or people, who will listen with compassion, with a desire to understand what has happened to us” (van der Merwe, 27).

2.7 Trauma and literature⁵¹

Since the healing functions of literary narratives are at the core of this thesis, the following chapter takes a close look at the various ways in which literature may cure human beings. Besides the treatment by listening and narrating, another way to ease the pain of trauma victims lies in the vast field of literary narratives.

The literary narrative, more than the academic language of scholars, is an appropriate medium for communication about trauma [...]. The modern novel often contains ambivalences, aporias and open endings; it lacks final certainties-and that makes it an extremely fitting vehicle for conveying the enigmatic experience of trauma. (66)

Hence, literary creators are granted enormous importance and responsibility. Only by the power of written words they try to retell, criticize or comment on various topics concerning worldwide events. Their works may portray everything from simple stories, historical recollections to critically remarks on political or social events in society. Their work plays a vital role in setting up new narratives of cultures and societies. By the act of writing, authors seek new extraordinary ways of narrative structures and modes “[...] communicating the seemingly incommunicable” (58).

Concerning the treatment of trauma writers can act as kind of therapists. In their works they may comprise events that shocked the nation or individuals and such create a basic narrative history. People who can not express their feelings, their memories, their thoughts due to traumatic situations or simply

⁵⁰ Terr 1988, quoted in Caruth 1995, 10.

⁵¹ All references in chapter 2.7 and 2.7.1 refer to van der Merwe’s book *Narrating our Healing*.

the lack of words to describe them, may re-find their history in these narratives, trying to apply it to their own lives' narrative. Humans, nations or cultures as a whole, may find new meaning to past events by recapitulating them.

The healing potential of literary narratives can be seen from the point of the writer, who could find a catharsis through the (indirect) expression of suppressed pain, or from the viewpoint of the reader, who could find some kind of healing through discovering points of identification residing in the narrative. (IX)

Furthermore, instead of facing trauma directly, some victims might find it helpful to approach their trauma indirectly and such address subconscious memories and feelings. This concept of treatment, achieved by literary narratives, is called 'Bibliotherapy' and dates back to as early as the 1930s. The basic concept behind this treatment is the assumption that reading has a healing factor. Bibliotherapy was introduced after World War II.⁵² "Literary narratives can play a vital role in the working through and healing of [...] trauma[s]-of being wounded and of losing the plot of life" (59). Besides literature, even other kinds of art may have a healing character if they convey a narrative. In this respect movies, music, pictures or sculptures, that carry messages and tell stories, can help victims of trauma to face it as well. (58f.)

According to stories narrated, van der Merwe compares them to traumatic experiences and coins the term 'life narrative'. Suffering from trauma means a break, a stop, an unbridgeable abyss in this life narrative which the person has to overcome. Therefore, our life narratives are autobiographical, determined by actions of the past and future. Turning one's life into narrative form is crucial for finding meaning in it since the single events become coherent and interrelated in the plotline and finally fit together.

Narrating one's life is about finding structure, coherence and meaning in life. Trauma in contrast is about the shattering of life's narrative structure, about the loss of meaning – the traumatized person has "lost the plot". (van der Merwe, 6)

⁵² See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bibliotherapy> 15.4.2008.

2.7.1 The healing power of literary narratives

Coming back to the central theme of the thesis, this chapter provides a closer look at how and by which means literature can specifically help its readers. Van der Merwe's book summarizes various aspects which are outlined in the following.⁵³

The first point concerns the "indirect confrontation and expression of trauma." Since the direct confrontation of victims with their trauma is often too difficult, yet painful, they may find a way by identifying with a literary character. The reader and the fictitious character do not need to share the same character traits or the same trauma, but indeed have something in common. This is a most helpful circumstance that enables and eases the patient's cure. From the moment the identification has taken place and the victim relives his trauma through the literary character, the patient's healing starts. The victims may derive meaning and insight in the course of reading, as well as by the expression of their pain through the literary mediator. A stylistic feature van der Merwe stresses concerns the supremacy of the novels' narrators. He states that modern novelists tend away from authoritarian narrators and shift their narration mode to independent characters, each of them having their own independent conceptions and beliefs as well as reactions to the narrated events. Thereby "this polyphony of voices in the novel leaves the reader with a wide variety of possible identifications." (60)

The second potential of literary narratives focuses on the transformation "from chaos to structure". Generally, narratives stick to a coherent structure, a plotline and a certain topic. The single events are usually linked by the plot and the characters act according to their identities. Yet, traumatic memories do not share these characteristics and are basically made up of chaotically composed bits and pieces. By transforming these loose memories into a narrative, they are granted a certain structure as a consequence of the plotline. Even novels that deliberately present a loss of coherence paradoxically have an ordered pattern at their heart, according to the

⁵³ See van der Merwe, 60ff.

specific theme. Therefore, victims who are searching for a frame to fit their experiences in, whose life's plot-line has been shattered, may find a solution in these narratives. "The form thus given to the formlessness of trauma, is an antidote to despair, and suggests that some meaning is still to be found, [...]" (60).

The next healing feature of literary narratives concerns "imagining new possibilities". In this respect, van der Merwe suggests that narratives may work as guidelines for traumatized people and such help them to find a way to react meaningfully to the trauma. In the course of a novel, literary characters are most often confronted with extraordinary and challenging situations, having massive influence on their behavior. As a consequence of these situations, characters may develop and adapt to these new situations, leaving them with changed assumptions and expectations of their lives. "[...] the traumatised reader, suffering from a shattered identity, may find guidance in the literary narrative" (61).

The last point and probably one of the most important in the case of South Africa concerns "the healing of a divided society". Van der Merwe stresses the importance of writers who, by embarking on themes like violence, rape, lust for power, poverty etc., create literature that is relevant to the nation. Writers act as their own Truth and Reconciliation Commission, trying to bridge society's abyss. Consequently, authors may work towards people's reconciliation in various ways: first of all, they deliver a diagnosis of the country's state. It is important that this diagnosis consists of things that should be improved and changed, but which no one would ever dare to speak out. Furthermore, they can call attention to the roles of marginalized people or groups in society, who are seen as inferior, who are silenced and whose opinion is not relevant at all. Lastly, writers can try to make the people familiar to what is esteemed as 'different'. Everything that deviates from the norms is mostly considered as bad and offensive. By writing about stereotypes, clichés, different cultures, religions or other racial groups, authors challenge people's imagination, trying to find sympathy and humanity in people that are different. "In divided societies [...] literature often combines [...] opposing narratives into one story, and introduces readers to

the “other side” of society” (62). Therefore, writers often have ungrateful roles, but it is crucial that their voices are heard. By disclosing misery and evil, they arouse public awareness and point at matters to be improved.

3. Trauma treatment in the contemporary South African novel

Now, that a basic knowledge of trauma terminology as well as some literary techniques have been outlined, the following chapters are devoted to a pragmatic approach. Attention is focused on various ways and techniques that authors employ to deal with trauma throughout their work. Hence, four contemporary works of South African novelists, each of them having severe traumatic events at their core, are closely analyzed.

The novels' contents is as manifold as the literary landscape of this country. Various writers have created a remarkable polyphony of themes and genres. South Africa's literary production speaks of a unique history and is tightly connected with the country's political past and present. In order to grasp the novel's scope, the writers' as well as the novels' political and social background need to be incorporated. The powerful Apartheid regime created different lifestyle situations for all ethnic groups across the country. As a consequence, its multifarious literature touches themes like power, torture, loss, home and exile, forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption, violence, oppression or death.

The traumas and inner conflicts of the individual characters, caused by their social and political backgrounds, the desperate search for their own inner self and a wish to belong are masterfully depicted [...]. Emerging from a spiral of senseless violence, humiliation and hate, South Africa encounters the need to overcome its divisions and reductive polarities and move beyond old conflicts in order to establish a "new" nation. The country's literature appears to function as collective memory, striving to unmask and critically investigate South Africa's recent history, thereby allowing digestion of a haunting past. (Stachelberger, 3)

The nation's collective trauma emerges from years of oppression by the Apartheid regime. Unfortunately, racist actions and ethnic struggles are deeply rooted in the country's history. Though, trauma is not only caused by racial controversies. These years of oppression were initial and responsible for a chain of violence and inhumanities that became manifest in various traumatic ways. Consequently, the literature dealt with here covers a broad

variety of trauma, each of them having their specific causes and consequences.

The novels strike the reader with feelings of seemingly insurmountable loss as well as sorrow; they take them to deserted and desolate places, highlight the troubles of growing into a world of hurt and cruelty; they seduce us to the world of fairies and imagination as traumatized last resort, or confront the audience with the all-overshadowing and constant threat of death.

The authors use the novel to depict social realities within the broader context of the country's political background and to show how the life of the individual is affected by the nation's complex history. The skillful portrayal of the challenges of time of national rebirth has won the South African novel world-wide prominence and acclaim. (Stachelberger, 23)

No other medium than literature itself is capable of conveying such themes and presents them in a way that lets people take heart from it and dream of a better tomorrow.

4. Troy Blacklaws: *Karoo Boy*

The first novel to deal with is that of a highly creative and word-witty young novelist, whose debut novel *Karoo Boy* has gained international reputation. Born in South Africa in 1965, Blacklaws spent his youth around Cape Town and grew up in a country ruled by Apartheid. After two years in the army and academic studies of literature, he was free to embark on his career as teacher, leading him to engagements in England, Frankfurt and Vienna.⁵⁴

In *Karoo Boy*, the reader accompanies a young boy on his lonesome journey into life, witnessing his troubled coming of age and blows of faith that challenge him along his way. In the course of a cricket game, the protagonist's twin brother Marsden is fatally hit by a ball his father has thrown. This disastrous event leads to the family's fragmentation. Feeling guilty and responsible for the death of his son, as well as being unable to cope with the resulting circumstances, the father leaves the family. Douglas' (or Dee's) mother decides to start anew, far away from the city and its painful memories. Together with their maid Hope and Douglas' dog Chaka, they leave the prosperous Cape Region, moving to South Africa's dry, hot and deserted outback, the Karoo.

Having settled there, Douglas finds himself alone in a totally different world. He has to master his adolescence pretty much on his own since his father is gone and his mother drifted off into her painting career. Moreover, getting acquainted with some friends turns out to be pretty hard in this tough and alien world. The only fellows he gets friends with are the young neighboring girl Marika and the old colored petrol jockey Moses, serving as a kind of surrogate father as things move on. Douglas masters over four years in the loneliness of the desert, having to deal with coming of age, the cruelty of reality, loss and desire and the search for himself.

⁵⁴ For a detailed biography of Troy Blacklaws, c.f. http://www.karooboy.com/troy_blacklaws/biography.html 20.4.2009.

4.1 Narrative patterns, techniques and setting

After this brief introduction to the basic content of the novel, a step-by-step analysis of its narrative patterns, trying to unravel the traumatic events lying at the story's core, as well as their narrative presentation are the primary objectives. Therefore, characters, plotline and structure, the role of time and place as well as narrative techniques are taken into close consideration.

4.1.1 Lost in South Africa's outback

The vast, desiccated hinterland known as the Karoo has served South Africa's writers well. From Olive Schreiner to J. M. Coetzee, Breytenbach, André Brink and Athol Fugard, some of the country's most celebrated authors have turned this stark world of stone and thorny silences into a backdrop for tales of abandonment, solitary anguish and racism's insistent cruelties.⁵⁵

As the title of the novel already suggests, the setting and especially the story's location is crucial to the whole plot and of high symbolic meaning. Starting off in a marvelous landscape, the story takes the reader from the Cape Region to the deserted outback, where the sea, flowers or other prosperous eye-catchers are things only known out of books. "This place is devoid of history or culture. [...] He reads us a poem about daffodils, something you will never see in the Karoo" (87).⁵⁶ Blacklaws, like many other South African writers, incorporates the landscape into his narration, making it an integral element of the plot development. He uses it to mirror his characters' feelings and emotions and to stress the change that takes place as the plot proceeds. Therefore, the difference between the Cape Region and the Karoo is a perfectly fitting element. After the family has left Muizenberg, the author employs a somber language to create and describe a landscape that mirrors the characters' current situation. "Blacklaws creates the wide dusty world of the Karoo in a few chosen words [...] and unwinds the vivid images of a world at the edges of civilization".⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Nixon, Rob 2005. *Feeling Lost and Found*.

⁵⁶ All references to Troy Blacklaws' *Karoo Boy* (2004) are merely indicated by page numbers.

⁵⁷ Cf. Muleboot, Fern. (<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Karoo-Boy-Troy-Blacklaws/dp/071563397X>).

The remains of the Thomas family boards the car, headed for “[...] Klipdorp. It is the kind of white boondock town you drive through, [...]. You may stop if petrol is running low, or if the engine is smoking, or if you need to pee.” (51f.) Douglas describes their journey there as a trip to the actual now-where, a desolated space made up of dust, sand and heat. Throughout the novel, the author does not even try to ascribe any charming elements to the protagonist’s new surroundings.

North is the way to Johannesburg, through Bloemfontein, where Tolkien was born. Mister McEwan cannot understand how the mind that mapped out Middle Earth could have been born in such a barren, godforsaken place. (162)⁵⁸

On the contrary, *Blacklaws* creates the image of hell on earth, a place where people might hardly find recovery from their haunting past, once they get swallowed by it.

Everything goes black as we are sucked into the mouth of a tunnel. The dark bears down and squeezes out any sea breeze still lingering in my lungs. As we come out into the sun [...] my lungs fill with still, dry air (49). [emphasis added]

In this quote not only the sun goes black as they enter the tunnel, but also the memories of Douglas’ father he was right thinking of. The tunnel metaphorically represents the threshold, the crossing from his beloved Cape region to the Karoo, “[...] this landscape of stone and dust and thorn” (51), where Douglas is compelled to spend his life.

After their arrival at Klipdorp, Douglas takes us on a short trip around his new home, the place his mother chose to find new inspiration as well as to finish with the past. Again, *Blacklaws* portrays the image of an old, rotten uncomfortable place, mirroring the characters’ mental state and the novel’s atmosphere:

[...] the walls a dirty white, red paint peeling on the wavy zinc roof. A dry bougainvillea forms a canopy over the stoep. The house looks bare after our house in Muizenberg, where hibiscus and frangipani and Pride of India hid it from the street. A lone thirsty

⁵⁸ The passage refers to J. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*.

jacaranda casts sketchy shade in the yard. The house has an abandoned, cursed air to it. (55)

Actually, Douglas faces two traumas, an inner and an outer one. The first one concerns the death of his beloved brother and the falling apart of his father⁵⁹. The latter is urged by the removal from his friends and his familiar surroundings, the move to the completely strange countryside where Douglas has to find a place for himself, where he has to position himself: "For me the Karoo is another world: foreign, far, flat and bleak. No surfing, no Marta, no Lagoon." (41)

The social surroundings as well as the atmosphere portrayed by Blacklaws scratch the surface of racist actions. Only a few scenes depict the injustice and inhumanities of a South Africa in the 70s. The author does not directly hint at historic events, but portrays the actual effects Apartheid has on its inhabitants, especially its minorities, in scenes of every-day life. In contrast to the rather progressive Cape Region, the protagonist faces totally different circumstances in the Karoo. He has to learn how to "conduct relationships with Afrikaners who are almost stereotypically racist [or how to] ward off the cruel pranks of Afrikaner schoolboys".⁶⁰ The reader is introduced to the colored petrol attendant Moses who, after spending his whole life working in the mines, is stranded in the Karoo after his passport has been stolen. For years he has been waiting for new documents to be sent from Johannesburg, but, obviously, officials do not pay much attention to someone like him. In the course of Douglas' search for his dog Chaka, the author takes the reader on a trip to the townships, portraying the miserable living conditions of the South African residents there.

It is obvious that such surroundings pose a difficult task to a fourteen-year-old boy. Nevertheless, given these circumstances, Douglas masters his life quite well, adapts as well as possible to his new situation, trying to make the best out of it. On the other hand, he does not have many options to choose since the omni-present Karoo is out there, keeping its 'prisoners', restricting

⁵⁹ See chapter 4.2.3.

⁶⁰ See http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/african_history/118010/3 (23.1.2009).

their actions, destroying their dreams: "I sometimes think of running away but there is nowhere in this desert to run to." (112)

4.1.2 The impact of time and mode of narration

The story itself is set in South Africa's troubled 1970s. Blacklaws gives a partly autobiographical account of his initiation novel, or Bildungsroman, mediated through the protagonist's first person narration. The period narrated by Douglas covers three and a half years; he is fourteen and a half years old when his brother dies and eighteen when he leaves the Karoo. The story is split up into chapters, or episodes, each describing a turning point or a remarkable event in the life of the narrator. Generally, the narrative follows a linear plot and is mostly coherent, but it is regularly interwoven with the protagonist's flashbacks, dealing with memories of his 'old' life. These flashbacks turn out to be of highest importance to this discussion, since they conceal as well as reveal traumatic as well as moving events in the protagonist's life. His traumatic memory deals with his twin brother's death, his father's disappearance, happy days around the Cape, memories of his youth, dreams of girls and love, and Sundays with Moses repairing the broken down Volvo to leave for the Cape. They deliver most information about the family's history, their relationship, about good and bad days and, most important, tell the reader about the never-ending, deeply rooted love and longing for his dead brother and father. The author uses these frequent memories, the hero's flashbacks, as a means to represent his most intimate feelings, desires and wishes.

A striking feature is the lack of any flash-forwards or dreams about the protagonist's future. The whole narrative covers Douglas' present and his 'day-dream trips' to the past. Besides frequent appealing dreams of girls and his urge to leave the Karoo, there are no scenes where he tells the reader about his future plans or other dreams. Until the novel's resolution, Douglas hardly spends any thoughts on his future. The protagonist seems to be imprisoned, caught between his past and presence, consequently making the past his present, unable to care or even think about his future. This

element underlines the protagonist's deeply inflicted psychic wounds and the severe trauma lying at its heart.

The time-frame of the novel is not easy to depict. There are only a few points of reference to the protagonist's age or to other historic events. The reader gets to know Douglas' age at the beginning of the novel. Then, along the Karoo days, months and years go by, seemingly without any remarkable events. Obviously, the author wants to stress the dullness of life in the Karoo, the emptiness and boredom that prevail and therefore lets time float by. In the very end of the novel, there is the only flash-forward and the reader is introduced to the eighteen-year-old hero, having become a man.

The novel itself is written in a vivid and versatile language, containing comparisons, metaphors and images throughout the narration. "The novel zigzags between vivid descriptive passages and sudden bursts of violence that recall the social and political nightmare that was 1970s South Africa."⁶¹ Blacklaws embellishes his narrative with extraordinary phrases, for example, Douglas' "cappuccino" feeling in the pit of his stomach; the vivid scenic descriptions make one believe to be a part of it, to feel and smell the portrayed scene. Throughout the novel, the author sprinkles the book with such odd but perfect word choices to describe scenery or emotions. This undoubtedly accounts for the great acceptance and reception by the reading community.⁶²

With his poetic style and liberal sprinkling of phrases that makes you smell Muizenberg's beach and feel the sun blasting down on the Karoo, Blacklaws certainly succeeds in vividly colouring [...] bleak landscape and adding hope to the South African story.⁶³

According to the genre of the Bildungsroman, the inter-textual allusions mentioned throughout the narrative (ranging from Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* to Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*), all in a way resemble the hero's tragic situation. Van der Merwe suggests that becoming older and growing

⁶¹ Compare <http://www.powells.com/biblio?PID=25697&cgi=product&isbn=0156030659>.

⁶² As a consequence of the novel's success, it is planned to be made into a movie by Anant Singh and Helena Spring, gone into production in 2006
cf. http://www.karooboy.com/troy_blacklaws/play+film.html.

⁶³ See Nolte, Elizma.

up is inextricably linked to an experience of pain since growth often involves a departure from familiar patterns of life and familiar surroundings, as well as the beginning and introduction to new ones.⁶⁴

As the plot proceeds towards its climax, death and other violent occurrences become ever more imminent. Though the story starts off with Marsden's passing away, the narrative's major part does not treat other scenes of murder or death. Yet, the last third of the narrative forces the characters to witness one violent action by another. Along their trip to the shacks, Douglas hears the story of Zeph, who was nearly killed after being wrongly accused for setting a veld on fire. Then the narration introduces the reader to Moses' passport thieves, some dumb and racist young men. They kill and fatally injure little cats at the petrol station. Then, Marika's racist father, "if you ever go to that damned Salem, that black hell, I'll beat you till you beg for mercy" (103), is killed in the townships. These events occur in three consecutive chapters, undoubtedly preparing the reader for the utmost tragic incident: the suicide of Douglas' father.

4.1.3 Trauma and its structural representation in the narrative

Before turning to a psychoanalytic approach in chapter 4.2, this one tries to unravel ways and techniques the author employs to present and integrate traumatic memories into the narrative structure. On the basis of trauma theory, with emphasis on the literary narrative as a means to deal with traumatic events, there is a look at how narrative structure, traumatic memory and narrative memory are interrelated and contribute to the development of the plot and characters.

One of the most important steps concerning the treatment of trauma is the verbalization of a person's memories. The way they are presented, narrated and structurally edited in the narrative, mirrors the actual state of being of the protagonist (or other characters). The author deliberately structures the novel in a certain way, such presenting the underlying conflict or trauma under specific perspectives.

⁶⁴ Compare van der Merwe, 21f.

At first sight, the basic structural framework of *Karoo Boy* seems linear and ideally arranged: the plot starts with the exposition and the introduction of its characters, followed by the complication, heads towards its climax and finishes with its resolution. But at a closer look, the reader notices that Blacklaws enriches the narrative structure with specific irregularities, omits certain details and events, and uses a time-line that stresses the traumatic experience of the characters. Hence, the following analysis tries to deconstruct these features and apply it to the narrative framework.

The first compelling feature is the fact that the traumatic events take place right at the outset of the novel. Blacklaws takes his audience to a beautiful day on the beach, just to confront them immediately with the tragic death of a fourteen-year-old boy. By adding a negative connotation to the whole narrative, this opening scene shows the direction the story will take. The death of the protagonist's twin brother triggers off the second, and eventually more traumatizing incident, the 'going away' of the hero's father⁶⁵. The author masterfully arranges bits and pieces of the narrative, leaving the audience in the dark about his whereabouts until the very end of the novel. In a way, the reader is manipulated and deceived by the protagonist's narration. Throughout Douglas' narration, his memories circle around his father, thinking of what would be if he was still around, where he might have gone to, what he is doing there and if he may ever return home to his family. The reader does not get any clue that his father has committed suicide. The narration hints at this crucial scene only three times. First on page 37, when Douglas is woken by a frantic sound he cannot define. Neither the audience nor the protagonist know what has happened. The gloomy description of the house and the night are the only indicators that something terrible must have happened: "A candle on the window sill has burnt to a stub [...]" (37). When the novel heads toward its end, Douglas' traumatic memory recalls that terrible night again on page 170. He remembers the terrible sound and describes the whole scene in the same way as on page 37. Still, the traumatic memory can not be fully grasped. Douglas lacks the memory and

⁶⁵ Douglas is seemingly able to cope with his brother's death better than that of his father. This is obvious since Douglas is able to recall, retell and think of his brother's tragic accident and the way it happened, whereas it takes him over 4 years to remember and come to terms with his father's suicide.

the words to retell what he has seen that night. On the final page of the novel, Douglas' memories – “yet undeveloped” (195) – have found a way out of, or rather into, his mind. He is able to recall every detail, disclosing the horrible events of that night. Douglas' ‘bearing witness’, the end of his lack of memory, the end of his search for words, give him the power to find structure in his life and to master his haunting past.

Although the conclusion of the plot is disillusioning, the novel does not end without a flicker of hope. Its final paragraph describes a new beginning for the young protagonist, following in the footsteps of his beloved father. As Caruth stated, narrating the event means the survivor's departure from the trauma.⁶⁶ Douglas overcomes and masters his memories on the psychic level. Moreover, even on a physical level he is able to escape his ‘prison’ and set out for the world. Blacklaws tantalizes his audience by giving the postponed solution on the last page of his novel. The fact that it takes Douglas the whole story, all his teenage years to come to terms with himself as well as handle his traumatic memories, seems realistically depicted.

After analyzing the impact of the crucial traumatic event underlying the narrative structure, there is another feature that highly contributes to the traumatic structure of the novel: memories. As mentioned in chapter 2.4, already Janet had distinguished between narrative and traumatic memory. Narrative memory is capable of improvising on the past so that the account of an event varies from telling to telling, whereas traumatic memory is inflexible and replays the past in a mode of exact repetition. In general, memory is the “[...] ability to recall events from the past” (Bryant-Davis, 77) and includes positive as well as negative ones. The integration of traumatic memory as well as its transformation into narrative memory are requirements for the recovery process. The ability to derive meaning of, as well as to be able to talk about memories, is a necessary means for the mental health of an individual. Caruth states that traumatic memory is “inflexible and invariable” (1995, 163), therefore resisting integration into the narrative memory. Since such memories can not be verbalized, they escape the subconscious mind as dreams, flashbacks or nightmares, or as feelings

⁶⁶ See p. 21.

of depression or guilt. Van der Kolk adds feelings of “extreme loss, anger, betrayal and powerlessness.”⁶⁷ In *Karoo Boy*, the protagonist embodies all of these symptoms.

In her book *Thriving in the Wake of Trauma*, Bryant-Davis mentions different reasons why victims may avoid thinking and talking about traumatic memories. Concerning the character of Douglas, all of the following features match the protagonist and have consequences on his recovery.⁶⁸

- the survivor was very young when the traumatic incident happened
- the survivor may have been asleep when the event occurred
- the survivor’s mind may have protected [...] [him] by allowing [...] to dissociate or black out at the time of the event
- the survivor’s mind may be protecting [...] [him] by not allowing [...] to remember certain details of the incident

The role of memory is not only relevant on the psychoanalytic level of the characters, but for the structure of the novel as well. The opening chapter is the only one where Douglas’ narration covers the present action. Then, with the death of his brother on page five, the narrative memory starts to intertwine with his traumatic memory. Flashbacks and thoughts of persons and things lost start to be incorporated into the narrative and make up an integral part of it.

Besides the interaction of these two narrative strands mentioned above (the interplay of Douglas’ narrative and traumatic memory), they account for another feature. The whole narration is filled and set alongside Douglas’ memories, dealing mostly with his father, his dead brother, but also girls he is in love with. This feature has implications on the time-frame as well. By juxtaposing the traumatic memory/narrative with the protagonist’s present narration, two timelines are established: one that is only set in the past, recounting events and episodes of his father and brother, and another one, that tells the audience about the misery he has to go through right now. By setting the past alongside the present, the author creates a sense of lost innocence, of lost childhood in Douglas’ world: Blacklaws starts the novel

⁶⁷ Van der Kolk, B., and A. C. McFarlane. *The black hole of trauma*. New York: Gilford Press. 1996. quoted in Bryant-Davis, 78.

⁶⁸ Chapter 4.2.3 closely investigates the traumatic symptoms of the protagonist.

with the most dramatic event, the death of Marsden, when Douglas is still young. After his father has left, Douglas is forced to accept responsibility, assuming the role of his father. In the tradition of the novel of initiation, the narrative develops according to the idea that childhood is an inherently difficult experience. The author forsakes the traditional coming-of-age structure, portraying a series of challenging events that lead to awareness and adulthood, displaying childhood as a time that is as challenging as adulthood.⁶⁹ Hence, the protagonist's experience is framed by death and characterized by growing disillusion. The intensity of this experience, as well as the voice used to recount these experiences, comes in the form of Douglas' memories punctuating the novel.

On a structural level, the persistent and linear narration seems to be distorted by the protagonist's flashbacks and memories. One might think they do not fit in, shatter the narration and leave a sense of chaotic structure. But, shattered timeframes and repetitions are some of the key literary strategies in trauma fiction to present traumatic memory. Repetition may be applied on the level of language, imagery or plot, suggesting the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression. In its negative connotation, repetition replays the past as if it was fully present and remains caught within the paralyzing influence of trauma. Constant repetition may function as a pathological response to loss, seeking to incorporate the other into the self as an act of preservation.⁷⁰ Novelists frequently employ and use narratives that are characterized by repetition and indirection. These stylistic features portray and show the impact of trauma, mimicking the temporal and chronological collapse that traumatic memory induces.⁷¹ While repetition does not only work on a physical level, it can be used on a psychical level as well, e.g. a character's haunting nightmares or flashbacks. Douglas' constant day-dreams, the memories of the past intruding his present, are surely an indication for this narrative pattern and stress the traumatic structure. Therefore, this element functions as another means to symbolize and highlight traumatic experience. In order

⁶⁹ For examples see chapter 4.3.3.

⁷⁰ See Whitehead, 84ff.

⁷¹ Compare Whitehead 7f.

to overcome this distorted life-narrative, literary narratives are capable of restructuring victims' lives.⁷² By giving words to the unspeakable, coherence meaning and structure may be regained. Douglas' hitherto untroubled life has been totally distorted and fallen to pieces, consequently, flashbacks and memories are evidences of this shattered time frame.

4.2 Analysis of *Karoo Boy's* main characters

After this formalist approach considering the roles of place and time, social surroundings as well as narrative structure, attention is paid to the presentation of characters, enabling a psychoanalytic approach. Signs of trauma are most evident on a person's psychic level. The attempt to outline the psyche of the protagonist's father, Mr. Thomas, is followed by the analysis of Douglas' mother, an interesting and multilayered character, and finally concludes with the hero of the novel, Douglas Thomas.

4.2.1 The catastrophe's origin: Mr. Thomas

For two reasons the character of the protagonist's father is of utmost importance to the whole novel and Douglas' development. In the first place, he threw the cricket ball, thus ending the family's hitherto happy life. Secondly, since *Karoo Boy* can be regarded to belong to the genre of the Bildungsroman⁷³, or the novel of initiation, the role of the father is crucial to the hero's inner development.

Although the character of Mr. Thomas only appears in the beginning chapters, Douglas' traumatic memory steadily feeds the reader with new information. Blacklaws creates the image of a loving caring father and husband, a cosmopolitan and unbiased journalist and human being, and, unfortunately, a man with a weak mental health.

⁷² See p. 23ff.

⁷³ Def. Bildungsroman: 'Die zentrale Figur, der Held, macht eine Entwicklung durch, die von seinem Verhältnis zu den „verschiedenen Weltbereichen“, also seiner Umwelt, bestimmt wird. Das Ganze spielt sich meistens in der Jugend des Helden ab, und die erzählte Zeit erstreckt sich über mehrere Jahre, oft sogar Jahrzehnte.' c.f. Jürgen Jacobs: *Wilhelm Meister und seine Brüder: Untersuchungen zum deutschen Bildungsroman*, W. Fink (1972), S. 14; 'the central figure, the hero, passes through a development that is determined by his relation to different aspects of life, thus his environment. This process takes place in the hero's youth, the narrated time stretching over several years, even decades.' [my translation].

When the Thomas family leaves home for a relaxing time on the beach, they would never think of the fatal consequences they are to face at the end of that day. They would not think that Marsden, Douglas' identical twin brother, crosses their threshold for the last time. A family cricket game should turn their lives upside down.

[...] so my father calls Marsden, still sketching seagulls in the shade. He wants to stay in the shade, but my father and uncles and boy cousins taunt him until he drops his pencils in the sand. His rice paper blows away in the wind. [...] I watch my father run up and let the ball go [...] it curves down towards my brother. [...] I hear a dull thud [...] My brother drops to the sand. His face is out of focus in the mirage haze dancing on the sand. (3f.)

What on earth can be harder to bear and endure than to lose the own child? As if this was not already enough, Mr. Thomas has to live with the burden of accidentally killing one of his beloved sons. It takes a strong personality and mental constitution to cope with that. As the reader has to find out, he lacks one of these qualities. Thus Douglas' father abandons the family 'sailing up along the East coast of Africa'. It is not until the last page of the novel that the reader finds out about the bitter truth, that only his ashes go on their journey, carried by the sea's eternal breeze.

The trauma Mr. Thomas suffers from and is unable to overcome relates to the central themes of the novel: loss. After losing his son, his psyche is on a steady decline. The reason for his misery as well as his inability to find salvation seems obvious: in the eyes of his wife he is responsible for the death of their son. It is him who teased and wanted Marsden to join their game. Moreover, he is the one who threw the fatal ball. "[...] she is not going to sleep in the same bed as my father. I know she wants to let him suffer" (9). He has to cope with a wife who can not forgive him, while he can not even find redemption for himself.

Another fact that crucially contributes to Mr. Thomas' trauma is his other son Douglas. Looking at him is like looking at the son he killed. Having his dead son's twin around him is a constant reminder of the tragic event that happened. Of course, his wife has to deal with that issue as well, but she

seems to be a stronger character than her husband (or rather has different ways of coping with her grief).⁷⁴ After the death of Marsden, Douglas tells the reader about the strange and absent-minded look in his father's eyes when being around him. This behavior makes Douglas believe that his father rather wishes it was him who died, and not his brother. Basically, there is no point in the novel that explicitly states his opinion. It is only Mr. Thomas' total despair and desperation that are reflected in his condition. "He senses me near him. For a moment there is the old spark in his eyes, as if I may just be my brother and it was all a dream." (KB, 12) This quote is taken from one of the last talks between father and son. On this occasion, Mr. Thomas tells Douglas about his plans to go away, not knowing exactly where. As a final and important gesture, Mr. Thomas gives Douglas his pocket knife and zippo, being in his constant company from now on. These gifts bear highly symbolic meaning: originally, Mr. Thomas wanted to split up those things between his twin sons when they have become old enough. Now, that only one is left, Douglas gets both of them. "I had always imagined I would be over the moon if he ever gave either to me, but I just pocket them." (14) These two things represent Mr. Thomas' last gift to his son since he will go away and leave his family forever. Moreover, he considers Douglas old enough to handle those things, or rather hopes that he is mature enough, laying the burden on his son to step into his footsteps after his departure. Douglas' involuntary journey into adolescence begins.

4.2.2 Escaping the real world: Mrs. Thomas

"Dee, I can't stay in Muizenberg any longer. This house is too full of morbid memories." (40) Mrs. Thomas, a tower of strength, is the solid centre of the Thomas family. She has an emancipated character, always knows what she wants and how to get it and leads a happy and equal marriage in all respects. She cares with endless love and patience for her children and husband, being ready to sacrifice her career (f)or whatever may come. Her family is the most precious thing in the world. "If the house goes up in flames [...] rescue the photos, everything else can burn" (8). Now, that half of her family is gone, polaroids and other pictures are the only lasting memories of their

⁷⁴ See p. 37.

family's life. Her fear is shown along the way to the Karoo, when their maid Hope flings a shot spool of Kodak film at Baboons on the road. Instantly, Mrs. Thomas "swerves to the roadside as there may be photos of Marsden on the film a Baboon is sniffing." (48) In the course of this short episode Douglas once again has to step into his father's footsteps, trying to get back the Kodak film from the "shark-fanged baboon". It is not for the last time he longs for his father since "I shall miss my father being around for when things get scary [...]" (48). As a consequence of Mrs. Thomas' newly adopted behavior, Douglas finds her getting even stranger: "My mother's head is gone again." (56) In his opinion, one of his mother's most incomprehensible decisions concerns their move to the Karoo.

My mother chose Klipdorp because of an advert in the paper [...]. Before my brother died, my mother would study the ins and outs of everything beforehand. [...] Now she buys a house she has never seen, in the middle of nowhere. [...] All she wants to do is paint, and Muizenberg does not inspire her. (51)

Besides Mrs. Thomas' behavior, the most imminent change concerns her painting, playing a crucial role for her trauma treatment. As outlined in the introducing chapter to trauma in general, the underlying hypothesis assumes that trauma treatment is enabled, that traumatic experiences can be processed, by finding and creating new narratives in order to convey and retell specific memories. While this paper primarily focuses on literature and its healing potential, there are many more ways and modes that can create 'narratives'. One of it is the multi-faceted field of arts with its countless ways of representation. It offers numerous possibilities to create new narratives by displaying and processing traumatic memories. In *Karoo Boy*, Mrs. Thomas has decided to re-embark on her painting career. In the course of the novel, she descends ever more into her universe of colors and canvas, processing her former life, getting lost in her creative work.⁷⁵

After the tragic accident Mrs. Thomas seems to cope better with her son's death than the rest of her family, but only superficially. "Oh Dee, life has gone all sour, my mother says to me. Sour as milk left in the sun." (10)

⁷⁵ The relation between art, especially painting, and trauma treatment is more evident in Susan Mann's *One Tongue Singing*, c.f. chapter 5.

Utterances like these show Mrs. Thomas' total desperation. Though on the surface she still mimes the strong remaining parent, deep inside, her heart is broken: "My mother's face is a mask but I know she is churned up inside, as the gears catch with a cry of steel teeth as she goes into third." (42) As the story proceeds, Douglas mentions her strange and ever increasingly changing behavior. Seemingly unimportant common things illustrate her deeply engraved wounds. One of these instances concerns a scene with Dee's dog Chaka. When she beats him, Dee tells the reader that she used to be an animal loving person that could not even harm a spider. "This faces me. I have never seen my mother hurt an animal before." (9) Another thing that "faces" Douglas concerns his mother's appearance. The longer they live in the Karoo, the less Mrs. Thomas cares for her looks. "[...] I wonder if it means she does not care about being pretty anymore" (125). The stylish neatly clothed woman seems to have vanished, giving way to a rather 'natural' look, mirroring the landscape and her actual state of being. Since fate has wiped out all of life's beauty for her, Mrs. Thomas finds no reason to look beautiful herself anymore. Consequently, the reader watches her change on the in- as well as on the outside.⁷⁶

In the chapter *Fluke* (126-128), the reader is once again witness of an occasion showing Mrs. Thomas' sorrow, grief and frustration. It is one of the few chapters commenting on historic incidents of racial violence⁷⁷ as well as people's racist attitudes. Furthermore, the reader is told about the character's disbelief, or rather doubts, in god's benevolent nature. Blacklaws uses the figure of a clerk, more precisely, the pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church, to incorporate these elements into the narrative. Already the description of the pastor adds a negative connotation to the whole scene: "As he mouths his words the tuft of a beard on his chin wags, as if he is a chewing goat. Chaka growls at the wagging beard, convinced it is some kind

⁷⁶ In *Thriving in the Wake of Trauma* (30f.), the author Bryant-Davis mentions that neglecting one's physical appearance may be a response to traumatic events. She talks of 'self-care', an action that comprises activities like eating, sleeping, exercising and - in this case most important - maintaining good hygiene as well as looking after the self. A person that practices self-care 'is saying to others that she values her life and health.' Vice versa, 'Self-Harm' implies that the person does not care for her physical well-being anymore, consequently showing their inability to appreciate and value life any longer.

⁷⁷ The riots in Soweto.

of *ratty animal*.” (126)⁷⁸ The dominee comes to see Mrs. Thomas, not intending to convey comfort to his flock’s new member, but rather to ask her to stop painting nude drawings, especially the ones that feature “Blacks”. Being a sophisticated lady, neither biased, narrowed-minded nor caring about people’s gossip, Mrs. Thomas defends her work, telling the pastor to take care of more important things. Then, when the Dominee suggests to turn to God in order to overcome her loss and grief, she feels mocked and teased. Mrs. Thomas makes her point clear and states her disbelief and mistrust in a god, who lets a child die the way her son did.

- Dominee, a woman with my story ought to mistrust God. [...] A fluke, a freak accident one may call it. But when the chances are so remote of the ball hitting just the spot, the Achilles’ heel of the head, then you begin to wonder if it is not somehow miraculous.
 - Madam, you surely do not accuse God of murder?
 - Of which murder? The murder of his son? The murder of my son? The murder of the Jews? The murder of the children in Soweto?
- (128)

Whether one tries to find help and seeks salvation after such incidents or rather blames and abandons God, undoubtedly is a question of strength and faith everyone must find on their own. However, the rupture in Mrs. Thomas’ soul, the loss that she has to overcome, prompts her to mistrust in a power that ‘protects us from above’.

The loss of Mrs. Thomas’ vital spark does not only have impact on her living condition but on her mother-son relationship as well. As the narrative moves on, the gap between mother and son becomes more evident. Stuck in her artistic world, Mrs. Thomas drifts away from reality and, consequently, her only remaining son. She neglects Douglas in his alien surroundings and does not give him the support he might be searching for. Mrs. Thomas rather relies on Douglas as the new man around the house, responsible for things his father used to be. As things go on, the novel mentions only a few scenes where Douglas and his mother have a conversation about serious topics. Mostly, unimportant gossip is the content of their chats. So, at a time and place when a son would need his mother more than ever, Mrs. Thomas

⁷⁸ Emphasis added.

completely fails her role. She is totally busy healing her own wounds, leaving her son at the age of fourteen completely on his own. On the contrary, instead of supporting her son, it is brave young Douglas who involuntarily changes roles and has to support his mother:

She gets up and comes to me. I think she is going to hold me and I want her to, but she just gives me a butterfly kiss on the forehead and floats past me into her studio.

– Dee, I need you to be good to me, you understand?

I nod.

– Be a dear and make your mother a g&t.⁷⁹ (117)

Undoubtedly, Mrs. Thomas still loves her son more than anything else. “Dee, you have to take care. If I lost you, I’d have no reason to go on.” (118) Unfortunately, she seems to have problems in showing these feelings to her son. “I chew my strap to stop myself crying. I will never be enough to make my mother happy.” (72)

By moving to the Karoo, Mrs. Thomas hopes to leave the terrible memories behind as well as to find a new source for inspiration. Yet, her feelings and psyche mirror the desert-like landscape, rather than the rich Cape region. Obviously, she has found the strength to handle her life without her husband and her son, but she can not find delight in life’s beauty anymore. Canvas and Gin Tonic seem to be her only escape:

Do you think you’ll be happy here? I ask my mother. I am thinking of her painting, and whether she will find the inspiration. She puts down her gin and tonic and sighs: Dee, I can never be happy again. Perhaps there will be moments of happiness, but there will always be the pain. (72)

With the death of Mrs. Thomas’ son and beloved husband, a part of her has died too. If she may ever overcome this loss and find joy in life again? When the novel ends, this does not seem to be the case. On the contrary: with Douglas’ departure from home, following the career of his father, it is more likely that Mrs. Thomas’ traumatic state worsens. From now on, all her family are gone, leaving her completely on her own in this hot and empty spot.

⁷⁹ Short for Gin & Tonic.

Apart from this hypothesis, the author leaves plenty of room for speculation on Mrs. Thomas' future. The last time she is mentioned, Mrs. Thomas defends and helps Moses who has got in trouble with the police. She offers Moses a place around the house, to look after them, ordering Hope to move inside. "- But, Madam, the law forbids it. - To hell with the law. Hope, you sleep in the spare room tonight." (187) In this scene, Mrs. Thomas has found her old strength again, standing up for her beliefs, defending the weak and disregarding ridiculous laws. With her last son moving away, it is the beginning of a new era. If Mrs. Thomas uses her re-gathered strength and faith in future times too, she may find a life worth living again.

Despite Mrs. Thomas' future condition, the author does not comment on the problematic mother-son relationship as well. The reader is kept totally in the dark, with no single letter hinting at their relation. Whether mother and son have drifted apart, or their relation has even tightened remains unclear. In the end, when Douglas leaves Klipdorp, it is Hope "my mother has to prop up, to keep her from flopping down to the grass." (188) Mrs. Thomas seems to have recovered quite well, having got used to letting things go. She is the solid rock of the family again (a family that more or less does not exist anymore). She is responsible for her maid and Moses, their property as well as her income and savings. But, since we cannot take a look deep inside her heart, much is left to the reader's imagination

4.2.3 Lonesome in a world of dust: 'Dee' Douglas Thomas

My name is Douglas. I am alive, though part of me, the me in Marsden, is docked. In one pocket I carry my father's Zippo and pocket knife. In the other pocket small change mixes with orange coral seeds. Perhaps it is true of the seeds, that they bring good luck. (36)

In the center of the narrative is 'Dee' Thomas, who, at the age of fourteen, is faced with love, loss and death. Born and grown up in the Cape region, he is a city kid used to the amenities of an urban settlement.

At the exposition of the plot, the reader is introduced to a happy young boy, whose life moves along common tracks. Unfortunately, fate has something

else in store and minutes later, everything has changed. The death of his twin brother triggers off a chain of events that turn his life upside down. At the difficult age of fourteen, Douglas has to overcome his loss and simultaneously master a bunch of challenges lying along his teenage way.

As already mentioned, *Karoo Boy* belongs to the genre of the novel of initiation. The plot covers Douglas' adolescent years, when he is between fourteen and eighteen years old. This period, being of highest influence and importance for a child's development, poses a variety of challenges to Douglas, thus leaving indelible impressions on the boy's psyche. Douglas suffers from a deeply rooted trauma, steadily infiltrating and influencing his psyche, behavior and emotions. It is not until the end of the novel that he is able to process his traumatic experience. In the course of Douglas' journey to manhood, "he develops a clearer insight into himself and his place in the world, a world where dreams and reality meet in a surprising twist."⁸⁰

The first traumatic event Douglas has to witness is the death of his brother Marsden. The fact they are twin brothers worsens the characters' trauma. "To the onlooker, Marsden and I are xeroxed, one like the other." (3) Even relatives, friends and teachers can not tell any difference between them. Hence, getting on with life turns out to be twice as hard. Especially for Mr. Thomas who "[...] sees it is me and, in seeing me, sees the boy he killed" (12), a circumstance that has crucial implications on Mr. Thomas' trauma. Besides their physical appearance, another typical feature of twin brothers is their identical behavior, daily routines and mental bond.

[...] Being a twin was having another boy on hand to throw a cricket ball to, to surf with, another mind for my thoughts to mingle with. [...] It was the feeling of being moored to another soul. (6)

For these reasons it is obvious that Douglas has to put all his strength together to overcome his twin brother's loss. But

[...] my brother will not fade in time. There is a filmy echo of his face in my Coca-Cola glass. [...] My brother visits me in reflections with broken edges. (27)

⁸⁰ <http://www.powells.com/biblio?PID=27473&cgi=product&isbn=0156030659>.

Throughout the whole novel, Douglas tells about his brother, his habits, his likes and dislikes; Marsden intrudes his mind, causing dreams as well as nightmares. He is like a ghost coming back, visiting and haunting Douglas, consequently reminding him of the terrible events and their further implications.

- How does it feel to be alone? Having been a twin? [...] I shrug.
- It still feels as if I'm a twin. I still feel as if he sees me, as if he knows my thoughts. (34)

Another consequence of traumatic experience is the shattering, and even worse, the loss of one's identity.⁸¹ As a consequence, Douglas has to cope with multiple traumas. Besides the loss of his father, he has to live on without his 'second half'. It is a matter of fact that twins have a tighter bond than 'ordinary' siblings. Marsden and Douglas used to do everything together, they kept the same secrets, shared the same friends, even acted and talked the same way. To lose a person that is the mirror of one's soul is unimaginable and indescribable. Throughout the narration, the reader witnesses Douglas thinking of his brother. There is always something that reminds him of his twin brother, no matter where he goes nor what he does. Douglas' life has started anew. From now on, everything has changed and become different. The young protagonist seems to cope with his pain quite well. Douglas tells about his aching soul and the tears that fill his eyes only on rare occasions. As the story proceeds, the memories of his brother do not become less, but his tears do. For a boy of his age he seems quite tough and mature. The fact that Douglas looks alike his brother does not only challenge his integrity, but that of his father as well. This circumstance has implications on the most evasive traumatic event: the loss of the father.

I fall asleep whispering Marta's name into my pillow. [...] My head flies off the pillow. My heart pounds. My mind ferrets after the sound that woke me, frantic to catch it, defuse its horror by defining it, naming it. [...] From the lip of a tipped glass, wine seeps into the floorboards. A candle on the window sill has burnt to a stub [...]. (37)

⁸¹ See van der Merwe, 25f.

This passage foreshadows the tragic event that finally prompts Mrs. Thomas 'to leave the house and move to a far away place'. At that stage of the novel, the reader is not informed about Mr. Thomas' whereabouts. When father and son have their last conversation Douglas is informed about his father's plans. He believes that his father leaves the family for a time-out, to cope with things and embark on his novel. He would never believe that his father is to leave forever, in a way that would make a return impossible.

For me, the world has become as slow, dull turning under the sun. My father's typewriter gathers dust. Marsden's room is a museum of unfingered things. [...] My mother treks deep into her painted landscapes. (39)

Douglas misses and needs his father indescribably. Throughout the novel, the number of references to his father is countless. There is hardly anything occurring that does not in a way remind him of his father.

She combs her fingers through the long strands of my lemon-juiced hair. I recall my father's lifeless hand on my head at dusk on the rocks and begin to cry because there is no father to chase jinxes away, or to bury dead dogs. (58)

Whenever there is something he is afraid of, he wishes his father was there to support him. He has to teach himself and accomplish all the things his father used to do since he is the only man around the house. "It is the first time I have ever braaied, because my father always used to braai. [...] I feel like a man, with the tongs in one hand and a beer in the other" (61). Douglas is urged to do things and take on responsibility at an age when children should have other things on their minds. Unfortunately, Dee has no choice. Since his mother is still too weak and mentally unstable, there is no one else to do his father's job, a role that Douglas often hates.

My mother is after me to be home for tea before dark. Not to drink milk from the carton like a blackveld boy. To fetch bones from the butcher for Chaka, and to monkey through his hair for ticks, [...]. To rub away the shit Hope's chicken drop on Indlovu's roof. To rescue the chickens out of Chaka's gob when he chases them. Not to hang around the Shell drinking Coca-Cola. So my life goes. I am forever being plucked out of my day dreams by cane-swinging teachers and my mother-hen mother. (150)

Besides accomplishing the work of grown-ups, Douglas has to live with another responsibility, weighing more on his shoulders than anything else. Since he is the only one of their family that is left, he is the most precious thing in the world for his mother. If Douglas left too, or if anything happened to him, there was nothing to live on for.

It seems unfair, in a world of hard balls and sharks and lynxes, to expect me to outfoot all the dangers fate throws my way. The weight of having to survive for my mother bears down on me. I wish my father would come and put up his feet and read the *Cape Times*. I would know then, as the ice clinked in his Jack Daniel's, that I was free to run out into the dark to play fearlessly [...]. (118)

Sometimes, it seems that Douglas forgets to find delight in life, just like his mother. "As I glide, my stomach skims the tiles and I yearn to stay down forever cool, enveloped, time-warped." (68) But his young age and unconcern, as well as his strong character, give him the strength to move and overcome the difficulties life poses.

After his father's suicide Douglas has to endure another experience. A male teacher, Mr. Skinner, under the pretence of consoling Douglas, comes on to him:

His eyes focus on the rear view mirror before resting his hand on my hip. It is the same instinctive glance to the back seat my father always gave before his hand went to my mother's lap. I know I ought to feel dirtied, but I feel numb. This is the beach my brother died on and it is as distant to me as the billboard beach. [...] As we pull away, a voice hurls the words: fucking homos at us. (30)

Douglas falls victim to a teacher who certainly wants to take advantage of his desperate situation. Fortunately, they are disturbed by others; nevertheless, Douglas has become a victim of sexual harassment, in the same place where his brother died some time ago. Besides negative experiences, Douglas finds his only delight in Marta, his girlfriend in Cape Town. But all joy is gone when Mrs. Thomas decides to flee to the Karoo, to "god-forsaken Klipdorp, a remote semi-desert hamlet where Douglas morphs

from Cape Town surfer kid into reluctant Karoo boy.”⁸²

In the Karoo, he is a city kid in an insular community. Douglas does not feel quite accommodated there. The other children taunt and tease him at school, playing disgusting and humiliating tricks on him. New classmates leave a rotting jackal in his water tank and put a dead lizard in his peanut butter and honey sandwich. “They steal Douglas’ clothes and stuff him into a wicker basket, through which a dog pees for good measure.”⁸³

[...] as a boy spits the word *moffie* in my ear and jabs me in my ribs. [...] Cape Town candyass, whispers another. I feel a pang of bitterness towards my mother for landing me in this backveld dorp [...]. (63)

Douglas is an outsider, he hardly talks to anybody, does not get along with his teachers, and gets taunted by his classmates. Seeing and meeting a girl, named Marika, in school, are his only moments of joy. She is the only girl he gets friends with and whom he loses his virginity to. But his deeply engraved wounds even come up in intimate moments. Instead of getting his mind clear, there is always something that triggers off memories of his deceased family.

I hold my arms loosely around her. My face is in her hair and her hair smells of green apples. Thoughts of Marsden and my father begin to filter through strands of apple hair and I bury my head deeper in the hollow neck and squinch my eyes to keep tears from coming. (98)

In the Karoo, one of the few persons Douglas gets to know is Moses, Klipdorp’s colored petrol jockey. Just like Douglas, Moses had got stranded in this region after his passport was stolen. Now, fearing the police, he has submitted to his fate, wasting his time in the Karoo until Pretoria sends his new papers, a hope he has given up. An old rusty Volvo becomes their symbol of escape and freedom. They spend their weekends repairing the car, dreaming of leaving the god-forsaken desert for Cape Town. During these years, Moses becomes one of the most important role models as well as a kind of surrogate father for Douglas. Moses helps with good advice,

⁸² Cf. Nixon, Rob 2005. *Feeling Lost and Found*.

⁸³ Cf. Brenn, Jones. *Coming of age in the extremes of South Africa*. 2005.

comfort and support whenever the boy is in need of it. He tells Douglas long stories of his own coming-of-age years and compares Douglas' growing up to his own Bundu time. In Moses, Douglas finds the only male person around the whole village he can share his feelings, his memories and his problems with.

Douglas, I think this dying of your twin brother, the going away of your father, was the beginning of your bundu time, the time of your hardship. You are in the in-between world, when the spirits will try to catch you. It is a lonely, hurting time. But you will come out of it a man. Look at you. Though you bleed, you do not cry. A pity your father does not see you become a man. (86)

When the novel comes to its end, the reader finds an eighteen-year-old young man, who has not only mastered the difficulties of the Karoo but also growing up without his father and twin brother. As mentioned afore, throughout the novel Douglas believes that his father has sailed away up Africa's East or West coast, sitting on a beach, thinking of him, his son. Though the author feeds his audience with some details as the narrative proceeds, it is the very last page that discloses Mr. Thomas' whereabouts. In other words, it takes Douglas more than four years to cope with his father's death. When Douglas finds his father's corpse in their garden, his mind has locked all information away, as it is yet not perceivable. When his Karoo days are finally counted he remembers again. Finally, his traumatic memories are granted access to his mind. Eventually, this process is triggered off and supported by the familiar surroundings of the beach in Kalk Bay. It is quite obvious that revisiting this well-known place where he spent his youth help him to close with the past. In the end, Douglas is able to fully recapture the traumatic experience of losing his father.

It was not the ragged volley of Chaka's blunt barks that woke me that night in Muizenberg, four years ago. [...] *Though I am scared, I force myself to go on, out the kitchen door, out into the moon-bathed yard. My father's study door is ajar, [...]. There is no sound from his study.* Then my mind fades to black. *All the Karoo years long the spooled images lay in a far dark zone of my mind: latent with memory, yet undeveloped.* Now the images float out of the dark into a lagoon of consciousness: [...] *My father's gaping eyes. His blood pooling glutinously as sump oil around his head,*

across the desk, tinging the typed pages of his unfinished novel.
(195f.)⁸⁴

Douglas is capable of transforming his traumatic memories into narrative ones. Hence, he is able to give a narrative account of the night's events. Then, the novel ends with another flashback, Douglas' déjà-vu of presenting his father's ashes to the sea, from where he actually started his last journey and sailed up the coast. Douglas gives his orange coral seeds back to the sea too, his lucky charm having accompanied him for the last four years. It seems as if Douglas has finally forgiven his father and made peace with himself:

- Hey dad. It was fate. It wasn't your fault.
- My boy, I know. But a hard fate to ride, hey?
He laughs a bitter, lonely laugh. (133f.)

Douglas still loves his father that much that he decides to follow his career and start off, maybe, as a coffee boy "[...] the way my father began." (196). Consequently, Douglas does not only inherit and take over his father's social function within the family, but his professional position as well. Probably this is Douglas' way of coping with his lost father, trying to preserve it that way. Moreover, it seems that his father has been more important for him than his brother. Dee is able to cope quite quickly with Marsden's death, to find words and talk about the accident in every detail, whereas the loss of his father seems to be too hard to bear. This is either due to the fact that Douglas loves his father more than his brother, or that two dead family members simply overwhelm the young boy. Therefore, Douglas' mind shuts up, trying to protect him from these unbearable memories. In the course of the novel, the reader gets little pieces of information that, in the end, reveal and complete the tragic jigsaw.

The last point to conclude the analysis concerns Douglas' docile submission to fate. His mother 'hijacks' him from Cape Town and forces him to live in this dead spot. Despite the whole bunch of new responsibilities, tasks, bonds and challenges forced upon him, he never seems to develop feelings

⁸⁴ Emphasis added.

of bitterness or hatred towards his mother. He never acts stubbornly or defiantly, but rather behaves obediently and dutifully. For a boy in his teenage years such a behavior is admirable, so as not to say implausible. "Douglas is more observant than introspective. He has frequent flashbacks, but he does not dwell on his misfortune."⁸⁵ Throughout the novel the reader only once encounters a slightly wrathful Douglas, when he says "I feel a pang of bitterness towards my mother for landing me in this backveld dorp where the boys and girls smell the sea in me the way wild birds smell the tameness in freed cagebirds." (63) This pang of bitterness is all he allows himself. Although *Karoo Boy* is a wonderful piece of literature, a whiff of criticism has to be permitted. Thus, Brenn Jones concludes that:

Karoo Boy is a scintillating yet incomplete novel. His [Douglas] adaptation is admirable, but the void of his own grieving is never resolved. With such forces hoisted upon the adolescent narrator, and with such attention that his parents pay simply to their own grieving, a little rage might have been in order.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ See Brenn, Jones 2005. *Coming of age in the extremes of South Africa*.

⁸⁶ See Brenn, Jones 2005. *Coming of age in the extremes of South Africa*.

5. Susan Mann: *One Tongue Singing*

The second novel analyzed has won its author international reputation and several literary awards. Though the novel shares certain themes with other stories examined, *One Tongue Singing* portrays trauma from a different angle. The novel features a highly interesting structure, leaving sufficient space for the readers' own interpretation, presents difficult as well as stunning characters and confronts the audience with forms of trauma that, unfortunately, threatened and determined South Africans' lives at that time. The novel introduces the audience to problems of South Africans, blows of fate they have to face, resulting in the troubled lives of the characters.

The analysis starts with the deconstruction of the characters, trying to come to terms with the underlying traumatization, the way it emerges and how characters try to cope with it. After attention is paid to assessing the structure of the novel, the implications of the traumatic experience and ways the narrative mirrors the traumatic memory, the analysis concludes with the investigation of themes the narrative addresses.

5.1 Deconstruction of characters

The novel is set in the closing years of Apartheid, telling the story of Camille Pascal and her daughter Zara. Being of French descent, they come to South Africa to make a new start among a wine-growing community. The analysis of the protagonist, definitely the most interesting and challenging individual of the novel, is followed by a close-up of the second stunning character, Jake Coleman.

5.1.1 A picture paints a thousand words: Zara Pascal

Have a look at that face for yourself. Have a look at those eyes. They are the emptied out eyes of the living dead. *There is no memory there.*⁸⁷ (225)

Although the novel has one main protagonist, the narrative introduces two seemingly different persons, sharing only the same name: a young and

⁸⁷ Emphasis added.

innocent child, open-minded, naive, unharmed by the violent world around her; and then, a young woman: distorted and withdrawn, having gone through hell on earth. Her character has been described flat⁸⁸ as she seemingly does not develop along the narrative. However, it is definitely her silence and taciturnity that speaks more than a thousand words. Zara is an example par excellence of the ways traumatic experience can be mirrored in a literary character. Throughout the novel, Zara has some mystic and stunning traits. Her complex character, as well as the absence of detailed information about her, pose a challenging task to the exploration and deconstruction of her character.

When the narrative unfolds, the audience is introduced to a girl whose world seems to be uncomplicated. As the plot proceeds, it reveals a young woman inhabiting her own world, cut off from her surroundings. She refuses, or rather does not care about talking to her fellows and avoids any kind of social contact with the world around her. Painting is the only obsession that she passionately embarks on, “[...] creating worlds of wonder, worlds of terror.” (51)⁸⁹ Zara inhabits a world where crayons and canvas are the only residents. After witnessing the slaughter of her mother, she tries to come to terms with this loss, her isolation and her disturbed conception of the world.

Those parts of the narrative that take the reader to Zara’s childhood days tell the story of a six-year-old girl, growing up in an unfamiliar surrounding. Zara’s mother, Camille Pascal, decides to move to South Africa’s wine growing region. When the narration starts, they have already lived there for five years. She and her daughter have to adapt to and cope with a new country, new customs, a new language, new friends as well as ‘different’ people. Undoubtedly, this is a difficult task for a young girl that has ever since stood out from the crowd.

Despite Zara’s present state, the reader is given some information about her childhood days as well; Camille tells her colored neighbor, Leah September, the mother of one of Zara’s few friends, Blom, what it has been like to raise

⁸⁸ Mengel *The Living Dead*, 1; all quotations from this interview are abbreviated LD. A transcript of this interview, *The Living Dead*, is provided in the appendix.

⁸⁹ All references to Susan Mann’s *One Tongue Singing* (2004) are solely referred to by page numbers.

up her daughter. Since her birth, Zara has definitely stood out from the crowd. Even her school-time is troubled from the very beginning. “[W]hat Zara did understand soon enough [...] was that she was excluded. [...] while the other children [...] would play [...] she would sit cross legged, drawing” (48). In school she is taunted and mocked by her classmates. Offending and frank as children can be, they tease and mock her, yelling “You have no dad [...]. [...] you’re a bastard.” Moreover, a teacher tells Camille that “[y]our child has interactive problems. [...] She does not mix with other children. Refuses to participate. And is blatantly disobedient” (50). Consequently, Camille takes her daughter out of school for good, isolating her even more. “She had stayed with her mother, and her grandfather, and her dog, and her world of make-believe and animals [...]” (51).

Being the product of an affair dating back to France, Zara grows up without her father. The only male person she is closely attached to is her grandfather (Camille’s father), joining and supporting his family in their new home country. Zara neither seems to depend on friends nor is she keen on making new ones: “I want a fairy, not a friend.” (59) She does not attend school any longer, rarely comes to meet other children and lives pretty isolated on the farm. Consequently, the only person to cling to is her mother, a circumstance that deepens the bond between mother and daughter ever more. “She [Camille] has never quite understood why Zara, usually so quiet, gets so excited, so abundantly relieved to see her, when she has been away only for a few minutes. [...] there will be a great reunion; all arms and legs and dog before silence and detachment return” (92). They spend every possible second together and share the same bed nearly every night. Since Zara is a girl who has a strong yet difficult personality, Camille seems to be over-protectively caring and worrying. Being without her daughter is an unbearable condition to her. Every time Camille has to go places without her daughter, e.g. to meetings or frequent dates, her thoughts steadily circle around Zara’s well-being. In a way she acts exaggeratedly, being somehow over-protective. “How would she ever survive the force of the world without any skin?” (47) Certainly, this close relationship has far-reaching implications and crucially adds to Zara’s trauma after the homicide of her mother.

Zara's childhood character is regularly plagued by nightmares. Most often these dreams deal with animals: "But the worst was always if she had seen a dead animal that day. [...] This seemed to break her heart as though she had lost a family member." (47) Camille has to admit to herself to be partly responsible for her daughter's nightmares since "[s]he had started to realize [to] be very careful which stories she read Zara; her identification with the story was so marked that she often could not sleep for fear" (47). Zara's imaginative forces are very strong and reflected in her paintings and drawings: "' You draw like that without a model?' [...] 'I have a model.' 'Where?' 'My dreams.'" [113] As discussed later on, her paintings serve as the mirror of her soul, revealing what her mind refuses to tell verbally: "She drew death without understanding what it really meant [...] her eyes dark and intense." (47)

Zara's taciturnity is deliberately stressed by her muteness. "Zara has been a paradox since she was born. She did not speak a word for the first three and a half years. [...] and then one day [...] she looked up [and] asked, 'Where are my colours?'" (51). From her earliest years on, Zara has not participated or taken interest in the world as other children do. As things seemingly cannot get worse, the traumatic event she has to experience abducts her even deeper into her world, resulting in the young woman that is registered in Jake Coleman's school of art, referred to in the second strand of the narrative.⁹⁰

This second strand the novel opens with introduces the reader to the present South Africa⁹¹. Zara has become a young woman of about twenty. Her grandfather announces her at Jake's school, where her adult character is introduced for the first time:

She simply stands there [...] gazing out into space. [...] Then slowly, as if in a dream, she turns and faces him. [...] It is a woman, unkempt, young. [...] Her eyes, big and black, are *completely opaque*. She has long hair, dark and matted, that falls to her waist. With her pale skin, *hollowed-out eyes* and angular features she reminds him of a rather grubby ghost. [...] She

⁹⁰ See chapter 5.2.

⁹¹ The story is set in 2001.

neither speaks nor smiles. [...] she appears to be looking straight *through* him, as though he did not exist. (21)⁹²

When the narrative proceeds, the reader is fed with bits and pieces describing Zara's behavior, her looks, her youth, her social surroundings, her outstanding giftedness as well as her weaknesses. The moment Zara's grown-up character is introduced, the reader undoubtedly recognizes that somehow she is different. Compared to her childhood days, her muteness has increased, or worsened, a lot. She appears to be shy, remote, cut off from the everyday world. While, on the one hand, this silence conceals a lot of information to the reader, on the other hand

[t]here is quite a lot in her silence; she says a lot with her silence. [...] it would have been completely [...] psychologically incorrect if she had been overbearingly chatty. [...] It just would not have tied in somebody with her depth. [...] verbal communication is only one way of communicating and Zara does this through her paintings. [...] You could almost call her autistic, but in her way she still manages to communicate with the world, she just doesn't do it verbally. (LD, 2f.)

Although Zara seems to have been "stunned into silence" (LD, 2) by a traumatic experience, this silence still conveys plenty of information. It is only transmitted through a different channel: her art. Since her youth, the only thing that has not changed is her affection and enthusiasm for drawing and painting. Unfortunately, the subjects of her drawings have not changed. On the contrary, her state of shock seems to have stunned her into a world that is preoccupied with death, a world that lies somewhere in between life and death.⁹³ Zara's obsession with animals is one of her most outstanding characteristics. All her paintings deal with and represent animals of any kind in grotesque, violent and brutal scenes:

In years to come this will remain one of the most significant points in his memory. [...] the raw intensity of her pieces [is] so powerful that they bypass the critical faculties, penetrating something dark within like a flaming arrow. Each painting is of an animal in savage attack. In each painting an animal has been killed or is doing the killing. It is as though she has painted the first

⁹² Emphasis added.

⁹³ Compare LD, 2f.

convulsive shock of death from the inside, the movement of the musculature, the gleam of blood and teeth and claws, the raging mix of elation and *terror* in their eyes. [...] He would never forget a single one of them. [...] The relationship between this *expressionless young woman* and the *raw violence of her art* is quite beyond him.⁹⁴ (22)

Though paintings of Zara's childhood days feature animals as well, the only difference to her later paintings is the violent portrayal of the animals. As a child, Zara used to create pictures without blood, teeth, clenches etc. This seems to have changed after her mother's death. From that day on, violence and cruelty are her drawings' dominating themes.

Referring to *Karoo Boy*, Douglas is incapable of remembering his father's death. In *One Tongue Singing*, it is not quite clear whether Zara can remember that night or not. Here is a major difference between the novels' traumatic structure: Douglas' narrative is more or less made up of his memory. There is so much information the reader can grasp from it that it becomes self-explanatory. *One Tongue Singing* on the other hand is far more cryptic. There are hardly any memories or flashbacks that give information about the protagonist. Most details have to be encrypted from between the narrative's lines, making the novel pulsating and exciting up to the last page. Due to the overwhelming shock of that night, Douglas is incapable of remembering his father's suicide. Zara rarely talks about the past nor does she spend any thoughts on it. Since she is such an intrusive character, it is hard to tell whether she is able to remember. Zara recounts her mother's death only three times along the narrative. Twice while talking to Jake, and once at the end of the novel, in hospital. Though she assures Jake not to know how her mother died (c.f. 114f.), it is quite possible that she does remember, exclusively transferring her memory into her paintings. The question arises whether Zara is 'only' unable to talk about it. When the novel closes, the traumatic memory drips into her consciousness (as in *Karoo Boy*). This process is launched by a specific memory, a picture in Zara's mind that is reactivated thus urging her mind to remember. When

⁹⁴ Emphasis added.

Jake compels her to abort, to kill her child, a memory is triggered off that prompts her to keep her baby:

[...] Zara can see the shiny implement the gynaecologist is holding out of the corner of her eye, as sharp and clear as the memory that gathers momentum inside her. *The knife. Her mother. Blood.* As he tries to insert it into her, from the depths of her silence rips a primeval scream.'[...]! I say *no. Leave my baby!*' (224)

The doctor holding his medical instrument, ready to insert it into her, reminds Zara of the knife her mother was killed with and her last words: "Leave my baby, for God's sake leave my baby!" (224)⁹⁵ Therefore it is clear that she can (at least partly) recall the incident. This time it is her baby that is to be killed. For the first time, Zara talks about the death of her mother to another person: "My mother died [...] She was murdered. It will never be okay." (227) Again, it is Peter who comes to find and save her, as back then when he found her in the mountains. Commenting on Zara's terrible constitution, even the nurse of the hospital says "Something in that face of hers. I don't know, Doctor. Terrible pain. [...] Did you see her eyes?" (228) Zara's eyes and their emotionless expression are commented on several times along the novel. If it is true that the eyes are the mirror of the soul, then Zara seems to be internally dead. Not only her grandfather or the hospital nurse are shocked about her expressionless gaze, Jake as well notices its numbness: "Her face is still very young [...]. But her eyes are not the eyes of a young woman. There is nothing of innocence in them. No naivety. They tell you nothing; give nothing away." (23) Indeed, her grandfather's expression, describing her eyes as "the living dead", is the proper depiction of her mental state. Bearing in mind the violent death of her mother, the horrible, terrifying scene that Zara has to witness, it is no wonder that she suffers from a severe traumatization:

[...] the intruder lunges at Maman with the knife. Only time enough for her to shout: 'Run, Zara. Run!' before he starts stabbing her repeatedly in the head and chest. When he turns to Zara, she has fled. A blood-flecked speck, running as fast as she can into the mountains. (225)

⁹⁵ Emphasis added.

Zara is indeed a character the reader has to sympathize with. She grows up without her father, witnesses the slaughter of her mother, has actually no friends and, moreover, loses her grandfather, the last person of her family she knows. As a matter of fact, such events have to leave deepest bruises and scars on a person's mind and soul. Bruises and scars that might never entirely heal.

5.1.1.1 Making sense of the senseless

In the course of the preparation of an international conference on South African contemporary fiction, dealing with the representation of trauma, memory and narrative⁹⁶, the organizer of the conference, Univ. Prof. DDr. Ewald Mengel, had the opportunity to interview the author Susan Mann about her fiction, especially about her novels *One Tongue Singing* and *Quarter Tones*. This interview⁹⁷, published in 2010, raises questions of highest interest concerning the dealing with traumatic memories.

Trauma theory states that giving/transforming traumatic memory into (any) kind of narrative is a crucial means for an individual's cure. Yet, traumatic memories can only be processed and coped with if the person tries to find meaning and sense in them. If this thought is spun out further, the resulting difficulty is of universal importance for trauma treatment. Relating to the case of Zara, the cardinal question to answer is: how can trauma be treated if there is *no* meaning to make out of a traumatic experience? Can any sense be found in a violent act of murder? When people get killed as a consequence of their political struggle, for freedom and their rights (to name but a few), these killings in a way do make sense. For example, the death of Steve Biko had crucial implications on the whole political landscape of South Africa, becoming a symbol of the resistance movement. In the aftermath one could argue that his death was not in vain. But, apart from such outstanding examples, what about the thousands of killings and murders that had no motivation, no reason; homicides like that of the protagonist's mother? Zara's obsession mirrors this insidious circumstance. Her paintings are her means to cope with the trauma. Being totally absorbed in her world, Zara

⁹⁶ For detailed information see <http://anglistik.univie.ac.at/research-projects/sanovel/> (31.7.2009).

⁹⁷ Compare footnote 87.

paints the same motifs over and over again. She does not change the subject of her pictures but keeps painting her violent scenes for over fourteen years. Whether these paintings are a meaningful device to get over her memories or if they merely worsen her condition, raises a difficult discussion. As mentioned above, Zara uses her paintings to express her grief, anger, despair, hope and other feelings. She may look for salvation, understanding and meaning through painting. Yet, her strong, powerful and intense art does not liberate her. On the contrary, Zara seems to be possessed or even haunted by her paintings.

Focusing on the question of possession and obsession, Mann states that Zara may be (and quite surely is) possessed by her traumatic memory and therefore cannot stop painting specific motifs. Consequently, her possession results in an obsession. Unfortunately, it is an obsession with death and violence being her means to find any sense in her mother's death. But since there is no sense in a violent and barbarous murder, Zara is stuck in this vicious circle:

If she is possessed by anything, it is the memory of the trauma that she witnessed, which would lead to a kind of [...] obsession with death and a perpetual attempt to engage with death, to almost find some kind of redemption for what she witnessed, some kind of understanding so that she can do what she will never be able to do, which is to make sense of it, because there isn't any sense to make out of it. (*LD*, 4)

Zara's possession and her resulting obsession with traumatic memory, consequently perpetuating it, may never bring cure to her traumatized soul:

The traces of unresolved past events, or the ghosts of those who died *too suddenly* and *violently* to be properly *mourned*, possess those who are seeking to get on with the task of living.⁹⁸ (Whitehead, 6)

⁹⁸ Emphasis added.

Until the end of the novel, her character as well as her paintings do not change. Only the last painting that is exhibited at the gallery is different. Its motif, as well as its name and description, are quite peculiar:

Her first self-portrait. In it, her eyes are closed, her lips are parted. Black blood drips from her mouth. [...] 'It's called *Innocence*.' [...] 'Innocence is black, not white. [...] White is a negation. It is not a colour, just a reflection. It does not exist. Within black, there is every colour. What you call innocence is simply a state of unknowing. Naivety. What I call innocence embraces all of life's colours, and celebrates it.' (199)

For the first time, Zara changes the motif of her paintings, creating a portrait. Whether the painting is a self-portrait or the portrait of Zara's mother is quite unclear. Despite Zara's surname on the painting, Matyas instantly seems to recognize the face in the picture. It is possible that Zara's last painting shows her mother and not herself as Jake suspects. If that is true, Zara may have entered the next level: she is able to change the subject of her painting, still quite peculiar and morbid, but not as violent as the 'animal-killing-motifs'. Moreover, when her pregnancy is about to be terminated, she manages to verbalize her mother's death for the first time. These two incidents suggest that Zara may be on the way to salvation and will be able to cope with her trauma at an undetermined time.

Concerning Zara's future, the reader is left in the dark. Whether her art does help her or not, if she is finally able to come over her trauma, if her life proceeds in its 'ordinary' path or Matyas discloses his relationship and care for her? It is completely up to the readers' imagination to think of what may become of Zara.

5.1.2 Jake Coleman

When the narrative unfolds, the reader is introduced to Jake Coleman, a womanizing painter who is severely stuck within a midlife crisis or even worse. Although the story of Jake Coleman is prominent throughout the whole novel, his character seems minor and less attractive than Zara's. Jake is rather meant to introduce the reader to the main protagonist's life and fate, to fit Zara's trauma into a narrative frame in the present narration.

Nevertheless, Jake Coleman is a character that somehow is not easy to interpret and understand. Although he has gained (inter)national reputation as an artist, is quite well off, has founded a school of art, has a wife and an affair as well, he is not content with life. Jake is the opposite of Zara. While she inhabits her little world and does not pay attention to things like money, glamour, reputation, esteem or prestige, Jake's life abounds with these affairs. Despite everything he has achieved in life he is in a state of total desperation.

Jake does not suffer from a traumatic experience the way Zara does. In his case it is rather a deeply rooted fear of failure. Jake advances to become a pitiable figure as the plot develops. He is one of those persons who are unable to enjoy their lives though they have everything. His inability to love and cling to a person is depicted several times: he is already divorced when he meets Maria and marries her; during his marriage he has an affair with his secretary, Trudy. All matters worsen and get severely troubled the day Zara enters his life: the mysterious young girl, incredibly gifted and highly creative. Zara's talent massively worsens Jake's creative crisis. There is nothing that he can teach her to improve her art. Somehow Jake is truly envious of her, since her outstanding giftedness outclasses his paintings and creative potential by far. Despite Zara's talent, the reader may ask why Jake feels attracted to her? The narrative does not beautify her looks when introducing and describing her. Eventually, Zara's mysterious, cryptic behavior unleashes the predator within Jake, whose one and only aim is to hunt down his prey.

In a way, one could argue that Jake's numerous attempts to get close to Zara, to attract her and to absorb her have a traumatizing effect on his person. Whenever Zara is around him, when he sees her or listens to her, his mind goes crazy for reasons he does not even know himself. As a consequence of his situation, the love triangle he is captured in, he suffers several mental breakdowns, anxiety as well as panic attacks. These attacks hint at a kind of traumatization, since for other reasons he would not suffer from feelings of anxiety, fear or panic, not even definitely knowing why. As a consequence, Jake is on the brink of madness, losing his mind if he cannot

get hold of Zara: "Perhaps if he cannot elicit love, he can at least provoke fear." (218) Like Zara, Jake is obsessed by feelings and emotions, not resting until he gets what he wants. Unfortunately, his obsession has severe consequences as Zara gets pregnant.

The narrative mirrors Jake's obsession by using loads of repetitions. His mind repeatedly circles around the same thoughts and emotions. Every time he faces Zara he acts as under hypnosis, his brain seemingly turned off. His obsession is another means to portray his critical state. When Zara does not show up in school his mind goes crazy. The fear she might never return starts to govern his thoughts. He even drives home to her, the seemingly nowhere, just to comfort himself and calm down.

Jake's numerous affairs are another repetitive means to show his relationship problems. When Trudy quits her secretary job, an agency sends a new one across. The moments she is introduced, the reader immediately recognizes that he may have an affair with her as well. After all these events, it seems as if Jake is unable to learn from the consequences of his actions. He is not able to master his crisis and create new paintings; he even needs to take a sabbatical to refuel his batteries.

The open ending does not provide information about Jake's future. The reader does not know if he will care for the baby and Zara. After his last talk to Maria it is not quite clear if they separate or not. Though Jake mentions that he misses her, their conversation does not seem to reconcile them, particularly since Maria already grabs her QM 2⁹⁹ tickets. Hence, Jake is the one who seems to lose everything in the end, personally and professionally: Maria looks forward to a long journey, Trudy is off forever, his secret obsession, Zara, returns to her world, and his creative potential does not seem to have recovered yet. Jake's story more or less mocks the life and fate of Zara: while she has to go through disastrous experiences fate has in stock for her, it is Jake who 'voluntarily' destroys his yet perfect world.

⁹⁹ QM 2, short for the Ocean Liner Queen Mary 2.

5.2 Narrative structure

The rise of trauma theory has provided novelists with new ways of conceptualising trauma and has shifted attention away from the question of what is remembered of the past to how and why it is remembered. (Whitehead, 3)

The transformation of traumatic experience into a written narrative is one of the major tasks of literary creators. But, trauma is made up of an experience or memory that overwhelms the individual and consequently resists its representation. The question to answer is, how can such experiences be translated into a narrative form, especially fiction?¹⁰⁰ Traumatic experience is something that is outside of time and place, beyond imagination, simply lacking any consistent form and structure, whereas every narrative requires a linearity.¹⁰¹ The narrative structure is a key element to come to terms with the characters' traumatic experience. Hence, authors seek and need to adapt specific forms to convey it, to incorporate the traumatic memory into the narrative structure. Mann's novel features a striking narrative form, enabling the readers to immerse themselves into the deepest spheres of trauma. The following paragraphs hint at general ways that can solve the questions raised, exploring methods of their application in the novel discussed.

5.2.1 The structural framework

Basically, the novel consists of a Part I, containing 18 chapters, and Part II, comprising 7 chapters. Part I can be further sub-divided into two narrative strands that constantly alter between the present and a past narrative. The first storyline within Part I dates back to Zara's childhood days, unfolding the day she meets a young girl, her neighbor Blom September. The second plot-line covers the present narration. It tells the story of the artist Jake Coleman, whose life gets interwoven with that of Zara the day she starts attending his school. These eighteen chapters of Part I persistently alter between the present and the past narrative, operating like an 'arrow' towards the climax of the novel. The two timelines step by step reveal the protagonists' fears,

¹⁰⁰ See Whitehead, 3f.

¹⁰¹ See LD, 1.

thoughts and traumatic experiences. The interaction of past and present seems to be a most suitable feature to represent traumatic memory within a narrative. As the author pointed out, “Zara’s past is present and presence.” (LD, 1) Unfortunately, traumatic memory may steadily intrude into individuals’ present, hence making the past the person’s present.¹⁰²

The shorter Part II contains only seven chapters. From now on, the time-line of the single chapters is linear, all focusing on the present narration. Part I is merely used to introduce the characters’ background and troubles, to forebode the underlying traumatization. The two time-lines of part I support each other and prepare the reader for Part II. There, the audience is overwhelmed by the shocking traumatizing event as well as other characters’ blows of fate. This striking structure, the irruption of timelines within the narrative and, consequently, the intrusion of (traumatic) memory into the present, mirrors Freud’s concept of deferred action, belatedness or ‘latency’, describing “a complex and ambiguous temporal trajectory” (Whitehead, 6). Caruth also states that narratives that feature interwoven time-lines are a means to depart from the “conventional linear sequence” and may convey a kind of “possession or haunting” (Whitehead, 6). As this narrative model finds application in Mann’s novel, it underlines the protagonist’s trauma. Hence, a form that departs from the linear structure, merging past and present into one state, is a major narrative feature to represent the chaotic nature of traumatic memory.

The author opens her novel with the description of a six-year-old girl, running away in intense horror and fear. What she tries to escape from and why is yet not disclosed to the reader. Mann starts the narrative with an exposition that relates to dreadful emotions of anxiety and distraction. It is the only foreshadowing to the key element of the novel. Hence, the opening page is the first clue to the traumatic experience of a young girl. In the course of reading, or maybe even after finishing the novel, the audience is well aware that the exposition refers to Zara. It depicts the protagonist,

¹⁰² Of course, the stress here is on traumatic memory becoming the present, since every person has and needs a past that principally constitutes an individual and sets up their life-narrative.

running away in intense horror after witnessing the barbarous murdering of her mother:

SHE IS RUNNING. [...] dress torn and filthy [...]. Her face a mucousy mess. [...] thorns tear at her skin. [...] *An animal screams*. She does not stop for a second. *Does not utter a sound*. [...] For hours she has been running, faster and faster. Into the jaws of the mountain; into the arms of the night. She is six years old. Just six years old. (4)¹⁰³

The opening paragraph provides two important clues about Zara's later behavior: first, while she is running, she can hear the scream of an animal. Since Zara seems to run in total numbness and muteness, the cry of the animal may represent Zara's crying soul. This would explain her affection for painting animals. Her art metaphorically expresses her innermost feelings, recounting, enduring and suffering from that night over and over, her soul crying out ear-splittingly loud, yet in vain, as it cannot be heard. The second feature concerns her taciturnity. Extreme experiences of horror or shock may lead to a person's aglossia, their speechlessness or muteness. While trauma does not only deprive a person of the words to disclose their memory, it may affect the psycho-social behavior as well. As mentioned in chapter 5.1, Zara's behavior is quite peculiar: e.g. she does not speak a single word until she is three and a half (a feature that only slightly and slowly improves while she grows older). Those parts of the narrative that recount scenes she spends with her mother appear quite 'normal'. And then, there is this experience that shatters everything, muting the six-year-old girl forever. Zara's memory is muted inside her mind, her interaction with the world frozen. The shock of her mother's death has silenced her. Art is left as the only device of communication.

5.2.2 Art as the mirror of the soul

In *One Tongue Singing*, art is a key element to reveal traumatic memory. In chapter three (18-23), the reader comes across a definition, an explanation of the potential of art, especially paintings. Jake Coleman discusses the potential and nature of art with his students. It can reveal more about a

¹⁰³ Emphasis added.

person's character than words may ever do. The artist's feelings, desires and emotions are portrayed in the picture, sometimes even unconsciously, granting the spectator a glance at their soul. Hence art

[can] bridge across the chasm of our unknowing. It is about creating our own meaning. [...] it is a journey. [...] Through medium and colour we create the texture, the flavour of an emotion. And there are often surprises on the way. Little truths that you never even knew, that find their way onto the canvas. [It is] a unique opportunity to express our own individual truth, to offer others a piece of ourselves, and sometimes themselves too. (19f.)

It is a matter of fact that language and speech have their limitations. Although mankind has invented millions of terms and expressions that try to describe universal things, words themselves have a limited potential. Literature and every other form of written discourse is made up of and therefore depends on words, in verbal as well as written discourse. It is even difficult to express or translate a specific emotion or a word into another language. There are things, feelings, thoughts or elements that cannot be simply expressed by single terms. At this point other ways of communication, other channels that can bridge the 'verbal frontier', have to be engaged to cross the threshold of imagination. *One Tongue Singing* uses the medium of art to create a narrative discourse that goes far beyond the power of words, in order to be able to descend deep down into the character's mind and soul and to express what words could never do. Art comes in when simple words fail. Mann merges these arts, written and painted discourse (resulting in their interaction), to reach an expanded level of communication: when the potential of words has been exhausted, drawings and paintings take their place, trying to present Zara's emotions on another level.¹⁰⁴

"[...], and I think that just as there are words in other languages that you can never translate, there are expressions and other nuances of feeling that can't be named, that perhaps can be expressed through one art, and not so much through the other. [...] I have full faith in the power of words, but [...] [A]t some point something like music can take over, or something like a painting [...]. (LD, 6)

¹⁰⁴ Compare LD, 6.

Besides the use of art as a structural means, Zara's pictures represent another theme. Since her paintings and drawings always feature violent occasions, they metaphorically mirror South Africa's political and social landscape, a country scarred by wars, battles and inequality. By disclosing the history and by reading the literature of this country, one encounters violence or racial conflicts nearly everywhere. Until the end of Apartheid, the country illustrated Darwin's principle of the survival of the fittest, or rather the survival of those who would stop at nothing. Zara's paintings tell stories of animals killing each other, e.g. the owl clutching the rat. In a way these pictures represent South Africa's former politics, where the white population would greedily wolf down their prey regardless of the consequences.

5.2.3 The role of the reader

According to the narrative structure, active reading and involvement of the reader are key requirements for the understanding of the novel. The reader has a crucial role to reach the resolution of the plot. The initial paragraph of the novel relates to a scene the audience will come across at the end of the narrative. Furthermore, the plot opens with the present narration, the seemingly less important second narrative string, presenting the protagonist after the traumatizing event. It takes some time until the reader finds out how to put the pieces together, revealing the effect of the traumatic structure. "The incipit is detached from the narrative and the reader is not only introduced to the leitmotif of this text, but also needs to do a constant re-piecing and remembering for the story to work." (LD, 3) Therefore, they "need to take an active role in making sense of the two plots and working it out." (LD, 4) Besides the structure, Zara's silence challenges the reader as well. It engages the reader a lot more, leaving them with more creative work as their own imagination is part of the novel's success. According to the saying 'silence is golden', it enforces a "huge creative possibility", creating a "void [...] full of potential." (LD, 6)

5.2.4 Critical voices

Although *One Tongue Singing* is an extraordinary piece of literature, its ending seems too constructed and the characters sometimes portrayed

stereotypically. The facts that after a short affair in France Matyas moves to South Africa, accidentally encounters Maria, in this way is introduced to Jake's world and, consequently, meets his daughter who in this year attends Jake's school, seems somehow quite far-fetched. Furthermore, the characters are overloaded with symbolism and meaning. The beautiful French nurse, too innocent to be aware of the menacing power of racism; Jake, the artist and seducer of women who has lost his way; his sexy, rich and successful business-wife who finally evolves and enjoys her independence. And the young: Pieter, the white boy, son of the vineyard owner, who faces his father's hostility and loves Zara without hope; Blom, the colored girl, who is also Zara's only friend and who happens to be the daughter of the same vineyard owner; all this seems just a bit too neatly tied up. Moreover, readers who enjoy novels that end with a resolution, whose endings actually do not raise more questions than the plot itself, might be left unsatisfied by this novel since a sequel is not yet planned.

5.3. Themes

One Tongue Singing feels like a quiet story, yet underneath the surface it deals with crucial themes like violence, loss, alcoholism, rape, murder, death, crime, racism, desire, betrayal and the ruptures of past and present. The following chapter presents the most imminent and recurring themes that leave the characters deeply wounded and confused within their souls.

5.3.1 Violence across the family

The September family, Camille's neighbors, is exemplarily used to show violence within the microcosm of the family. Both mother and daughter are beaten and tyrannized by the family's father who, in a drunken state, is out of control. The narrator tells of characters' bruises, scars, effusions of blood, even broken bones. Blom regularly shows up at Zara's place with bruises and scratches. At the height of violence, Goiya, Blom's father, hits his wife so hard that she collapses. Again, children have to face the immaturity and brutality of grown-ups. Blom finds her mother lying motionlessly on the floor. "Between Blom's tiny fingers the flickering light throws shadows in streaks

across the room. And then Leah, collapsed open-mouthed in a small pool of blood on the floor.” (75) Mann raises an issue affecting thousands of women and children, to critically comment on some of the reasons that cause domestic violence. Those parts of the narration that cover past events are set in a rural region where nearly every one works in the wine-production. Mann addresses the problem of alcoholism which is wide-spread across the male community:

[...] Mondays are the worst. [...] many labourers never show up to work on Mondays, never. They are too busy sleeping [the weekend] off, [...] or shouting at their families. She also learns [that] it is all too evident which women have been beaten over the weekend. (94)

The payment of the workers is the root of all evil. Instead of paying their wages with money, the white farm owners disburse their workers with bottles of wine. As a result of the workers' poor surroundings, their limited possibilities to improve their lives as well as their racial and social humiliation, many of them regularly numb themselves with alcohol. Those who have to take the blame are their wives and children. Mann uses the character of Camille, a foreigner and therefore standing 'outside', to comment on these social structures. Coming from a country where equal rights are deeply rooted in its history, Camille's ambitious goal is to change these circumstances. But soon she has to experience that the historic ethnic conflicts cannot be bridged and solved that easily. In her attempt to improve the medical supply, to set up a hospital for the workers and to do something against the imminent violence towards women, she does not only have to overcome the ruling white community's resistance, but the colored's as well. Camille has to learn that “[...] here is not like France. [...] People [...] like to keep their washing separate. Or at least when it suits them. [...] And you don't mix white with coloured washing [...]” (58).

5.3.2 Hate and envy: the legacy of Apartheid

The attitude of white people towards Blacks and Coloreds is depicted as it was during Apartheid. The minorities are characterized as a wild, violent and lazy people: “The Coloureds are a violent lot. And they drink far too much.[...]”

They're a bad lot." (80) Camille has to learn that things in South Africa are far more difficult and complex to handle than in France. Her arrival in the region causes the common chatter and uneasiness. To white people she is a stranger, without husband but a curious daughter, to the workers, she is another wealthy White to dictate and oppress them. Leah's character mirrors the jealousy and rejection Camille has to overcome. Growing up outside South Africa and being unbiased by Apartheid, Camille does not think of any consequences or troubles that could result from children, being of different ethnic origin, playing together. From Camille's point of view Leah is just another neighbor to invite and chat with. Leah's perspective is quite different. She is envious and jealous of Camille's perfect life, someone who in her eyes never had to struggle for anything.

Leah suddenly stands up. For a second she feels an urge to violate the perfection of this woman; her softness, her serenity. [...] With her little walk and her little cakes and her accent and her daughter; everything so sweet. [...] After all, hers is hardly a face that has ever had a fist through it." (61).

In this scene, total desperation and despair talk through Leah. Forced to leave District Six before it was run over by bulldozers, she moved to South Africa's wine-region. In the dullness of her daily routine she has to serve Mr. Smit and his wife, both supporting Apartheid to the bone. She and her daughter have to bear being raped. Worst of all, she wastes her life to her husband "Goiya, and I'm only twenty-something, and we get married, and he is a drunk bastard [...]." (60) Thousands of people must have felt like Leah, consequently exacerbating the country's reconciliation.

Mann does not only comment on violence caused by alcohol and despair. The Smit family is an example of violence that is racially motivated. Pieter, the son of the most powerful wine-owner of the region, has fallen for Zara since the moment of their first encounter. Several times Pieter is punished and beaten by his father and mother as they do not want him to 'mix' with 'those people': "'I've told you before, Pieter, not to mingle with *those* people. They behave like gypsies. Vagrants. And they're *dirty!*'" (99). This does not prevent Mr. Smit from raping Leah September as well as her daughter Blom.

As the reader finds out, this is the reason why Blom is sent away to the Karoo. In the end it seems as if Mr. Smit faces his just punishment: after years of beating, ruling and humiliating his son, Pieter vents his emotions. After going out with Blom his father “hisses” at him “[t]hink I brought you up to fuck Hotnots?” Seconds later, Mr. Smit “sees [Pieter] wrench a fence post free and watches in immobilized horror as the knockout whack fuelled by a *lifetime of rage* knocks him senseless against the wall.” (195) [emphasis added]

While the other characters of the novel come away with mental as well as physical bruises, Camille has to pay the highest price. As a consequence of her homicide, she undoubtedly becomes the story’s tragic hero. Nobody seems to know that she has had to master blows of fate as well. She did not come to South Africa because she was bored of France. Her death turns out to be tragic since she has always been driven by the best intentions. Being a nurse, hence an outstanding and admirable character, the only thing she has in mind is to support the people. Being honest, caring, ready to help and sincere to the core, South Africa’s cruel reality has caught up with her. In her naive belief in the goodness of man, Camille seems to underestimate the anger, the envy and hate that boil in the abyss Apartheid has created: “I have not lived here that long. But this much I do know: in this country [the murderer] could have been anybody. Nobody of any colour, shape or creed seems to escape the dry brain rot here.” (226) To help the workers is somehow a naive attempt to overcome the problems of the country by herself: “You are not going to change this place single-handedly overnight. No matter how hard you want to.” (93) The fact that she is raped and brutally killed by those she wants to save, adds a note of bitter irony. Nevertheless, it was and still is the courage and ambition of people like her who helped to reunite the nation.

Another prominent theme in South African literature is inextricably linked to the whole narrative: loss. On the one hand, the reader encounters loss caused by a person’s passing away (e.g. Zara’s mother and her grandfather). On the other hand, the novel touches on the loss of innocence, the loss of childhood or the loss and departure of parents, friends and lovers. Both

characters, Jake and Zara, somehow experience the loss of their vital spark. Zara, as her beloved mother passes away; Jake encounters the loss of his muse or the end of his ability to love. Moreover, his midlife crisis enforces feelings of his lost youth. In the end of the novel, Jake is probably the most pitiable person: he loses his wife, his secret object of desire, and his creative crisis does not seem to be over which may land him in economic difficulties as well. Above all, he is the father of Zara's unborn child and therefore responsible for her. However, what may become of the two protagonists is not ours to see.

6. Rachel Zadok: *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*

*Little fairy glowing bright,
Lead lost children through the light.*

*Home to bed they safely go,
Following your golden glow.*

*Warning comes when glowing red,
Follow then and you'll be dead.*

*Green signals a dangerous path,
For soon you'll meet Dead Rex's wrath.¹⁰⁵*

Gem Squash Tokoloshe abducts the reader into the realms of South African mythology, worlds of fairies, sprites, evil spirits and superstition, crossing and blurring the border between reality and dream. It leads its characters to the brink of madness and challenges them with questions of belief, sense of belonging and identity. Zadok's novel has won her the Whitebread First Novel Award nominee in 2005 and is not just another novel about growing up with Apartheid. It is a vivid description and a powerful evocation of a child's-eye view of rural South Africa. Attempting to come to terms with the harsh world the young protagonist inhabits, the novel raises some of the most elementary questions: who am I? Why and what do I believe (in)? Where do I belong? Zadok sets her drama of a disintegrating household against the backdrop of a changing nation and creates a tangible atmosphere of menace, loss and death. A distinct world of spirits and fairies is realistically woven into the narrative. The novel mirrors and stresses the deteriorating health of the characters, such reflecting the sick state of the farm as a consequence of centuries of atrocities. The reader encounters the protagonist first as a child and later as a young adult, trying to come to terms with her nightmares, the darkness and the spirits surrounding her. What begins like a memory of childhood years soon deepens into something much richer and more profound, taking the reader to the darkest spheres of the characters' haunted souls.

The analysis of this novel focuses on Zadok's depiction and presentation of traumatic experience. The author encounters trauma from another angle,

¹⁰⁵ All quotations from Zadok's *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* (2005) are merely indicated by page numbers.

employing an extraordinary narrative structure to incorporate the dilemma of the characters. Set in 1985, the first part of the novel covers two years in the life of the six-year-old protagonist Faith. She grows up on an isolated farm, significantly called “Legae la Morwediake” (“My Daughter’s Home”) (72), in the Northern Transvaal. Besides frequent trips to the town market, where she and her mother, Bella, sell home-grown vegetables and Bella’s paintings¹⁰⁶ to earn a living, Faith has to spend most of the time on her own. Living isolated on the farm she has no friends to talk to and nobody to play with. The only ones to keep company are her mother, her father on week-ends when returning home from his salesman job, her dog Boesman and King Elvis, her teddy bear. Nevertheless, Faith believes that they do not live alone on the farm. Invoked by tales of her mother which have influenced and terrified her until the present day, Faith deeply believes to be surrounded by fairies, good as well as evil ones. “I’d lived on the farm from the day I was born, and as long as I could remember, I’d been surrounded by fairies.” (7)¹⁰⁷ Faith, puzzled by most things happening around her, strives for understanding and tries to dodge the watchful eyes of the evil fairies in her mother’s paintings.

The life of the family seems to be a normal and happy one until the day the father leaves the family. At this point, the complication of the narrative has its start. Faith’s mother suffers a breakdown, becoming increasingly obsessed with the black African world of spirits. Faith is a resilient child with a vivid imagination, trying to absorb and get over her parents’ marital strife and her mother’s descent into madness. After a time-forward at the end of the first part of the novel the narrative re-opens about ten years later. Faith, now twenty years old, returns to the farm after her mother’s death. Under painful circumstances she faces her past, learning why her mother was incarcerated and her ghosts do not stop to haunt her.

¹⁰⁶ Actually, Bella’s paintings serve as a means to process her traumatic memories. As in *One Tongue Singing*, art is once more employed as the channel to come to terms with the past. This crucial circumstance is discussed in chapter 6.1.2.

¹⁰⁷ As discussed later on, the role of fairies greatly influences Faith’s understanding as well as view of the world, and has far reaching implications on her whole life.

6.1 Narrative structure

The narrative unfolds with a clammy, cryptic and thrilling description of the night that causes the protagonist's trauma. It is distinguished in time, point of view, mode of narration as well as style. The novel starts and ends with the evil Dead Rex, walking the earth, creeping round the house, looking for fear, pain and hate to nourish his demon soul. He is the most hostile creature in Bella's imaginative world of fairies. These initial and concluding passages differ from the main text not only on a formal level by different font type, but stylistically and grammatically as well. They are told in the 'strange tongues' of the fairies, written in grammatically broken, short, fragmented, shattered and distorted sentences. These two chapters are full of terms describing hate, anger, grief, violence or despair. The broken grammatical structures mask the bleak and terrible events simmering underneath each word. The beginning creates an atmosphere of foreboding and anticipation, thrilling the reader to the bone. The prologue is cryptic and does not make any sense at all as the reader is not yet introduced to the sprites or the characters. But, undoubtedly, this initial section conveys something evil.

Faith, the young protagonist, firmly believes in the realm of fairies, making her the perfect prey for the fiendish demons. One night, she is woken by the evil Dead Rex: "[...] he [Dead Rex] like mosetsana¹⁰⁸, she still be pure, blank canvas, torment not yet painted on her soul." In a trance-like state, Faith wanders through the house, backdoors to Nomsa's shack. There she witnesses the shocking scene: "[...] Dead Rex feel mosetsana panic, feel mosetsana pain, feel fear, feel confusion. Her soul scream what her body hold frozen." (2f.) The narrative hints at crying and moaning voices, screams, fear and panic. As the reader finds out later, the prologue eerily recounts the night of Nomsa's rape and her death, through the eyes of the creature. The full meaning of the initial passage unfolds as the story progresses and keeps the reader guessing about what reality is hiding behind the curtain of the magic world. The novel's outset sends icy shivers down the reader's spine and keeps them guessing all the way until the uneven pieces finally come to

¹⁰⁸ "Mosetsana" (Northern Sotho/Tswana), transl. "girl".

(<http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/translation/Sotho+%2528Northern%2529/mosetsana>).

fit together. After the introduction, used as a means to forebode and create suspense, the actual plot unfolds, until the final passage reemploys the narrative code the novel has started with, ending it with a surprising twist.

The whole narrative is divided into two parts. They do not only differ in terms of the protagonist's age and setting, but in their mode of narration as well. The first part is set in Faith's childhood days, a time she is still innocent, naive and confiding. After Nomsa's death and her mother's incarceration, Faith is forced to leave the farm to find a new home in Johannesburg. It is there, at the age of twenty, that she is urged to confront her past. The first part is written in past tense. Consequently it is the narrative account of the grown-up protagonist from some point outside the narrative action. Then, the first person present tense of the second part draws the reader in and faces them with a young woman who is near a mental breakdown. After the resolution, when Faith has finally found out the truth, she becomes an utmost pitiable person.

The narrative structure of this novel shares some common features with *One Tongue Singing*: the traumatizing action does not occur right at the beginning, like in *Karoo Boy*, but is anticipated by a 'preface' that hints at some violent action. The prologue is followed by a narrative that is split in two parts: while one dates back to childhood, the other presents the adult character who suffers from the remnants of the past. The narration of the first part is linear and coherent. The audience is granted a look at about two years in Faith's youth, learning about the family's life just when things start getting troubled. Since the first part as a whole covers the past as well as memories of the protagonist, it could also be distinguished as one long coherent flashback.

While the rhythm of the book starts at a normal pace, it seems to keep on getting faster as the novel proceeds, especially in the second part. Faith's present narration of part two features more irregularities in its timeline. Time goes by faster and faster, each day recounting the protagonist's inner struggle. Faith's narration gets distorted by nightmares and flashbacks, both means to forebode the conclusion and to stress the traumatic memory that

starts to infiltrate her mind. Dreams and nightmares are the author's stylistic features to incorporate the traumatic experience into the narrative. Faith's nightmares vanish when she moves to Mia in Johannesburg. For nearly a decade her sleep is not plagued by ghosts or evil spirits. Then, with the death of her mother:

[...] the nightmares have started again. I can feel it when I wake up, the sense of futility, that there is nothing to live for, that everything is lost. [...] The remnants of the dreams are like those ghosts, tantalizing images that slip away before I have time to fully grasp them. I haven't had the nightmares in years. Perhaps Mother's causing them from the grave, unwilling to be forgotten and left to be rot. The thought chills me. (187)

Faith's past immediately catches up with her. She is haunted by it, somehow plagued by remorse and guilt. Unfortunately, she cannot explain why. Faith's nightmares only occur frequently along the narrative. Though she believes to have nightmares, they actually are her memories that in the form of nightmares come to her mind. Due to her traumatization, the memory has vanished, only coming up as intrusive thoughts "[...] plagued by violent nightmares, nightmares that left me feeling terrified yet unable to remember anything about them." (181) Faith's recurring dreams are masterfully integrated into the narrative structure. Her dreams are the only clues about the tragic night. Since her mother is declared insane, Nomsa dead and Oom Piet reasonably unwilling to tell her anything, Faith has to unravel the night's devastating events on her own. The reader is forced to read in between the lines and to look out for the smallest detail. The bruise on Faith's shoulder is the first hint the narrative reveals. It is the morning following Nomsa's death when Faith remembers:

I awoke with a start, my heart pounding. I'd been having a nightmare, but I couldn't remember what it was. [...] I felt sick, and before I could stop myself I vomited on my bed. The heaving sent a sharp bolt of pain through my shoulder and down my back, making me cry out in a strange strangled voice I'd never heard before. [...] I was scared, confused, but I didn't know why." (166)

Deep down inside she knows what she has done; that she has caused a chain of events that is to change her life sustainably. The reader has to

wonder where her bruise comes from. Maybe she has fallen out of bed, as her mother suggests. At this point, the audience is on the same level of knowledge as the seven year old traumatized protagonist. The narrative has been neatly arranged so the reader has no need to speculate any further. Faith's mother is insane and hates Nomsa from the day she has entered their lives. Hence, the motif seems to be clear. In the end it is obvious that Faith's bruise has actually been caused by the rifle's recoil. But this clue is not revealed until the end of the narrative.

As mentioned previously, the use of dreams and nightmares is a prominent stylistic means to set up a traumatic narrative. Apart from nightmares, Faith's memories are equally important after her mother's death. Her present narration is regularly interwoven with childhood recollections. These memories are another feature used to project her possession onto the outside. Since she is incapable of deriving meaning, to fully grasp and understand what has happened on the farm that night, her memory unconsciously takes her back to her childhood, evoking feelings she has suppressed for a long time.

The suppression of anger, the denial to confront one's feelings, the refusal to cry for the beloved that have been lost, are another reason for Faith's inability to come to terms with her past. Therefore, the role and importance of mourning one's losses is discussed in the following.

6.1.1 Mourning the lost ones

Grandma English once told me that crying was good for you. She said that crying let out the hurt that you were feeling inside, that if you didn't let it out it would grow until it made you sick. Crying was like medicine. (148)

The characters' refusal to cry and mourn properly is another prominent feature of the novel. As cited above, mourning is a crucial means to reach inner peace, to get rid of feelings of remorse or anger as well as to close with past memories. Bella esteems crying as kind of shameful. In her eyes, crying is a sign of weakness, exposing the most inner feelings, hence being vulnerable to the outside world: "One thing you must learn my girl, is never

to cry in front of other people.’ It was a lesson Mother had drummed into me from as far back as I could remember [...].” (88) This circumstance conveys a lot about her harsh life, full of privations. With Marius being away on salesman trips, Bella spends most of her time on the farm alone and has to run it on her own. Certainly, assertiveness as well as a hard shell are necessary qualities for women who wanted to stand their ground in the South Africa of the 80ies.

Bryant-Davis outlines the necessity of mourning to face the traumatic experience. She describes it as “experiencing grief for and recognizing the losses one has endured. [...] It requires the capacity to sit with one’s feelings of sadness. This begins with an acceptance of the fact that there have been losses.” (Bryant-Davis, 94) One of the basic preconditions to recover is to face loss, to accept it and make it the trigger of mourning. Every person has their own ways of coping with loss. In the course of the novels’ analysis, various ways have been disclosed by now. Some people may flee to self-pity and shut themselves up; some may employ artistic ways to express their grief, while others may seek the dialogue to literally talk their emotions off their chest. The things the person might have lost are as manifold as the ways to cope with it: e.g. safety, health, joy, the sense of power, a relationship, one’s voice, as well as hope, trust and faith.¹⁰⁹ In order to mourn the losses, the person must be able to allow feelings of grief or sadness to the self, to confront the impact of the loss. Bella and Faith skip this stage. According to their attitude that crying and mourning are feelings to deny, they obstruct their passage to healing. “I got scared that this was my Mother’s sickness, that her crying was part of her sickness, because my real Mother didn’t cry, the Mother that was sick cried, the fairy-sick Mother cried, but not my Mother.” (127) Acknowledging the impact of trauma, hence recognizing the power one is helplessly delivered to, is indeed a painful process. Wounds need to be recognized in order to be healed. Mourning is a process that takes its time. In the course of the recovery process, there may be various moments when memories of the loss emerge, prompting the person to re-experience their grief. It is of utmost importance not to shut

¹⁰⁹ See Bryant-Davis, 94.

one's feelings off but to find a safe place, a safe home or friends to trust, to accept and face the loss. Relating to the characters' dilemma, Bella might think that she does not have the time to mourn as well. Since she is responsible for the farm and her daughter she must not waste time on feelings. The end of her relationship deeply affects and hurts Bella. Whether she allows herself to grieve now or never, the mourning needs to be done. As a consequence, she has never again found complete wholeness and recovery.

Another point Bryant-Davis comments on is the role of gender¹¹⁰. Therefore, the setting of the novel needs to be considered. Today, as society is open-minded and sophisticated (or at least seems to be), there are no societal barriers or taboos that force people to suppress their traumatic experiences. The novel comments on barriers that keep people from committing their feelings; barriers like race, ethnicity or gender related issues. Decades ago, when psychological illnesses were not granted the same (public) significance as today, people were often forced to overcome their problems on their own. Things like the breaking of relationships, rapes or unwanted pregnancies were left to the suffering persons. In the city located in the Northern Transvaal this seems to be no different. Bella even refuses to talk intimate things on the phone as she fears that the town-gossip may wiretap her calls. Moreover, since Bella is a character featuring dignity, pride and grandeur, she would never share her secrets and emotions with other people. Bella's inability to mourn affects her daughter as well. Undoubtedly, the welfare of the children should be considered a mother's (and of course parents') priority. Consequently, Bella neglects her own needs and desires to care for her family. But "[i]t is important to attend to both the children's needs and the survivor's own grief. If the survivor doesn't grieve but instead swallows her pain, her children will experience it as detachment or misplaced anger at them." (Bryant-Davis, 96) In *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*, Bella does not 'place her anger' on her daughter, but her withdrawal into her imagined world separates her ever more from Faith, evoking feelings of hate and rejection:

¹¹⁰ C.f. Bryan-Davis, 95ff.

[...] I didn't want her to touch me. I turned my face away from her, scared to breathe the air that came from her mouth. I didn't even want her tears to touch me, maybe I thought they would burn me. [...] When she'd left, I ran outside and threw up. (127ff.)

In contrast to her mother, Bella has taught herself to swallow her feelings. As mentioned afore, she believes that the expression of emotions is a sign of weakness. But the opposite is true. It requires an incredible amount of courage to face one's pain, accept the loss and mourn properly. Eventually this is Bella's weakness, her Achilles' heel. She is unable to summon the courage to face her pain. She rather escapes to her world of fairies where the blows of reality do not bother her.¹¹¹

6.1.2 South African mythology as a narrative framework

Zadok's novel is tightly woven with a traditional African element, making it a unique literary work. The novel incorporates the world of fairies, sprites, ghouls and ghosts, a world that depends on faith to come into existence. *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* takes its title from an incantation uttered by Faith to ward off the Tokoloshe, an evil spirit much feared by black South Africans. The use of a narrative framework that goes beyond the frontiers of reality is a feature that distinguishes Zadok's novel from the ones discussed so far. Her novel is an interesting, appealing and delightful read, as it challenges the imagination and seduces the reader into a cryptic and stunning world they have ceased to believe.

The title of the novel refers to a supernatural entity in African mythology. Faith believes that the Tokoloshe¹¹² lives in their cellar, lurking to steal their

¹¹¹ The reasons for Bella's pain are discussed in chapter 6.2.2.

¹¹² "Originally a water sprite, the Tokoloshe is nowadays often a domestic spirit in the households of witches and warlocks. The Tokoloshe is usually invisible to adults, but if it is seen, one should on no account annoy it by speaking to it. It can be seen by children, but fortunately is friendly towards them. The creature is mischievous, but only malevolent when controlled by an evil sorcerer. It may be caught by a skilled medicine man or witch doctor (inyanga or sangoma). Sellers of muti (traditional medicine), who may have small shops or stalls all over South Africa, often advertise and sell products used for protection against it. Belief in the Tokoloshe has spread to all races, nations and cultures in Southern Africa. In South Africa, where many white families had maidservants, they would often raise their beds by placing the legs of their beds on bricks. It was an almost universal belief, among white people, that this was to keep the occupant of the bed out of reach of the Tokoloshe". (For more information see <http://www.tokoloshe.tk>).

souls. Zadok uses this figure not only as a dramatic element, but also to address crucial historic themes. A seemingly innocent fairy tale hints at the inequalities of land-distribution and dispossession during Apartheid: "Mary told me about the Tokoloshe in our cellar. She said a witchdoctor had sent a Tokoloshe to live with us, to steal our souls while we slept. She said that the land we lived on didn't belong to us, and unless we moved and gave the land back, the Tokoloshe would stay." (20) Since the narrative comments several times on incidents caused by Apartheid, this theme is closer discussed in chapter 6.3.2. Apart from the Tokoloshe, Bella invents a complete world of fairies who have their kingdom in the orchard. Thus it becomes a thrilling and mysterious place that Faith fears as hell and does not dare to enter: "Don't go into the orchard alone. Tit Tit Tay will steal and turn you into a monkey child" (7). For some reason, the fairies Bella invents are not the kind who prance around sweetly at the bottom of the garden. There is Tit Tit Tay, who has lost all her children, Sillstream, the water fairy who haunts the reservoir and brings rain, and, the evil Dead Rex. He is the most fearful and scary figure of all, nourishing from the people's hate, fear and anger. The fairies are vividly rendered in the paintings Faith's mother creates. They decorate the interior of the farm and frighten Faith out of her wits: "I knew the fairies could hide inside Mother's paintings [...]. I ducked quickly under her [the fairy], feeling her fingers brush my back as I passed out of reach." (7ff.) The fairies' presence intensifies after Faith's father leaves. Her mother suffers a nervous breakdown and succumbs to their world. To Faith, the fairies are as real as other family members or relatives. Inspired by her mother's tales, Faith develops emotions of fear and anxiety that intensify her belief in this surreal world sustainably. "I knew they were there, hiding in the shadows, coming ever closer. Dark fairies. Dead Rex." (46) As a child she fears to be caught by the fairies, grabbing at her out of the pictures, lurking all around the house: "I knew if I tried to move they would discover me. I was afraid, Dead Rex, the Tokoloshe, Tit Tit Tay. Now, in the dark alone, I didn't want to see the fairies. I lay still, taking shallow breaths as often as I dared. My heart thumped, my breath rasped, filling the black." (25) Faith is so frightened and full of fear that she even does not dare to go to the toilet at night, hence wetting her bed. It is a matter of fact that

Faith's mother exaggerated her fairy tales way too much, not considering their effects on a young girl's mind. "That night I lay awake, watching for the Tokoloshe. Shadows slid around the room [...]. Shapes shifted, the chair twisted monster-like [...]. I pulled the sheets over my head, clutched King Elvis and said a prayer. I woke up yelling." (20f.) Zadok uses the theme of the fairy world to stress the characters' mental instability, to create a world to take refuge in, as well as to display their fears. Furthermore, it is partly responsible for the severe traumatization of Faith and may be the cause of the fatal accident too. Believing in everything she has been told by her mother, Faith blames the fairies for her mother's illness. She deeply believes that they cause her mother's increasing madness, thus fearing their dark influence and power even more. She is too young to know of the shock a divorce might leave on a person. "Suddenly everything made sense. Dead Rex had stolen mother's soul: perhaps she'd accidentally looked him in the eyes. The cold fist of fear tightened around my guts, squeezing until I thought I might vomit my stomach up." (82) As outlined in the following, the fairies are a basic element of the narrative structure and metaphorically represent various images throughout the narration.

First of all, the world of fairies is a crucial dramatic element to make the plot work, to lay a false trap and misguide the reader. When Marius leaves his wife she suffers a mental breakdown. Suffering from isolation and emotions of solitude, "We're alone, Faith [...] all alone in the world" (159), her imaginative world is the place to find hold and security in. Without her ever declining mental state the plot would not succeed, since there is the need of a motif for the shooting of Nomsa. Along the narration, the reader is informed about Bella's deepest reluctance to have Nomsa on her farm. She dislikes (not to say hates) Nomsa from the beginning. She has not been informed about the arrival of their new maid, thus feeling overruled. Apart from that, she fears the presence of a stranger would drive the fairies away: "That woman doesn't belong here. [...] She'll make the fairies leave. [...] I don't want us to be alone, Faith [...]" (75f.). Bella uses this argument several times. She hopes for Faith's support by telling her repeatedly that Nomsa's presence drives the fairies away. But, her repetitive invocations have the reverse effect on Faith. Bella's mental state scares Faith ever more, leading

her to ignore her mother. Bella's repetitive use of the same crazy arguments underlines her decreasing mental state. Everything seems to be lost when Bella's dreams manifest, making her unable to tell dream from reality. Since the reader has been informed of Bella's aversion for Nomsa, the frantic homicide perfectly fits her deteriorating behavior, leaving no doubt about her motif.¹¹³

Bella's madness is another crucial dramatic element to depict the mother-daughter conflict. With Bella descending into madness, she evokes feelings of disgust and hate that lead to their fragmentation. Without the death of the person Faith feels deepest affection for, thus depriving her of everything she has loved (her father as well), Faith would probably never have cancelled contact with her mother. "I hate you' I muttered [...] and left her at the mercy of Dead Rex." (103) As a result, Faith never had the possibility to talk with her mother about their shattered past and, consequently, the truth could have never been revealed to her. If the past had not remained a mystery, Faith would have been able to confront it, relieving her from the guilt that keeps haunting her over a decade.

The supernatural realm is a decisive dramatic means to forebode and anticipate the narrative action. As mentioned previously, the perspective of Dead Rex indicates the complicating traumatic scene. The characters' narratives, as well as their invented supernatural imaginary figures, merge up to a point that scratch the surface of schizophrenia, prompting the characters to commit deeds they cannot remember, e.g. Faith witnessing Nomsa's rape. At that point of the narrative, Faith loves Nomsa more than her mother whose mental state has decreased massively. The narrative does not focus on Faith's emotions while observing the scene, but employs the voice of Dead Rex to poison her mind and tell her what to do. The prologue unfolding the narration ends with Dead Rex insinuating Faith: "He be hurting her [...]. Hurt him back." (3) Taking this into account, Faith seems to become the personified Dead Rex. Her young age as well as her firm belief blur her vision of reality. Hence, she esteems the ghoul's voice as real,

¹¹³ Actually, this is not true. As disclosed at the end of the narrative, the reader finds out about the true happenings of this fateful night.

as her own thoughts, tempting her to take revenge on Nomsa's perpetrator. It is over a decade later that the remnants of her past slowly take shape. Still as an adult, her mother's tales are engraved so deeply that she is unable to cease believing in the mysterious world: "Sleep, unsleep, a halfway world. Look, look, mosetsana, look what you done. The voice rasps into my consciousness, malevolent and full of spite. [...] I'm not asleep, I can't be dreaming. The voice, it's too real, too clear." (201) Her traumatic memory catches up with her and is verbalized by the evil voices. Zadok uses the fairy world as the channel to incorporate the traumatic experience into the narrative. Much more, the voices resemble her traumatic memory that does not stop to haunt her as long as it is not revealed and disclosed. Whereas the reader knows that Faith is on the brink of madness and her spirits the product of her weird imagination, Faith believes those voices to be part of the real world, voices of lost ones that haunt her for reasons yet unknown.

My past life here seems shrouded in mystery. Why did I believe? And what exactly was it that I believed? What was real and what imagined? I still struggle to separate what memories are true from the ones she [mother] planted there. Even now in my mind I can see Mother's faries, [...]. I can't recall for definite ever having seen one, [...] but somehow their forms are as solid in my mind as any other real-life being who ever entered my world. (274)

Faith's increasing madness is another crucial structural means for the resolution of the plot: if she was not haunted and therefore felt the urge to confront the past, she would have never been able to overcome her trauma. Deep down inside her she can feel that the past is not as it seems, that there are decisive moments whose memories she lacks. Now, with her mother's death, she feels pangs of bitterness, emotions of remorse and grief for neglecting her mother. The truth, refusing to be locked away, intrudes her mind, casting shadows over her presence like black clouds of thunder. Faith still believes that her mother is the reason for all her losses in life. But, her yet concealed traumatic memory slowly evokes feelings telling her that some things ought to be different. Faith has not yet come to terms with the fact that her mother saved her, that all she has ever done was just for her

daughter's benefit. Faith is yet not aware that it was her who shot beloved Nomsa while her mother took the blame to protect her precious.

The following scene is another example of how Faith's traumatic memory is incorporated into the narrative. In the course of a *séance*, led by a blind witch lady, Faith experiences a surreal backflash. In a dream-like state she is taken back to the farm where she encounters her mother, accusing her daughter to have left her: "I look at mother, she can save me. [...] Mother begins to melt [...] Soon she is nothing more than wasted effigy [...]. 'Why did you send me away? My little girl, why?'" (228) Faith is trembled by feelings of sorrow and guilt as she left her mother to rot in the asylum. Now that she is dead, all chances to talk and admit her failures are lost. Engaging the theme of the fairy world once more, it is not herself who is able to overcome her feelings. Believing in the dark spirits and mysteries of a world beyond, Faith finds redemption and remission with the help of a witch doctor, trying to get the bad spirits out of her.

As the narrative closes, it employs the perspective of Dead Rex once more. Hence, the equivalent to the introductory passage, the evil voice that gets problems rolling, rings down the curtain on the narrative. The shattered evil-like narration tells of Faith, Molly and Mia, "the love circle", a family finally welded together, who have come to burn the painting Dead Rex has been trapped within for years. Finally, he is released from his 'framed' prison, free to nourish from the "hard-swollen-black", representing Faith's guilt, her sorrow, her penitence; short, her traumatic memory. The figure of Dead Rex is also used to embody Faith's traumatic memory. He has been unable to escape the painting, the frame of Faith's mind for such a long time. The witch doctor, (the *sangoma*), relieves Faith of her evil spirit, enabling her to face the past on a supernatural level. She overcomes her trauma by means of another world, within a surreal realm. Dead Rex has infiltrated her young innocent mind and heart, trying to destroy her slowly from within. Given the *muti*, the dark ghost and all the trembling memories he has planted within Faith are exorcised, thus giving piece to Faith's tormented soul and mind.

Though the reader could guess the ending of the novel, the actual events of the shocking evening are disclosed on the novel's last page, granting final certainty about the traumatizing night:

Iguana tongue tease out memories long-time buried, taste them. Taste the cold on *mosetsana's small feet*. Taste the burnt *sulphur of gunpowder on her hand*. Taste the fear in her heart and the scream of her soul when she *realize* it be *not easy to shoot straight*. Guns have life all their own [...]. (328).¹¹⁴ [emphasis added]

Finally the reader is confronted with and assured of the devastating truth. The end is truly destructive, evoking emotions of deepest pity and empathy. On the other hand, it offers a glimpse of hope since Faith is finally able to master and overcome her traumatic past, thus enabling her to lead a normal life: "Mosetsana's fear-hate be finished now. Dead Rex drop the hard shell to the ground, crush it under splayed foot into tiny bits that disperse like dust in the wind." (328)

Whereas the figure of Dead Rex does not only impersonate Faith's traumatic memory, he may further metaphorically mirror the situation of the whole nation. Zadok gives a mythological answer why violence does not cease: Dead Rex is nourished by fear and anger, consequently addicted to it. After swallowing the hate he regurgitates it further into the world where it grows. Since South Africa is a nation whose past records are filled to the brim with accounts of violence, this nation resembles his paradise. Yet, this thought need not be restricted to South Africa but may be universally applied to places that are arenas of war and inhumanities. As violence will probably never stop as long as mankind exists, there will always be enough hate and anger to nourish figures like Dead Rex, roaming and drowning the world in blood and terror.

Although Gem Squash Tokoloshe is a fascinating read, a real gem among its genre, a notion of criticism must be allowed. The whole narrative is cunningly told, the structure well woven, keeping suspense until the end. Zadok masters a narrative structure that reveals only the most necessary

¹¹⁴ My emphasis.

elements, thus keeping the conclusion of the plot a riddle until the novel's closure. Yet, Faith's grief that is healed by a stranger, a person that is not part of the narrative and does not share a single memory with her, is rather disappointing. It is unlikely that Faith finds redemption within three days and nights, rather than by redemption coming from somewhere within herself, being the result of her understanding and reprocessing her past. On the other hand, as the whole narrative is embedded in a world beyond understanding and imagination, her healing is not even that far-fetched. Since she has been poisoned by dark spirits, it seems obvious that she can only find salvation by other spiritual means. Nonetheless, the way her soul finds redemption is perhaps too easy a way to bring about reconciliation with the past.

6.2 Faith

"'You are Faith?' I nodded [...]. 'It is a lucky name'". (65)

Faith is confronted with experiences and blows of fate that make her an utmost pitiable and tragic figure. It seems as if her whole life is one big challenge. Several engraving events have not only kept her life troubled for over thirteen years, but have left her mind scarred and bruised as well. The following chapter investigates these strokes and the way they affect her traumatic memory.

Faith's life starts getting troubled the day her father abandons the family. Marius has a salesman job and comes home only on weekends. As a consequence of the events that have taken place¹¹⁵ he leaves forever. "Papa was not there. Nor was his car in the drive. He had left without saying goodbye." (26) A letter and a picture of him are the only proofs of life he sends his ex-family within a decade. As time goes by, Faith's memories of her father fade ever more: "I was willing Papa to phone now, wishing him into existence with such determination that I could smell his cigarette smoke. [...] I closed my eyes again, trying to picture his face. It seemed just out of my reach." (97) As time proceeds further, her attitude towards her father

¹¹⁵ E.g. finding out about Faith's biological father as well as Bella's mental breakdown.

worsens. Her mind erases one picture, one thought, one emotion of him after the other, until she is left with hardly any feelings or memories: "I looked at the photo for a while. I wanted to cry but something in me couldn't cry for him anymore." (132) As a child she cannot understand why he leaves nor where he goes to: "Since he had left I had just thought of him as gone, like he didn't exist anymore." (145) When Faith discovers that Marius' fatherly love for her is limited, her love and longing turn into feelings of hate and despair. Otherwise, he would have left a trace to find him, or sent pictures and letters to Faith. As an adult, Faith still feels the urge to meet him, to face him one last time. When Faith settles her heir with the lawyer¹¹⁶, she is given the envelope her father had once written to Bella. Reading the letter over and over again, searching for any information concerning his state of being, reasons for abandoning them or where he might have moved to, Faith disappointedly has to realize that: "Your papa didn't love you. Surprise." (241) Finally, she has to give up all hope and confront the truth that Marius does not care for her at all.¹¹⁷

Before Marius' break up with Bella, Faith has to witness their disintegrating relationship as well. The novel tells of Faith's seventh birthday, a scene that deeply affects the reader. Bella invites her daughter to a roadhouse for Coke and ice-cream. For reasons unknown¹¹⁸, Bella forgets her daughter there, leaving Faith on her birthday with feelings of despair and fear: "On the day of my seventh birthday I sat alone in the red booth, sucking on the dregs of my Coke. [...] I didn't want to believe Mother had left me for good." (37ff.)

Finally, her father 'saves' and takes her home. Bella's deed has taken Marius to his point of no return, telling his wife: "That's it. I can't fucking do this anymore. You fired a gun at your own child. [...] I'll send money." (49) A fateful evening ends the couple's relationship forever. Faith witnesses the whole scene of violence. She seems to decide to forget (or is unable to remember) the events of that night, since her narrative memory never touches on that evening again. Faith is traumatized by the brutal beating of

¹¹⁶ Compare chapter 7, 218-225.

¹¹⁷ Marius' actual reasons for leaving the family are discussed in chapter 6.2.2.

¹¹⁸ Generally, Bella's health is not yet deteriorating. Either she leaves her daughter at the roadhouse to take revenge on her husband, to indicate his responsibility for his daughter, or this is indeed the first sign of her declining mental state.

her mother. Like in *One Tongue Singing*, children have to bear witness to violent acts of grown-ups, blurring their hitherto safe picture of the world.

I didn't notice *Mother* [...] holding a large spanner [...]. I could see a bright red trickle tracing its way down *Papa's* face [...]. Then he pulled back and with one quick flow he punched her squarely in the face. [...] She flew into the door of the shed, making the whole building shake. He lunged for her. 'No *Papa!*' I shrieked. [...] the snarl on his face drained to pale disbelief. 'No, Faith, please God, no.' I screamed and the sound hit him in the chest and when I stopped screaming *Papa* looked empty. [...] Then he disappeared into the dark." (50f.) [my emphasis]

Due to Marius' action it is possible that he has not tried to get hold of his daughter because of shame. When he realizes that his young daughter has witnessed his shameful deed he is left with emotions of terror and embarrassment. "After Papa had gone I had sat on the steps, shivering and crying and tugging fitfully at my jersey." (53) Undoubtedly, this scene leaves deepest bruises on Faith and contributes to her inability to establish a relationship, as she tells the reader that she cannot love anyone.¹¹⁹

Another interesting feature concerns the way Faith addresses her parents. Throughout the novel, she uses the term "Mother" to refer to Bella. In contrast, Marius is referred to with "Papa". This unquestionably shows her different attitude towards her parents. Although her father has left her alone most of her life, she still feels a tighter bond to him than to her mother, the person who has always been there, has brought her up and protected her from everything. When Faith is relieved from her traumatic memory in chapter twenty-one (318-324), as she is able to grasp matters of the past for the first time, she still refers to her parents the same way. Hence, the information is either too fresh, yet not handled by her mind, or she will never be able to forgive her mother. In the end, Faith has finally quit with the past and deleted her parents from her mind. She accepts her new family, Mia and Molly, questioning herself: "I wonder what ever possessed me to doubt them, to flee the safety of their friendship. Of my family." (326)

¹¹⁹ C.f. p. 215.

The next point of discussion touches upon the mother-daughter relation. This theme enables feelings of identification among the reading community and expresses possibilities and ways to forgive and reconcile. One of the strongest emotions that governs Faith throughout Part II is anger. From the day Bella succumbs to her fairy world Faith's anger starts to grow. Faith feels abandoned, helpless, deserted, deprived of all things she once loved: "There's no point in my life, it lacks meaning, direction." (242) She has taken refuge in a world of her own, trying to forget all childhood memories. Neither a long period of time nor her mother's death could erase her feelings of hate and anger. Faith's comments like: "What about the crazy bitch", "If it were up to me, I would have let the state bury her in one of those prisoner graves marked with a concrete slab and a number", or "Mother no longer exists. She's gone. Gone to hell to spend eternity with all the other murderers. God forgive her. I can't." (175ff.), underline Faith's deepest anger, chaining her to the past. Feelings of anger are a common characteristic among traumatized people. These emotions may either be directed at other people or even at one-self (in specific situations). Bryant-Davis outlines¹²⁰, that anger is a natural and healthy response to traumatic experience. But, anger may threaten the healing process if the person gets consumed by or gets stuck within their anger and rage. A person may feel overwhelmed by their feelings, consequently trying to internalize and suppress these emotions: "The survivor's goal should not be to take on the characteristics of the one who hurt her, but [...] to come to a place of recognizing that as a human being they are worthy of safety and respect." (Bryant-Davis, 108) One of anger's destructive ways is expressed by internalizing one-self, to shut everybody out of one's world. Hence, reactions to emotions of anger can be found in both characters, Bella and Faith: Bella escapes into her fairy world after her family has broken to pieces; Faith is unable to trust or even love somebody, to explain and share feelings, like fear or hope, with her friends. On the personal level, all her anger, frustration and hate is directed at her mother. In Faith's opinion, her mother is responsible for everything that has gone wrong in her life. Therefore, she curses Bella and wants to let her suffer: "I cried for everything I loved and had lost. I cried for Boesman and

¹²⁰ C.f. Bryant-Davis, 108ff.

Papa, for the market and my treasure box. When I stopped crying I decided that I would no longer love Mother. I would never again care what happened to her.” (103) As the reader finds out, Faith keeps to her promise.

In the night of Nomsa’s death, Faith’s behavior and reactions are depicted as analytically as it is described by trauma theory. The events leave a black whole within her memory, making her an innocent and pitiable character. As discussed in chapter 6.2.1, Faith awakes from a nightmare in the middle of the night. She is unable to remember what she has been dreaming of, obviously something terrible that leaves her trembling and vomiting on her bed. The next morning she comes to the kitchen to find her mother in total desperation. Still suffering from the trauma’s shock, Faith blames herself for Bella’s despair, believing mother does not love her anymore.

I was surprised to find Mother in the kitchen [...] staring into space. [...] She looked at me with such sadness it made me cry. [...] ‘I’m sorry,’ she whispered. I didn’t know why she was sorry. Maybe she didn’t love me any more because she just stood there, looking at me like I was the reason why she was so sad. (167)

Faith’s traumatic memory is locked away, she does not have the slightest clue of the night’s events. Interestingly, her mother apologizes to her. Maybe she is sorry as she feels responsible for Nomsa’s death: if she had not started going out with Oom Piet, he would have never had the opportunity to come over Nomsa; eventually Bella believes that her madness has absorbed her daughter as well. But, the most obvious reason is that Bella apologizes as she will have to leave Faith on her own. Bella does not even try to inform Faith about what she has done. She is ready to take the blame on herself, well aware that this might result in losing her daughter forever. “You have a big bruise [...] Do you remember how you got it?’ I shook my head. [...] She didn’t say anything, and neither did I.” (168)

In the second part of the novel Faith is at the end of her tether, thinking of suicide: “The balcony railing cuts deep into my ribcage and for a brief second I consider myself throwing over to get away.” (172) Though she is surrounded by people who love and care for her, she is totally confused and lacking direction. Whereas Faith has condemned her mother for going mad,

history repeats itself, now leading her on the path to madness. Zadok employs the date of New Year's Evening, a day that closes the past year and raises hopes and possibilities for a better one, to have Faith being informed about the death of her mother. Moreover, when Faith gets the lawyer's letter, containing information about her heritage, she compares it with opening Pandora's Box. Subconsciously, she fears the secrets buried on the farm. The new year has a bad start and turns out to be the worst in her life. Faith's traumatic memory starts to catch up with her; voices, pictures, images and memories of her youth return to her mind. "Now, years later, the sudden power of the returning memory makes me feel the same way. Fifteen years on I'm still displaced, unsettled, homeless." (203) For reasons yet unknown, she is haunted by the shadows of the past that lurk for her in the dark: "I could just turf it [gem squash] in the bin, but childhood superstition and my recent scare make me want to keep it around as some sort of protection. [...] Grow up, Faith, the days of evil fairies are over. [...] You're getting paranoid, Faith." (198f.)

Faith's feelings and emotions mirror her distorted life: "I laugh and laugh and then I cry and feel foolish [...] and then I feel appalled and bereft and mad." (255) She starts talking to herself, starts to hear voices of fairies in her mind, starts to question her identity, reality and, her mental state as well: "I sink down on the couch, cover my face with my hands. I feel on the verge of tears, exhausted and raw." (264) The evil tales of her mother start to haunt her again. Bella has hammered these tales deep into Faith's consciousness, terrifying her as a child, and still as an adult. As Faith suffers from a severe identity crisis as well (discussed in the following chapter), she starts to blame and punish herself. As a common feature of traumatized people, Faith is completely out of it, believing not be herself anymore: "[...] feeling ashamed [...], convinced more than ever that I was a child born out of the evil of fairies." (242)

Faith is at the point where, as Caruth states, trauma will out. She needs to confront her past, get to know the dark secrets and find salvation by leaving those trembling memories behind. Unfortunately, the ghosts that still lurk on the farm turn out to be mightier and more terrifying than she ever allowed

herself to believe. In order to make Faith aware of the inner pain, her traumatic memory that is going to destroy her if she cannot face it, the narrative employs the character of a 'witch lady', whom Faith encounters in the streets. Though Faith tells her that she does not believe in magic, the lady feels that:

[t]here is something inside that is beating to get out, some violence that is buried, an anger that [...] will end up harming [...]. A thing that has been suffocated for too long and now claws its way up, gasping for air. It's the voice that whispers spite in my dreams, a darkness that attached itself to me long time ago [...]. (243)

Although Faith's childhood memories of scary monsters and nightmarish bewilderment are thoughts she wants to suppress, she has to learn that to remember and face them is the only liberating experience: "[...] there is bad inside you. [...] Bad things have happened and need to come out. You don't let them come." (191) Consequently, she returns to the cradle of sorrow, ready to confront her past. Since magic and spirits have poisoned and distorted her mind, it is only magic that may cure and suck the evil out of her. Finally, the grief, the desperation, the anger, the frustration in her, as well as the events and reasons that have caused these feelings, are integrated in her life-narrative, allowing her to find structure and meaning in life again.

Oom Piet snorts and lets go of me [...]. 'She didn't protect me, girlie, she protected you.' *He is saying other things, things that reach into the core of me and rip me apart, things I don't want to believe but I can feel, in the soul of me, are true.* [...] He shakes his head and walks out, leaving me alone with the flies. I sit for a long time, unable to move, then I peel my hands away from the sticky floor and turn them over and *I look at the blood that stains my palms red and I wonder why I never saw it before.*" (317) [emphasis added]

6.2.1 Identity, place and home

Closely related to traumatic experience are symptoms of loss of identity and feelings of displacement. After experiencing traumatic situations, self-defense mechanisms are activated that ought to protect the mind from the overwhelming shock. These mechanisms deceive the mind by suggesting

that specific events have happened to another person and not to oneself. If the person suffers from a weak mental constitution, they might start to identify with persons related to the experience, in some cases even with their perpetrator. It allows them to re-engage feelings of power and control. When mental disorders play a crucial role, as in *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*, the traumatic experience may abduct the victim to surreal worlds as their last resort. The question of identity is crucial for the recovery process of a person. Victims can only find cure if they recognize and admit that the terrifying event has happened to them.

To integrate a shattered personality is one of the first and most decisive steps along the road to healing. Therefore, place and home are a decisive supportive means to re-gain one's identity. Place of birth or questions concerning childhood memories are an integral part of an individual's history and identity. Hence, if a person doubts their origin and belonging, they might face severe trouble retrieving their identity. Humans need to know and accept their past to go on with life. In Zadok's novel, these questions are tightly woven with the characters' trauma. As mentioned afore, Faith has lost all meaning in life, including her identity and the place she belongs to. She neither knows who she is, her place in the world, nor whom to love and accept as her family. The following paragraphs investigate her desperate odyssey, undermined by textual allusions from the novel.

Faith's problems of displace and -settlement arise in the second part of the novel. When she has to confront her traumatic past again, memories start to shatter her inner-most being. The deeper the traumatic memory seeps into her consciousness, prompting her to remember and hear the dark evil voices from childhood days, the more her mind starts to disintegrate and question her mental stability and superstition. Faith starts to identify with her mother, believing to go insane as well. Faith is completely lost, feeling like a spectator witnessing another one's life: "Since the day I stepped on the train bound for Johannesburg, I have done nothing to the course of my fate. [...] If I don't do something soon [...] I will be like Mother, a nothing locked inside my body, waiting for death." (242f.) Faith is sincerely worried about her future. She feels the urge to change her fate, to change her life that has

been a misery by now. Due to her shattered life, Faith is numbed and lacks motivation. She shows no ambitions to improve her life, professionally as well as personally. Faith is stuck, experiencing a deep depression. In such a state, healing is impossible. Individuals who are trapped within a black hole may never overcome this abyss on their own. If they do not find help by friends or therapists, the road to cure is denied. But Faith is never left alone. Along her way, she has the support of Mia and Molly, though she declines it. Faith walks a fine line, the danger to fall into madness menacing over her like the sword of Damocles. Fortunately, she decides to face her past just in time, before inheriting her mother's place in the asylum.

The repetitive references to Faith's unease, e.g. when looking into mirrors, are a structural means to stress her shattered identity. There is a climax in Faith's behavior and the interpretation of her reflection. These scenes appear several times along the narration. In Part I of the novel, Faith starts to question her existence in mirrors' reflections. Related to her superstition she believes to be Dead Rex, convinced her life is a lie. Faith fears that she is not a person but a "Halfling", being the reason for everybody leaving her (See 134f.). When problems origin in Part II, Faith has ceased to believe not to be human, but still she is convinced that the mirror does not show her reflection: "I'm always slightly surprised when *I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror*; the person that looks out at me isn't the person I expect. I feel *smaller* than her, feel like what *I am* should take *less space than my framed reflection*. My mirror image is a reminder that I don't fit, [...]." (24)¹²¹ Faith perceives her reflection as shattered, broken into thousands of pieces. This circumstance is mirrored in her distorted identity. She is still lost, not knowing who she really is. As her identity crisis worsens, she starts searching for characteristics she might share with her mother. In the end, Faith is convinced that she has never existed; she is convinced to be the reflection of her mother; Faith believes that she has evermore become like her mother, acting the same way, having a similar appearance and being as mentally weak as her.

¹²¹ Emphasis added.

I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror, a mirror that manages to capture all of me [...], not to break me up into smaller pieces. [...] my reflection [...] in the glass is not a version of myself I know, not me at all. The person framed by dark wood in the age-clouded mirror is Mother, in her room, on her farm. Am I so much the product of her, so much my Mother's daughter, that I don't exist at all? (275f.) [emphasis added]

When Faith returns to the farm her crisis culminates. Obviously, she seems to look like her mother. Some people in the village mistake her for Bella, whereas other ones see the mad criminal in her, the killer, who in different shape has finally returned. The peoples' small-mindedness truly hurts Faith. All the years past, she has tried to forget her mother, has hated every trait of her and sworn never to become like her. Now she has to experience that the people do not see her, Faith, a completely different character, but still her mother, the insane murderer:

Perhaps there is no Faith, no person separate from the source, just a genetic imprint of her, her exactly, fated to follow her in life, and maybe even death. Perhaps every action perpetrated by Mother was also by my hand. That is what the people of this place see, not the little girl returned, but the murderer, untouched by time. (276)

When she arrives at the train station she is deeply affected as the station worker mistakes her for Bella. Ironically, the people are right in their belief. No one knows yet that the killer has finally returned home.

The return home and finding one's place in the world is another challenge Faith has to take. After Nomsa's death, Faith leaves the farm to live with her mother's friend Mia in Johannesburg. Though she spends there over ten years, the city never feels like home to her. She rather feels displaced, belonging somewhere else. Torn between the countryside and the city-life, she lives in-between these two worlds, consequently belonging nowhere properly: "It's strange, all the time spent in Johannesburg I felt out of place, the simple country cousin. Here, where I thought I belonged, I'm city folk." (267) Though she has never felt happy in the city, she is unable to return to the place she esteems as home. Still, she cannot handle the memories buried on the farm: "I wonder if anyone lives on the farm now and whether

they are happy or as haunted as we were. [...] I never went back, though there had been so many times I wanted to go home.” (225)

The role of place is not only important since it affects Faith's character psychologically, but as it is a narrative device as well. Her narration steadily refers to the farm as a haunted place, a house that is full of devastating memories, a place that has been witness to indescribable grief and sorrow. The narrative highlights the crucial role of this place, her home, foreboding the notion that only in this place she may find her inner peace. The narrative does not only hint at this fact by inter-textual allusions but expresses it definitely in the course of the narration. Chapter Eight in Part II (226-231) covers an overall important scene for Faith's healing process. The 'witch-lady-doctor', Mrs. Mabut, advises Faith to return home since this is the only place to find salvation. Consequently, she stresses Faith's bond to the farm, her spirit that is still connected to the place of her childhood, her home ever since: "Go home. It is only at your home that you will free your spirit. [...] You cannot make a new home for yourself while your spirit is buried elsewhere. If you don't return home to free your spirit, you will get sick. You already are." (230) Once again, the notion of magic is a crucial feature of the novel's narrative structure: Faith has to confront her past demons on the farm; only there her soul will find redemption and make her feel free to go wherever her heart takes her. Faith's narration anticipates the evil aura embracing the farm. On her way home, she is overcome by doubts and fears of what has happened and will happen in that place: "I look down the road and I'm fearful of what lies at the end of it, perhaps this was a bad idea, the idea of digging around in the memories of the farm weighs my stomach with dread, I should have stayed in Jo'burg." (254) Throughout the novel, the house is described as an evil space, a haunted place that destroys the people who live there. "Ay, that is a bad place. Why you want to go there?" (252) When Faith finally arrives, there is nowhere to run from the memories. As she wanders through the house for the first time, she is still afraid of the ghosts that hide in every corner. The farm is indeed a place that has witnessed a lot of misery. It has seen loss, despair, hate, anger, grief and death, but also scenes of hope, love and happiness. To Faith, the house does not share any of these good memories anymore. In her eyes, the farm

is the place where her life has been destroyed, revoking solely the most tragic memories: "It feels like a tomb." (261)

When the medicine man is able to support Faith's recovery and to expel her demons, her soul is free to look at her life without fear. She is able to accept and mourn her losses, to close with the past, to re-define her identity and her place in the world. She mourns her parents, her maid, her grandparents, her friends, her dog, the fairies and herself. Faith accepts her past and starts to come to terms with it. The following quote underlines Faith's endeavor, the rain indicating metaphorically the beginning of a new life: "My grief pours from me, making the first marks on my fresh soul, and outside it begins to rain." (324)

6.2.2 Family ties

Another point that is closely related to the protagonist's identity and which has implications on the whole family's life concerns questions of family ties, as well as shattering events that put the family to the test. Once again, all clues addressing family bonds are skillfully embedded within the narrative. The reader has to pay attention and look out for the smallest detail in order to get the full meaning.

One of the first questions arises from Bella's deteriorating mental state. When Bella succumbs ever more to her desperation, the readers have to ask themselves what actually causes her despair? Why does she fall into this black hole she is unable to escape? At the time Marius decides to abandon his family Bella is still more or less sane. Life has proceeded in its ordinary path, with Marius being away and his family waiting for his return. Then, on this particular week-end, something occurs that changes Marius attitude. It seems as if Marius has found out a secret that prompts him to turn his life upside down and to leave those behind who he loves more than anything else. Basically, the attentive reader has to ponder on the following questions: why does Marius leave? What causes Bella's state of being? Who is really Faith's father? What happens on the farm during Marius' salesman trips? These are many questions whose answer is crucial for the novel's understanding. A factor that somehow links all of these questions

and which is responsible for many of the family's troubles bears the following name: Oom Piet.

The reader is introduced to Oom Piet on the market for the first time. He is described as "[...] a man who stopped by our stall every Monday to pinch my cheeks. [He] was our best costumer and the biggest flirt in our small town. He was something of a ladies' man [...]." (28) As the novel proceeds, the reader finds out that Oom Piet is more than just a good costumer. When Oom Piet visits Bella for the first time after Marius' departure, there seems to be far more in between the two: "[...] all I could do was stare at their unreal shapes. Eventually the shape of Oom Piet [...] went to stand next to the shape of Mother. The two shapes became one and some distinct part in me realized that he had his arms around her [...]." (146) It seems as if Oom Piet was glad that Marius has left Bella, giving him the opportunity to court her: "I thought I saw Oom Piet smile a little that day, as Mother cried on his shoulder. The horrible things Oom Piet said about Papa [...] made me think that Oom Piet wasn't really Papa's friend." (158) Bella slowly gets better, but when she responds to the attentions of her suitor, things fall apart again. He visits her several times on the farm and even brings flowers. But, their first night out is to change Bella's life forever. It is the night of Nomsa's death. For the first time since Marius is gone, Bella dresses up to spend an evening with Oom Piet. When Faith awakes from her nightmare, actually dreaming of Nomsa's death (166), she finds her mother in the kitchen, "[...] her mascara had run down her cheeks, staining them [...]. She was still wearing the ugly brown dress, but it was torn at the neck and her lipstick had rubbed away." (166f.) Bella's dress hints at the horrible events that have taken place that night. What exactly happened is not that easy to read out. But, as for the whole novel, the prologue, "The Soul Stealer", and the epilogue, "The Baby Snatcher", are of utmost importance. It is in bold and in dialect and if not read carefully, the rapid reader may fail to comprehend the significance of the actions in this novel. These two chapters reveal the most important details of this night. The prologue tells of Dead Rex on his way through the night. He witnesses scenes of pain and torment, nourishing from peoples' fear. The narration tells of the shadow of a man: "He [Dead Rex] seen that man on other days, he been before to this place. Pretending he kind." (2)

Obviously, Oom Piet's character is addressed here as "Fat-fingered butcher hand push down her head [...]" (3) The whole scene describes Oom Piet raping Nomsa. Since Bella's dress is torn at the neck, the reader has to ask why? As these events are not indicated in the narrative, one has to guess about the night's happenings. Probably, the two came home after their date; Oom Piet wanted to get physically close to Bella, too close in her opinion. When Bella rejects him it is possible that Piet attempted to rape Bella or at least had a struggle with her. Upset and full of anger, Oom Piet heads for Nomsa's shack where he rapes her, is interrupted by Faith who then accidentally shoots Nomsa. Anyway, it is the character of Oom Piet who darkens "Legae la Morwediate" with black clouds of bitterness.

Concerning the question of Faith's identity and Marius' departure, Oom Piet inherits another prominent role. As mentioned before, something must have led to Marius' change in attitude. When the narrative unfolds, his character is painted in glowing colors. He is looking forward to seeing his wife and daughter on his short weekends and seems to be a caring and loving father. But, when he finds out that he actually is not Faith's biological father, he is unable to cope with that. This inevitably leads to the next question: who is Faith's real father? Along the novel, there are several instances that hint at this circumstance. "Mother smiled at me. She reached out with her hand and stroked my hair. 'You have such soft hair [...] sometimes I wonder where it came from. Your father-' she faltered, and swallowed. 'He's got such coarse hair.'" (128) Her father's hair is coarse like a lion's while her mother's hair is thick. Consequently, where does Faith have her delicate, fine silky hair got from? In another scene, Faith stands in front of a mirror, feeling puzzled at her own reflection. She questions her identity, her belonging as well as her descent: "Blue eyes stared intently back out at me. Where did they come from? I wondered. Mother's eyes were a deeper blue [...]. And Papa's? Papa had brown eyes." (132) Hence, it is obvious that Marius is not the father of Faith, a circumstance that would explain his total withdrawal from his family. After living with this lie for seven years, he seems to be that deeply hurt that he can not forgive his wife. Consequently, he leaves hardly any traces, sending just one letter as if the earth had swallowed him up. When Faith returns home after her mother's death and tries to get some

clues about her father's whereabouts, she meets Liesel, the 'fancy woman' Marius had an affair with. Unfortunately, she is unwilling to help Faith. "[I am] Faith.' She narrows her eyes at me, drops my hand [...]. 'Did you know him? Marius Steenkamp.' For a long moment she seems to be considering something, then her face closes and she changes the subject." (285) Faith has to live on coming to realize that in the eyes of her father, she seemingly does not exist anymore.

The last point concerns Bella's mental state and the events that led to its decline. Since certain clues have been outlined proving that Oom Piet is Faith's biological father, the question remains how this could have happened? It is a matter of fact that Bella feels pretty lonely and isolated on the farm, with her husband being there for only two days a week. Whether she deliberately chose to have an affair with Oom Piet or if Faith's conception was a violent act is not clearly depicted. But, as the reader gets to know Bella's character, her obsession with the fairy world as well as her "strange moods" (9), it is more likely that she has been raped by Oom Piet. Therefore, she has started painting fairy motifs as her means to cope with this traumatizing experience. When Marius finds out, Bella seemingly can not cope with the whole situation and suffers the breakdown. Unsurprisingly, Bella attempts to suppress the memories of Faith's conceiving. When her mental state is on the decline, she seems to be persuaded that Faith's conception has actually been a miracle as she firmly believes her daughter to be a child of the fairies: "I think the day I conceived, the fairies came and put you inside me. I used to wonder about that; your father wasn't even there, I think." (129) Obviously, Bella has been the victim of rape; an experience that had a traumatizing effect on her and which she tries to process in her pictures. Lastly, it seems worth mentioning that all of Bella's fairy paintings, that all her fairie's faces, portray the face of her beloved daughter, Faith.

I look from one painting to the next and see, for the first time, that each fairy, though their hair, skin, eye colour and expression are different, has the same face. The child-girl face that looks at me across time from the sketches I posed for also looks out at me from within the frames of the fairy paintings. Their poses mimic quick studies of me at play, running, jumping climbing, swimming

in the reservoir. It makes me realize just how isolated Mother was, how lonely she must have felt. (296f.)

6.3 Themes

The analysis concludes with a brief investigation of the novel's most important themes. Since some of them have already been incorporated and discussed in previous chapters¹²², the focus is on questions of belief and the way it affects a person's perception of the world, as well as scenes of racism the narration comments on.

6.3.1 Belief and trust

The whole novel is built on this universal theme, raising questions of what to believe in and especially why. Zadok states in an interview that the book is about belief and the influence society has on children. It is about unpicking belief systems, figuring out how people come to believe the things and how this might end up in tragedies if it is the wrong sorts of believes.

It is a novel about women trying to survive in a world of imprisoning loneliness and physical hardship, inventing strategies to support and protect themselves and each other. Sometimes they fail; sometimes their strength takes them beyond all imaginable frontiers.¹²³

The novel tries to explore the belief system that is forced upon children by parents. In *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*, Bella is deeply absorbed in her fairy world. She invents tales, a whole universe of imaginary characters with rules and laws of their own to keep her daughter from going dangerous places as well as a last resort for herself. Faith is only six-years-old when the narrative unfolds. The reader is informed that the fairies have lived on the farm ever since. Parents are the most important and imprinting persons in a child's youth; therefore, everything they tell is taken serious until a child knows better. Faith, who has heard her mother's tales as long as she can remember, has started to believe in this world as it was real. Concerning education and the maternal role of Bella, she has failed her goals. Her

¹²² For example: identity, home, loss, madness, imagination and mythic realms.

¹²³ See <http://www.sundayindependent.co.za/index.php?fArticleId=3030184&fSectionId>.

stories have aroused emotions of fear and panic, terrifying and haunting her daughter for years. Bella's tales drive her daughter to the edges of desperation, madness and suicide. All her life Faith has never seen a fairy with her own eyes. Yet, her ambitious efforts to believe and see a fairy some day unleash such strong emotions that her mind manifests this surreal world. Hence, the novel is also about the choices life offers and the responsibilities it entails. As an adult, Faith is well aware that she must be crazy to believe in fairy tales, though she is incapable of completely denying and forgetting their existence.

The protagonist's initial name is another element that undermines the significance of belief, trust and faith. In a way, her name is a self-fulfilling prophecy. As a child she never loses faith in her parents and their advice. But, a person's faith has to take several challenges while growing up into a cruel world. Therefore, Faith's faith is put to the test.

6.3.2 Racism

Set in the 1980s, the narrative inevitably touches upon scenes of Apartheid. Like in the novels discussed before, these scenes are not outstanding features within the narration. The political and social situation in South Africa is delicately woven into the narrative. The novel addresses inequalities concerning land distribution as well as the deprivation and dislodging of Coloreds and Blacks from their homeland. It also touches on the beginning riots against an inhumane system: "Seems there's been some trouble with the blacks in the townships again [...] and more rioting in those independent homelands. There is talk of a state of emergency if this nonsense continues." (34) When Nomsa is taken to the market to sell Bella's vegetables, Faith's narrative account portrays an image of hostility and racial hatred that makes one shiver. Faith and Nomsa are immediately the centre of attention, compelled to listen to the market-people's talk about the blame and the demoralization their country suffers. "Out of the corner of my eye I could see the crowd, their faces hostile. [...]". (93) Faith is puzzled that even their friends, "people I had always thought were nice [...] gave us a wide berth. [...] some of them looking at us with a disgust I could not comprehend,

some commenting on how shameful we were [...].” (94f.) Faith is still too young, her mind too innocent to understand what is going on. “This person [Nomsa] cannot under any circumstances own a stall here. If she wishes to sell her *kaffir* mielies, I suggest she does what the rest of *her kind* do [...].” (93) [emphasis added]. The second part of the narration confronts the reader with the racism that still boils underneath the reconciled surface, as well as with problems resulting from years of suppression. Chapter Six (207-217) tells of Faith looking for a cash machine. The simple act of getting money poses a life-threatening situation to her: “It’s risky business drawing cash here on a Saturday afternoon, especially if you’re alone, on foot, a woman, white.” (207) The place near the cash machine is crowded with drunks and homeless people, hence a place where poverty and desperate souls meet. After Faith has left the capital for the countryside, she encounters another scene of deeply rooted racism: in her home-town, the mistrust, and above all the fear of the minorities, has not yet ceased to be. When Faith wants to order a phone for the farm, an old ‘friend’ notes: “Can’t have you on that farm alone with no phone [...], what with the blacks killing farmers all over the country.’ She mouths the word ‘blacks’, like it’s some dirty word [...].” (281)

Unbiased behavior and real intimacy between Blacks and Whites is only described between Nomsa and Faith. Like in *Karoo Boy*, both young white protagonists have a very close relationship to their black servant. Faith adores her maid Nomsa, while Douglas recounts how he and his twin were breastfed by their maid Hope. By evoking their suppressed memories they are able to make a new beginning. In the context of the whole nation, this device suggests that reconciliation will be only possible for South Africa if Whites will be able to confront their history.

7. Sindiwe Magona: *Mother to Mother*

In my novel, [...] the legacy of Apartheid – a system repressive and brutal, that bred senseless inter- and intra-racial violence as well as other nefarious happenings, [...] a system that promoted a twisted sense of right and wrong, [...] the killer's mother, [...] in looking for answers [...], draws a portrait of her son and of his world, and hopes that an understanding of that and of her own grief might ease the other mother's pain ... if a little. (*Mother to Mother*, Author's preface, Vf.)¹²⁴

Magona's novel is a unique masterpiece among the new voices of South African literature. In contrast to the novels discussed so far, *Mother to Mother* exclusively bases on a true story, the killing of the American student Amy Biehl in 1993. Magona establishes a narrative of confession, accusation and reconciliation to emphasize the atrocities of Apartheid as well as the imminent and prevailing violence that has shaped South Africa over decades. Whereas *Karoo Boy*, *One Tongue Singing* and *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* focus on impersonal trauma, *Mother to Mother* has to be read in terms of cultural trauma affecting the nation as a whole. The confession and lament of the mother is the representational narrative that discloses the fate and motifs of a 'lost' generation as the result of their struggle for freedom.

At the time Magona embarked on her novel she was working for the United Nations in New York. The fact that Biehl's death was of international concern crucially influenced Magona's choice of topic. Moreover, she was personally motivated to write about anti-White violence due to her identification with a childhood friend, Evelyn Manqina, becoming the fictionalized voice of Mandisa. Consequently, *Mother to Mother* is sprinkled with autobiographical accounts as well as similarities and overlaps between Magona's autobiographical works *To my Children's Children* (1990) as well as *Forced to Grow* (1992).¹²⁵ "I know which kind of life she [Manqina] must have had as a poor African woman. Because that's the situation I have been in ... and I imagined the rest of her life."¹²⁶ The novel's representation of South Africa's past and its impact on the fictionalized narrative is stressed by authentic

¹²⁴ All references to Sindiwe Magona's novel *Mother to Mother* (1998) are merely indicated by page numbers.

¹²⁵ For more details see Altnöder 76, 91.

¹²⁶ Attwell and Harlow 2000, cited in Altnöder, 91.

traumatic memory and narrations of people suffering torment under Apartheid. Nevertheless, *Mother to Mother* is not merely an autobiographical account but has to be read in terms of memoirs. Autobiographical notes are based on an individual's real life, covering it from birth until the present day. A memoir on the other hand, "is a life story written from some vantage point in the future and looking back on decisive moments in one's life."¹²⁷ In contrast to autobiographies, memoirs offer the possibility to narrate chosen moments in one's life, hence focusing on decisive experiences. They are based on rather "fleeting moments, anecdotes" and may also be "less comprehensive", but as they are "subjective narrative [re]constructions" of a person's experiences, they allow to reconstruct the past from such subjective angles and turn out to be even more authentic than e.g. autobiographical notes or historical accounts. In the context of South Africa's past, memoirs seem to be a more suitable mode of catching up with the past since a person's (especially Coloreds' and Blacks') memoirs are esteemed more confiding and trusting than official South African history writing. Moreover, memoirs are capable of giving voices to stories and people yet unheard, "implying that each individual life story is worth while recording, worth while listening to." (ibid.) Such, the omni-present suffering, the suppression, the thousands of instances of torment, humiliation and murder, are given an individual face and voice to identify with: "[the memorial stance] fleshes out a life story in concrete terms, thus making the incredible atrocities of the past conceivable." (ibid.) *Mother to Mother's* protagonist, Mandisa, employs a confessional mode of narration that asks for an empathic audience. Throughout the narrative, her character strives to evoke sympathy for her beloved son (made a murderer by the system), her people's history and the circumstances they grow up with, and for her own self, as she fails her maternal role and is unable to protect her son. Only if the readers (and of course the novel's silent addressee) are willing to open their hearts, trying to understand the victims' problems and come to terms with the reasons for the hatred that has split South Africa, only then the author's novel will work out and evoke sympathy among its readers.

¹²⁷ Mengel 2009.

Since the novel has to be read in its historical context, the analysis unfolds with a brief summary of the most important facts concerning the death of Amy Biehl. Then, the deconstruction of the novel's narrative structure tries to unravel the author's means to transcend and incorporate the cultural trauma into narrative form. Finally, attention is paid to the role of race, place and home, as well as inter- and intra-racial violence.

7.1 The killing of Amy Biehl

The author depicts the killing of the student, Amy Biehl, as the basis of her novel. In 1993, the 26-year-old Fulbright scholar was killed in the township of Guguletu when giving four university colleges a lift home. Biehl got the victim of anti-White violence in a place "[w]hite people are not allowed to go [...]." (24) Due to the prevailing motto "ONE SETTLER – ONE BULLET" (198, 205ff.), their car was stoned and she herself stabbed by a violent bulk. Besides the condemning nature of the deed itself, her death bears a bitter irony as Biehl had traveled to South Africa to support and help the people along the first free elections held in 1994. Her affection for the people's affairs is described as a "passionate involvement in and empathetic dedication to improving the plight of the black South Africans [...]" (Altnöder, 76). Since Biehl was U.S. citizen, news of her homicide spread over South Africa's borders, causing an international stir that up to that time was unique in the country's history.

The political and social climate was all but peaceful at that time. South Africa was in its phase of transition, trying to leave Apartheid behind and welcome a non-racial democratic constitution. As history shows, the path leading to the South Africans' liberation was marked by grief, pain and death. After the unbanning of the ANC and the PAC, negotiations of the CODESA¹²⁸ culminated in the establishment of an interim constitution. Unfortunately, various parties were left unsatisfied and urgent issues unanswered, above all questions of settlement. Therefore, the military wing APLA¹²⁹ propagated an on-going struggle and "declared 1993 the Year of the Great Storm [...]"

¹²⁸ African National Congress (ANC), Pan African Congress (PAC), Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA).

¹²⁹ Azanian Peoples Liberation Army (military wing of the CODESA).

continu[ing] to wage a political struggle both against the then-government and against white people in general.” (Altnöder, 77) The narrative is set at this time and even mentions “Operation Barcelona, a campaign [...] in support of the[ir] teachers who are on strike” (10). This operation was launched by the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) who supported the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU). Operation Barcelona crucially influenced the prevailing atmosphere in the townships and, among others, delivers the motif for Biehl’s killing. Its main objective urged students “[...] to stay away from school, to burn cars and to drive reactionary elements out of the townships.” (10) In more detail, as revealed in the course of the TRC hearings, its main purpose was to

[...] make the townships ungovernable, more particularly by preventing government and company supplies and services from coming into the townships and also by killing, maiming and injuring what was popularly known as settlers and this was a term that was used to refer to White persons. (TRC 1997, quoted in Altnöder 77)

Township inhabitants were ‘officially’ instructed to cause chaos, devastation, terror and even death to support the party’s political objectives. This deeply rooted and stirred up hatred is the basis of Biehl’s murder and the outset of Magona’s narrative ‘fiction’. ¹³⁰

Concerning the TRC amnesty hearings, it seems worth mentioning that although the car was surrounded by dozens of people, actually only four were convicted of the murder. Four young men were accused of the ‘lethal stabbing’ and sentenced to nineteen years prison. All of these youths held important and decision-making positions among the PASO, the Pan African Student Organization. Since Biehl came to South Africa with the best of intentions, to work for and support the people, PAC, ANC as well as other political groups distanced themselves from the deed, negating that the suspects acted upon anyone’s command. The political parties commented on the deed the following:

¹³⁰ See Altnöder, 76ff.

“a barbaric act of violence” against their “dear friend and comrade”, or as “racism in its crudest form ... at a time when all should be united in their efforts to achieve peace and racial tolerance [and that] the killing of Amy Biehl [was] a mistake committed by young people who were misguided.”¹³¹

Therefore, Biehl’s death was not considered as homicide, but rather as an unfortunate occurrence during “South Africa’s early phase of transition during which a political – and in fact, armed – struggle against the Apartheid government was persistently fought.” (Altnöder, 79)¹³² The four perpetrators were granted amnesty by the TRC in 1997. In her novel, Magona does not incorporate all four suspects who were convicted of the deed but focuses merely on the life of one, the fictionalized character Mxolisi ¹³³, as representative of ‘the other side’.

Magona’s novel critically reflects on the country’s leaders who deprived a whole generation of their future, for stirring their hatred and violence in the name of liberation. It comments on the role and responsibility of the parents, who brought up their “misguided youth”, a “lost generation”, unable to control their children, unable to guide them on a peaceful path and protect them from the violence.¹³⁴ *“It’s been a long, hard road, my son has travelled. Now, your daughter has paid for the sins of the fathers and mothers who did not do their share of seeing that my son had a life worth living.”* (3) [original in italics] Therefore, the novel has to be read against this backdrop, trying to understand the “young woman’s killers, the world of those [...] whose environment failed to nurture them in the higher ideals of humanity and [who] became lost creatures of malice and destruction [...]” (V) By introducing and presenting the perpetrator’s world, a world defined by suppression and intolerance, Magona’s novel is an attempt to overcome the violent past and to achieve reconciliation across the racial divide. At this point, it is worth mentioning that the Biehl parents somehow managed to forgive their daughter’s murderers and even to establish a friendship. Today, Amy Biehl’s

¹³¹ ANCWL 1993 and ANCWC 1993 quoted in Altnöder, 78 respectively.

¹³² This may sound cruel and inhumane, but compared to the innumerable dead the liberation struggle had claimed, the death of Biehl appears as a drop in the ocean.

¹³³ Xhosa: “Mxolisi, he who would bring peace.” (136)

¹³⁴ Since the reasons for the violence of South Africa’s youth go far beyond the two points mentioned above, chapter 7.3 investigates reasons and consequences in more detail.

memory lives on in the “Amy Biehl foundation”¹³⁵ which aims at “actively seek[ing] social change for those not so fortunate. Her legacy has inspired young people [...] and has been a source of opportunity to thousands of South African[‘s] youth.”¹³⁶

7.2 Narrative Structure

As its title suggests, the novel is the lament of the killer’s mother, Mandisa, to the mother of Amy Biehl. Magona’s preface is crucial to the novel’s understanding as well as to grasp her intentions. She argues that after such tragedies, “[...] we hear a lot about the world of the victim: his or her family, friends, work, hobbies, hopes and aspirations.” (V) Yet, it is equally important to have a look at the perpetrator’s life, at the events and blows of fate that finally cause their deed, since the pain may be eased if a glance at “the other world” (V) is provided. Therefore, Biehl’s murder sets up the narrative frame that incorporates the perpetrator’s as well as his family’s history and background and, on a wider scale, the history of a whole nation, exploring the events and circumstances that have led to South Africa’s devastating past.

Magona’s novel fictionalizes facts, as details like place and time are explicitly stated in the author’s preface. The murder is set at a specific time, the 25th of August, in 1993, at a specific place, the township Guguletu, and even hints at the actual space where the murder had happened, a petrol station at the street NY1 in the township. The author locates her narrative at a specific point in the historical context, thus emphasizing the importance of the historical background. The narrative employs a plotline that is based on evidence, as well as a fictionalized account of the killing that triggers off the protagonist’s narration. “[...] from the involved vantage point of one killer’s mother [...] the first-person narrator [...] claims and delineates a textual space from which to speak.” (Altnöder, 79) The “mother as witness” employs a confessional mode of narration to explore “the theme of black hatred of white people” generated by a “generic black experience of oppression, [...] highlighting endless suffering under apartheid [...]”(ibid.) The author tries to

¹³⁵ <http://www.amybiehl.org/>.

¹³⁶ <http://www.amybiehl.org/amy.php> (29.8.2009).

bridge the historic divide and bring the racial groups together by using the common basis of the shared experience of motherhood.

Mandisa, the mother of the murderer, Mxolisi, takes the reader through the narrative. As the title conveys, the whole novel is primarily directed at the victim's mother. Therefore, it is important to note that the protagonist's narratee is not the reader but, on the structural level, a fictional character that remains silent throughout the narrative. As a consequence, Magona's novel is a monologue that misses an overall decisive detail: the reaction and answer of the white mother. Further, though the murdered character of the novel and that of Amy Biehl show certain similarities, the assassinated character remains nameless throughout the narration as well. The reader may know that the author depicts the Biehl case but, as her real-life name is never incorporated, Magona leaves space for the readers' own interpretation. Thus, the fictional character resembles the fate of numerous nameless victims, making her a symbolic representative figure. But in this special case there is not one, but two victims. There is Amy on the one side, described as a kind-hearted person, with hopes and dreams "harbouring in her breast" (5), dedicated to help other people, loving, generous and caring. All these features make her homicide even more abominable as she seems to be the incantation of innocence. On the other side, there is the murderer: Mxolisi. His life has been the exact opposite. Hence, the contrast and extremes of the 'white world' compared to township-life which is ruled by violence, depriving its people of any hopes and dreams, is emphasized even more and a crucial factor for understanding the character's motifs.

Mandisa's lament and back-flashes are monologues that are structured into three levels of narrative action, each incorporating different contents of factual and fictional information. These three levels correspond to specific textual reference points within the novel's temporal frame. On the first level, there is Mandisa, directly addressing her sister-mother via epistolary excerpts. The second level covers Mandisa's subjective experiences of the day in August 1993, thus fictionalizing facts, while the third level consists of historical flashbacks that take the reader far back into South Africa's history. Undoubtedly, this structural peculiarity aims at "attaining the narratee's

understanding of a black person's life in apartheid South Africa [...] and thereby achieving intersubjective recognition [...]." (Altnöder, 93).

Mandisa's lament corresponds to the first level within the narrative structure. These sections cover epistolary excerpts directly addressed at the white mother. They are set apart in font and differ in style as well as syntax by using short sentences, mainly questions. As mentioned before, Mandisa never directly or personally addresses her opposite. But her second person narrative account as well as the content of her talk leave no doubt who she is talking to. So, the dialogue (implicated by the title of the novel) turns out to be a monologue, with Mandisa crossing "national and racial boundaries so as to create a bond of sorrow and grief between them." (Altnöder, 92) A stylistic feature highlighted in other novels as well is once more the notion of foreshadowing at the beginning of the narrative. Chapter One, "Mandisa's lament" (1-4) creates a threatening atmosphere by announcing and commenting on the actual murder: the very first sentence of the novel reads *"My son killed your daughter"* (1, original in italics). This short and plain statement hints at the inevitable path the narrative is going to take, incorporating the characters' doom they cannot escape.

The introductory section features Mandisa questioning of the system that has turned her son, a brave, intelligent and caring person, into a murderer. Apart from that, she also has to question the victim's understanding of the world, since no 'normal' person would have entered the township "[...] at this time of day – late afternoon, when people return from work [...] Earlier, perhaps. But not this late. No, not this late" (12), but actually "[t]hat was your daughter's weakness, I can see. [...] [P]eople like your daughter [...] so believe in their goodness, know they have hurt no one, are, indeed, helping, they never think anyone would like to hurt them." (2, original in italics) The lament closes with Mandisa's deepest apology, pleading for forgiveness: for her own, as well as for her son's mistakes. Commenting on the author's epistolary design as a means to portray the protagonist's message, Altnöder highlights the significance of the letter as a literary form. It is a form that "pretends to be private while it is made public [and] ensures an open inquiry into [...] one's spiritual disposition, one's destiny, and one's relationship both

to other people and to the environment.” (Ogunyemi 1985, quoted in Altnöder, 93) As *Mother to Mother* can be read in the context of womanist writing, more precisely black female writing, the epistolary form is granted even greater importance since “[l]etters in black female writing finally ensure illumination of the black predicament that precedes black integrity [...]” (ibid.) Hence, Altnöder states that Mandisa’s letter includes all the issues described above and, moreover, “not only refers to what precedes but in fact what precludes the integrity of a black person in (post-)apartheid South Africa.” (ibid.)

Propelled by the voice of Mandisa, one part of the narrative takes the form of a private confession via epistolary excerpts, making up the novel’s master narrative on the diagetic level. This main narrative frame is sub-structured into a meta-diagetic level of narration, creating a structure that employs two subordinate narrative strands.¹³⁷ They differ in mode of narration as well as their temporal and local setting. As discussed above, Mandisa’s master narrative employs the literary form of letters and introduces the reader to the basic contents or the frame of the novel. As it proceeds, the narrative only frequently employs the epistolary address. The letter that opens the novel is incorporated only into four chapters. It shows up again in chapter Seven (88-114) and chapter Eight (115-163). Once more, Mandisa tries to evoke understanding for her son by mentioning and commenting on her difficult task as mother and wife. As a loving and caring mother, she tries to plant a common basis of understanding.

Apart from Mandisa’s epistolary address, her character employs two subordinate narrative levels. First, as a witness of the day’s events she recounts her subjective experiences. From the early morning time when she and her family wake up, Mandisa takes the reader through her day, describing her family’s daily routines until the terrible news, that there is trouble in the township, catches up with her. This narrative account confronts the reader with the brutal practices of the police, a view at the

¹³⁷ Although the narratives can be pointed out as being isolated, consisting of three independent plot-lines, they intertwine and overlap as shown in the following.

family's lives, the routine among the townships, and the freedom fighter's mission to take Mandisa to her son, who hides from the police.¹³⁸

After Mandisa's lament, the narration leaves the level of the letter and turns to her narrative account. It opens in the morning on Wednesday, the 25th of August, in 1993. Mandisa portrays their morning routines and duties, hence stressing their diverging lifestyles.¹³⁹ Actually, the reader has to bear in mind that Mandisa's description of the student's morning can only be assumed, since she has never been witness to a day in her life. In a way, the white woman's morning can be read like an idealized version of how black people from the townships imagine and perceive a white person's life. Afterwards, the reader accompanies Mxolisi on his way through the township. Since none of Mandisa's children attend school that day, due to "Operation Barcelona"¹⁴⁰, Mxolisi is left to his political business, "toyi-toying"(17)¹⁴¹ around Guguletu with his friends and comrades, looking for a place to hold a meeting.¹⁴²

Meanwhile, the white victim is busy planning her day, thinking of the things to do before she departs.¹⁴³ She drives to University to bid farewell to the many friends she has won over the few months. Nobody knows it is a goodbye forever: "I guess this is the last time we see you?" one of her black friends asks." (11) By foreshadowing and anticipating the inevitable fate she is to encounter that day, the dramatic structure creates a menacing atmosphere overshadowing the whole narration: "If only they knew. [...] How she wishes she were home already. [...] But perhaps she will come back. Of

¹³⁸ For a detailed discussion of these themes as well as their impact on the characters and the cultural trauma see chapter 7.3.

¹³⁹ For a detailed analysis see chapter 7.3.1.

¹⁴⁰ Compare p. 109.

¹⁴¹ This term refers to "a means of movement in-between marching and dancing in time with protest songs popularly deployed during the times of the liberation struggle" (Altnöder, 94).

¹⁴² Concerning the novel's fictionalizing facts, Altnöder's investigations reveal that the description of Mxolisi's morning matches the real-life suspects' testimonies before the TRC. The narration's first element that anticipates the later violence describes a delivery van that is burnt down in the name of Operation Barcelona. Even the various groups' toyi-toying up and down NY1 is based on true incidents. But, the political meeting that actually inspired and motivated the real-life suspects to make the townships ungovernable by burning and stoning government vehicles is not delivered in the novel. Further, Mxolisi's group is only described to watch the burning delivery van accidentally, but actually they do not throw stones themselves.

¹⁴³ Actually, the character is killed on the last day of her stay in South Africa; a fact making her death even more tragic.

course, she will come back, one day. A not too far-away day too, that's for sure." (9) Mandisa's narration of the white victim's day breaks off at the end of chapter Two. Her report-like account of the events that finally culminate in the murder ends right before it takes place. Though the narrative anticipates the devastating scene, it is resumed in the novel's final chapter. Consequently, Magona establishes a circular narrative structure that crucially adds to the dramatic structure. The student's death is inevitably predestined, "rendered an unavoidable fact", and creates a "[...] lingering presence in the back of the narratee's mind throughout Mandisa's and her son's (auto)biographical stories [...]". (Altnöder, 94) Moreover, it becomes a matter of fact that Mxolisi's and the victim's fate are intertwined, that somewhere and somehow they will meet that day: "[...] this predestined ending evokes an atmosphere of doom in the initial representation of the perpetrator's and the victim's head-on trajectories." (ibid.)

When Mandisa's narrative account of her morning ends, the novel's time line features a time-forward to the afternoon of that day, more precisely to 5.15 pm. (20) At this point, the narrative shifts from the level of "telling [...]" to the narrative level of the fictionalised facts of 25 August 1993." (Altnöder, 95) The reader perceives the rest of this day through Mandisa's subjective experience of the events. In contrast to the previous chapter, Mandisa's "first-person narrative voice does not relate this story in retrospect but from the point of view of the involved I being narrated." (ibid.) Consequently, she is initially confronted with the emerging problems when her employer tells her "Trouble in Guguletu, my girl. I think you'd better go." (23) Mandisa, now shifted to a limited narrative perspective, recounts her chaotic bus ride from work home. On the bus she acquires information about the riots that take place. In this respect, Altnöder (95f.) observes an interesting rupture in Mandisa's narrative structure: all the way home and even in Guguletu, she is confronted with conflicting stories. On the bus she is informed that university students have been the victims of violence. She wonders "[w]hy would the school children fight with coloured university students?" (34) At this time Mandisa does not even think that a white person has dared to set foot into the township which meanwhile has turned into a battlefield she compares to a "pandemonium" (30).

My house is a stone's throw away from the police station so I am not unduly worried. However, a few steps after I get off the bus, I find I cannot take one step without putting my foot on a policeman. They are like ants on a saucer of raspberry jam. (37)

Ironically, Mandisa hopes that her home's vicinity to the police station is a benefit, but "[t]he police are not our friends" (44). Her description of the police station is another hint at the violence that overshadows this place:¹⁴⁴

The warning has dredged rumours of horrific deeds in that building. [...] In the middle of the night, blood-curdling screams have been heard coming from it. Awful things were said to happen to those dragged there by the police. Terrible, terrible things, some, worse than death. Of course, death too happened there. Of course. (18)

Mandisa finally gets the truth when a curious neighbor tells her that a White, a "*mlungu* woman" (43) is involved in the riot. Although Mandisa only knows that the person killed is a white university student, she nevertheless states: "A white person, killed in Guguletu, a black township. Killed, from all accounts, for no reason at all. Killed, in fact, *while doing good...helping the people of the township*." (69, emphasis added) From her limited point of knowledge, Mandisa would not know the reasons that lead the victim to Guguletu or to South Africa.

As the novel proceeds, the narrative further employs the subordinate narrative level where Mandisa intertwines her historical childhood flashback with her subjective narration of August, 25th and the events which follow that night. This subordinate narrative string takes the reader back to Mandisa's youth, yes even further back into history to the beginnings of white settlement in South Africa. On this meta-diagetic level, she introduces the reader to a life stigmatized by Apartheid, the long-lasting effects of white suppression as well as mystic tales of her people. Thus, the novel features narrative levels of "fictionalised facts" and "historical flashbacks". (Altnöder, 93) As a result, the three narrative levels are intertwined and embedded in one another. They follow a 'historical hierarchy', highlighting the effects of hundreds of years of white supremacy rule, hence trying to explain her son's

¹⁴⁴ For further information on the role of the police in post-Apartheid South Africa see chapter 7.3.3.

deed as a consequence of oppression and humiliation. Chapter Seven (88-114) opens with another letter excerpt directed at the victim's mother. The few lines of the letter serve as an introduction to the chapter itself as well as to chapter Eight (115-163), covering nearly eighty pages. Focusing on Mandisa's youth and adolescence, it is now that she actually starts recounting her own history, her upbringing, her family's surroundings as well as her own troubled life. Basically, Mandisa addresses the problems resulting from the Africans' spatial segregation; she accuses the government's education system and complains about the upbringing of children, the treatment of wives among their families as well as basic principles that governed a woman's life due to traditional and religious traditions. Magona uses her flashback to name and recount several instances of Apartheid politics that have shaped (not only) the protagonist's life sustainably.¹⁴⁵

Mandisa's historical backflash does not incorporate letter excerpts to the victim's Mother, but is frequently intertwined with the subordinate narrative levels as the novel proceeds towards its end. In chapter Eleven (198-202) and the final chapter Twelve (203-210), Mandisa addresses her "sister-mother" directly for the last time. Her lament focuses on their children's lost future, the beauties of life they will never face, as well as her own feelings of remorse, guilt and exclusion among her community. In her last address, Mandisa once more recounts and consequently tries to excuse her son's motifs. She blames the situation of the country, depriving her people of any future aspirations, of any possibilities to improve their lives. The only thing they have left is the hope that someday, somehow, things will change:

And my son? What had he to live for? My son. His tomorrows were his yesterday. Nothing. [...] A glaring void. Long before the ground split [...], that knowledge was firmly planted in his soul [...]. He had already seen his tomorrows; in the defeated stoop of his father's shoulders. In the tired eyes of that father's friends. In the huddled, ragged men who daily wait for chance at some job whose whereabouts they do not know [...]. But chance has not come that way today. [...] Chance has been busy in that other world...the white world. Where it dwelt [...] where it made its abode – in posh suburbs and beautiful homes and thriving

¹⁴⁵ Chapter 7.3 is dedicated to a close analysis of these themes.

business [...]. Such stark sign posts to [my son's] tomorrow. Hope still born in his heart. [...] The million-million lumpen, the lost generation. My son. My son! (203, original in italics)

Throughout the novel, on all structural levels, the story is told by Mandisa's first person narration. Altnöder notes (93f.) that the employment of the narrator's 'I' on all levels is a means to draw the victim's mother's focus on the crucial impact of history on her present life. Moreover, by "[...] the generic reference of the second-person pronoun used in her initial address [...]," the novel is directed at an "anonymous public" (ibid.) as well. Consequently, Mandisa's confession is not only an attempt to gain the white mother's compassion and understanding, but an outline to a wider public to grasp her people's disillusion.

As a result of this narrative framework, Mandisa's narrative voice establishes a powerful, deterministic line of reasoning at the interface of the novel's three narrative levels. On the one hand, the perpetrator could not evade the fate of his personal history so decisively influenced by apartheid's politic of Race – illustrated on the narrative level of historical flashbacks – and on the other hand, the victim could not escape her preordained death described on the narrative level of fictionalised facts. (Altnöder, 93)

Furthermore, Mandisa tries to draw in an anonymous public who might absolve her from the terrible guilt she bears upon her shoulders, the shameful blame she feels because of her son's deed; someone to bear and understand her son's delusion, which "[...] she explicitly attributes to the atrocities black people suffered under the apartheid system." (ibid.)

Three children have come from my womb. Three claim me as mother. Three. But now, since your daughter's unfortunate death, I have been called mother to so many more: Mother of the beast. Mother of the serpent. The puffadder's mother. There are those who even go as far calling me Satan's mother. I know. With a mother's pierced heart [...]; bringing a harvest of shame to my father's house. Bitter tears to a mother's proud heart. (115) [original in italics]

7.3 Themes

After this introduction to the novel's basic narrative structure, the following chapter is dedicated to the narrative's themes and the way they resemble the cultural, national, as well as the personal history of traumatic experience due to white supremacy rule. Therefore, the following issues are at the focus of discussion: the politics of race as Apartheid's devastating legacy; the importance of place as a crucial means of identification, hence the effects of special segregation, re- and dislocation, and finally, the disillusioning routines and consequences of inter- and intra-racial violence. To grasp the far-reaching dimension of these problems, the country's colonial history needs to be taken into account when actually spatial and territorial controversies originated.

7.3.1 The politics of race: Black vs. White

'Deep run the roots of hatred here
So deep, a cattle worshipping nation killed all its precious herds
Tillers, burnt fertile fields, fully sowed, bearing rich promise too.
Readers of Nature's Signs, allowed themselves fallacious belief.
In red noon's eye rolling back to the east for sleep.
Anything. Anything, to rid themselves of these unwanted strangers.
No sacrifice too great, to wash away the curse.
That deep, deep, deep ran the hatred then.
In the nearly two centuries since, the hatred has but multiplied.
The hatred has but multiplied.' (176) [emphasis added]

Basically, the whole novel is an accusation of Apartheid's atrocities and those in favor of it. Mandisa describes the legacy that the Apartheid system has bestowed upon her family and upon all of South Africa's minorities. They had to bear an existence violated by many and great injustices, extreme poverty, disillusionment, as well as abuses, both personal and institutional.

The first-person narration takes the reader to various places and introduces them to seemingly 'normal' situations in history as well as present life, consequently trying to draw the readers' attention to the problems and barriers the black community encounters every day. The following lines depict specific scenes from Magona's novel, trying to illustrate instances of the clash of races and its implications on South African society.

When Mandisa's lament opens the novel, chapter Two (5-19) turns to the narrative account of Mandisa's and the white victim's daily routine. The narrator takes the narratee to her home, recounting her day that even starts off arduously: as a caring mother, she wakes her three children and her husband, making sure they make it in time for school and work; she prepares their breakfast, tidies up their home as good as possible; Mandisa has to make sure there is enough food in storage. Finally, she worries about her children: what did they do last night? What do they plan for today? Will they go to school or get themselves into trouble? She throws orders and reminders at her children, having to realize that they might be ignored. Lastly, she blames herself for not being there to care for her children: "[w]hat would happen if I stayed home doing all the things a mother's supposed to do?" (8) When all her family have left home, Mandisa leaves the house herself, heading to work, just at that time the white victim wakes, feeling the morning sun for the last time in her life.

To stress the different life-style situations in the lives of Blacks and Whites, the narration switches between Mandisa's morning and that of the white student. Whereas Mandisa's morning is exhausting even before she has started her actual work, the victim is woken by the phone, something that does not exist in Mandisa's home. Living only twenty kilometers from Guguletu, the young woman seems to live in another world. Mandisa and her family share a little house, with the children living in shacks in the backyard for there is no more space left. The white woman shares her flat only with a room mate. The description of the breakfast underlines the vast discrepancies between the two worlds and stands in sharp contrast to the violent ending of that day. Whereas the young woman's breakfast contains "cold-milk cereal, [...] black coffee, piping hot [...], a slice of wholewheat bread. Toasted. Butter and a splash of Marmite. As an afterthought [...] a thick slice of cheese" (5f.), Mandisa's family's breakfast looks different. They have "[...] coffee, bread with jam [with] bread running out." (7f.)

Throughout the novel, the reader is faced with two worlds: on the one side, there is a white world, inhabited by those who are in power, ruling and governing the country. The Whites have stolen the Natives' country, claiming

the most dwelling and prosperous places for themselves. On the other side there is the black world. It is a world inhabited by a people who suffered centuries of suppression, deported to fenced arid and barren areas. Little is their hope to escape their prison, to lead a life worth living. The author underlines the difference between these worlds by the generic use of a "stark, racial, dichotomy between black 'us' and White 'them'" (Altnöder, 98), hence addressing either of the two worlds. Altnöder further argues that this stylistic feature forces or enables the white reader to cross the dividing line, to experience and grasp the dimension of 'the other side':

[...] in the act of reading, the white narrate "experiences" a reversal of the boundary lines between apartheid's racial categories in that he or she is obliged to cross these boundaries through his or her identification with the black Other's experience, narrated from an involved first-person point of view. (Altnöder, 98)

Undoubtedly, the author's intention to provide a look onto the other side works out as the reader is introduced to and confronted with shocking events that actually used to govern black people's lives. The novel's style of memoir certainly contributes to the narrative's authenticity. But, as mentioned afore, the novel needs to be read by an empathic audience to achieve the author's goal.

Another means to stress the abyss between Black and White is the great amount of native languages throughout Mandisa's narration. Since language, like the role of place or origin, makes up an integral part of a person's identity, the novel's character's repeated use of Xhosa underlines the black population's tradition, identity and difference from their oppressors.

Apart from these basic stylistic devices to illustrate the gap between Blacks and Whites, there is now a closer look at the reasons for the deeply rooted hatred and anger between these 'two people'. Like every other child, Mandisa is born in innocence, neither biased nor infected by the atrocities and inequalities of life. How did it come then, that already children and youths feel the same anger and have the same objection to Whites as their parents do? Reading *Mother to Mother* confronts the reader with several reasons and instances that may have given rise to such feelings and

attitudes. The opening lines to this chapter are taken from a story Mandisa is told by her grandfather. When she asks him, “Why is there hatred in the hearts of the people?” (175), his answer is a mythic tale of his people that recounts the early days of South Africa’s colonial history. Through several instances and in the tradition of oral story-telling he passes on “an alternative and subversive version of the history of colonialism and of its impact on black South Africa.” (Altnöder, 178) “Long, long ago [...] in the times of our ancestors [...] they called this the place of storms. [But] the biggest storm was the storm they themselves brought. [...] For, let me tell you something, deep run the roots of hatred here. Deep. Deep. Deep.” (175) In order to dispel the growing number of white settlers from their native land, the black population followed the prophecy of Nongqawuse¹⁴⁶, who instructed them to kill their cattle and destroy their prosperous country. Only then, after all resources and supplies were destroyed, the white intruders, “the abelungu” (178), would be driven to the sea where they would all drown. So, they killed all their cattle to the last one and burned their thriving fields. Unfortunately the prophecy did not fulfill itself but left a whole people starving. Then, it was the Whites, “the ones without any colour” (182) who brought gifts and food to the starving dying people, and “[...]a golden opportunity never to starve again. “To the mines, to the mines, hasten! hasten and be saved. Never will you hunger again. Never.”” (181f.) Hence, the plan of the native population did not work out but rather had the opposite effect.

‘We have come thus to hunger, for white people stole our land.’
[...] Later I was to hear those words with growing frequency.
‘White people stole our land. They stole our herds. We have no
cattle today, and the people who came here without any have
worlds of farms, overflowing with fattest cattle.’ (173)

The black population’s submission had its start, making them slaves, working and depending on the Whites. Actually, this is Mandisa’s first encounter with one of the reasons of her people’s fate, as she was told a different version in school: “These liars, your teachers [...]. But, what can one expect? After all they are paid by the same boer government ... the

¹⁴⁶ C.f. 173 ff.

same people who stole our land.” (176) Mandisa’s grandfather’s Xhosa legend stands in sharp contrast to the historical explanation of the arrival of the Dutch. These contrasting versions of the official on the one hand, and the native, traditional or alternative portrayal of colonial beginnings on the other hand, emphasize and deepen the gap between the two racial communities. Especially the treatment and experiences of the black people varies according to which version is narrated. Consequently, the ‘deep, deep roots of hatred’, this source of violence bred since the Whites’ arrival, may account for “Mxolisi’s surrender to what his mother depicts as a historically (pre-)determined path of violence in the struggle against the White oppressor.” (Altnöder, 104)

Apart from her grandfather’s tale, Mandisa’s character is first physically exposed to ‘race’ in the course of their relocation. Up to that imprinting event, any notion concerning race, or racial identity, does not play a major role in her life. Her home’s infiltration, the siege of her township by thousands of white police-men and soldiers marks the first “violent impingement of RACE upon her personal life.” (Altnöder, 98) For the first time, she has to experience the effects of race, to be treated differently because of her ethnic origin. Mandisa’s father plays a vital role in showing her the difference between Blacks and Whites when leading her outside the house, telling her that Whites are pulling down their houses. (Compare chapter 7.3.2) Thus, “the children are exposed, guided by their elder [to] witness the end of their hitherto known life-world by the White men’s violent destruction of their neighbourhood’s houses.” (Altnöder, 98)

Apart from Mandisa’s own experiences and confrontations with racism, she has to admit that her own generation is to blame for their children’s attitude towards white people as well. As most of the parents work for Whites, or at least encounter them in the course of the day, their (unfortunately most often negative) experiences are discussed at home. As a consequence, from their earliest days on, the children are exposed to their parents’ tales, complaints and frustration caused by the Whites. “[The children] grow up with a particularly racialised knowledge about White people in general imprinted on their minds.” (Altnöder, 103)

Whites are dogs! Not a new thought, by any means. We had said that all along. As far back as I can remember. Someone would come back home from work fuming [...] because of some unfairness they believed had been meted out to them that day. A slap. A kick. Deduction from wages. [...] So, yes, our children grew up in our homes, where we called white people dogs as a matter of idiom ... heart-felt idiom, I can tell you. Based on bitter experience. (75)

Mandisa tells of such events as a commonplace experience among Blacks. Consequently, it is only a matter of time until children start to reproduce and take over their parent's attitudes. Obviously, no further discussion is needed to grasp the coining and imprinting dimension of these experiences on the youth.

Another theme the novel addresses concerns the youth's education as well as the education system as a whole. Again, this issue can not be discussed in isolation as it is vastly influenced by various other factors. Back in Mandisa's childhood, education was esteemed as important and (in most cases) 'easily' provided for. Before their relocation, schools were located within adequate distance, with class-mates and teachers coming from close surroundings. After the forced removal all this changed. Apart from the Bantu Education Act¹⁴⁷, which massively influenced the school-system,

¹⁴⁷ "The 1953 Bantu Education Act was one of Apartheid's most offensively racist laws. It brought African education under control of the government and extended Apartheid to black schools. Bantu education served the interests of white supremacy. It denied black people access to the same educational opportunities and resources enjoyed by white South Africans. Bantu education denigrated black people's history, culture, and identity. It promoted myths and racial stereotypes in its curricula and textbooks. African people and communities were portrayed as traditional, rural, and unchanging. Bantu education treated Blacks as perpetual children in need of parental supervision by Whites, which greatly limited the student's vision of "their place" in the broader South African society. In what are now infamous words, Minister of Native Affairs, Dr. Hendrik F. Verwoerd, explained the government's new education policy to the South African Parliament: "There is no space for him [the "Native"] in the European Community above certain forms of labor. For this reason it is of no avail for him to receive training which has its aim in the absorption of the European Community, where he cannot be absorbed." South Africa's National Party viewed education to be a key element in their plan to create a completely segregated society. Dilapidated school buildings, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate instruction, poor teacher training, and a lack of textbooks plagued African education. Students struggled to learn under such conditions. The schools reserved for the country's white children were of Western standards and the education was both mandatory and free. 30 % of the black schools did not have electricity, 25 % running water and less than half had plumbing. The education for Blacks, Indians and Colored was not free. In the 70s the per capita governmental spending on black education was one-tenth of the spending on white. Black students rose in protest in 1976 when the Department of Bantu Education mandated that students would have to learn some key subjects in Afrikaans – the language of the oppressor. The *Afrikaans Medium Decree* of 1974 forced all black schools to use Afrikaans and English in a 50-50 mix. This decision sparked a youth uprising in Soweto, where more than 575 people died, at least 134 of them under the

pupils were signed-in to schools that were located far-remote from their homes; the once well-knit social classroom-communities dispersed, well-known teachers substituted and, worst of all, most schools were lacking the place to host all pupils. As another consequence of the relocations, parents had to travel much longer distances to their working places. Hence,

in the brand-new brick houses of the townships [...] new needs were born. But how to satisfy these needs? The wages of fathers had certainly not been augmented. Soon, all our mothers, who had been there every afternoon to welcome us when we returned from school, were no longer there. They were working in white women's homes. Tired, every day when they returned. Tired and angry. In time we did not remember coming back from school to mothers waiting with smiles. (67)

As a consequence, parental control that ensured the children went to school ceased to be. Children were left to their own responsibility to look after themselves. "To this day, there are not enough schools or teachers [...]. There are not enough mothers during the day to force the children to go to school [...]. The mothers are at work. Or they are drunk. Defeated by life. Dead. We die young these days." (32) Given the circumstances described above, it is no wonder that many children decided to quit going to school, hence wasting their opportunity for a better life. But, while on the one hand many of them were dragged into crimes, township students on the other hand started to boycott schools following their policy: in the name of liberation, books exchanged for arms, to fight for their people's freedom. As the student politics of the 1970s and 80s demanded "LIBERATION NOW, EDUCATION LATER" (161), a whole generation was deprived of "the future they actually fought for." (Altnöder, 104) In this context, Mxolisi becomes merely an instrument in this struggle, carrying out the policy his leaders had esteemed for good.

The enactment of the deep, dark, private yearnings of a subjugated race. [...] My son was only an agent, executing the

age of eighteen which then spread nationwide and became a watershed event in the struggle against Apartheid."

For more information see: <<http://overcomingapartheid.msu.edu/sidebar.php?id=3>> and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bantu_Education_Act>

long-simmering dark desires of his race. Burning hatred for the oppressor possessed his being [...]. The resentment of three hundred years plugged his ears; deaf to her pitiful entreaties. My son, the blind but sharpened arrow of the wrath of his race. (210)

According to this quote, Mxolisi is acquitted of any guilt as the blame is shifted to “the deterministic influence of history on the generic black experience and to the white oppressor.” (Altnöder, 105)

Belonging to both, the spatial as well as racial dimension, (or rather the former as a consequence of the latter), the narrative voice does not only differ between a black and white world in terms of their welfare, but as two worlds that are separated spatially as well. In Apartheid South Africa, there was (and unfortunately still is) a clear dividing line between white residential areas in the cities and the townships of the black population on the periphery. Movement between these two areas is allowed only ‘one-way’: since many of the black population work as domestic workers in white households, they have to commute from their townships to the white residential areas. Consequently, Mandisa crosses Apartheid’s boundaries on a daily basis which “to some extent reinforces racial boundary lines.” (Altnöder, 99) This omni-present difference is highlighted by the different life-styles of Mandisa and her wealthy white employer who is even exhausted on her ‘day-off’ after spending hours without her children in the gym, going shopping or drinking coffee with her friends. “A woman gets a day off when she never does any work around this house.” (20) According to Mandisa’s poor living condition, her day off is the day she has to work hardest as she needs to take care of her own household as well. “[...] the two White women’s and Mandisa’s practices of habitation symbolize two utterly different counter-hegemonic stances on the “new” South Africa.” (Altnöder, 186) Consequently, race is undoubtedly the determiner of one’s class as even in contemporary South Africa black people are only selectively included in urban places, which still tend to be “shaped by White people’s practices [...].” (Altnöder, 187)

Concerning the characters’ crossing of racial boundaries, Altnöder focuses on another interesting circumstance.¹⁴⁸ Since the novel is also an attempt to

¹⁴⁸ See Altnöder, 79f.

cross the boundaries between Blacks and Whites, the characters themselves cross these historic borders on different levels: on a personal one, the white victim has established friendships across the color-bar, having black colleagues at university. On a spatial level, she crosses the border of the black township Guguletu, thus ‘infiltrating’ a place that belongs to another world. She “[...] transgress[es] apartheid’s epistemological boundary lines in her friendship with black university students [...]” (Altnöder, 179) By no means, a place she should enter. “White people are not allowed to go to Guguletu, [...]. She [Mandisa’s white employer] never takes me to Guguletu. White people are not allowed to go there” (24), since “*White people live in their own areas and mind their own business [...]*” (3) [original in italics] As discussed previously, Blacks may cross the racial spatial boundary due to their work, while Whites are unwanted elements among the townships, no matter if they are civilians or the police:

And your daughter, did she not go to school? Couldn't she see all the signs telling her this is a place where only black people live? [...] [w]here was her natural sense of unease? Did she not feel awkward, a fish out of water, here? That should have been a warning to her ... a warning to stay out. Telling her the place was not for her. It was not safe for the likes of her. (72) [original in italics]

On the other side, the narrator’s voice attempts to cross these boundaries as well, yet by different means: by verbal discourse, she introduces the white mother to her own world, trying to seek understanding for and recognition of their lives by explaining and recounting their historic genesis. At the race-gender interface, Altnöder (c.f. 195f.) highlights Mandisa’s hierarchic position within the “trope-ical” family. She occupies the iconic role of black woman as a domestic worker within a White’s suburban household. From this ‘under-privileged’ position she reaches out to a white woman in order to understand the devastating effects of her lived experience as well as her son’s life. “She was not robbed. She was not raped. There was no quarrel. Only the eruption of a slow, simmering, seething rage. Bitterness burst and spilled her tender blood [...]” (210) As women, they both mourn the loss of their children. Only on this basis, the black woman attempts to reach out across the boundary

lines of race. Apart from that, Mandisa does not dwell on a trans-gender attempt of reconciliation as she neither talks to nor of the grieving father.

7.3.2 Segregation, dis- and relocation: the politics of space

This was home, they said. Home. Always had been. Always would be. HOME. (55)

A major theme affecting the South African people still every day is a consequence of Apartheid's politics of space. None of the other novels discussed by now comments that massively on the decisive role of place, space and home. But, in order to grasp the dimension of the consequences of forced re- and dislocations in the history of South Africa, the following lines provide a basic outline of white settlement policy that has shaped the country's face sustainably.

Spatial segregation as a sibling of Apartheid politics of race dates back to the 1950s. The Population Registration Act required each South African to be classified and registered according to their racial characteristics.¹⁴⁹ The inhabitants were classified according to four main racial classifications: White, Black, Colored (Mixed) and Indian. Since social and political rights as well as educational opportunities were largely determined by one's racial class, the classification vastly influenced the persons' lives. The same year, this act was followed by the Group Areas Act in 1950. It assigned the newly determined racial groups to specific residential areas. Hence, Apartheid politics wanted to exclude non-Whites from inhabiting the most developed and prosperous areas. As a consequence, thousands of non-Whites were forcibly removed from their hitherto heterogeneous urban areas. It was only 41 years later, in 1991, that the law was finally repealed. It is a matter of fact that the minorities' dislocation was another drop in the ocean that has nurtured the hate and extended the divide between the classes. A famous representative of one of those forced removals is that of District Six, which is also briefly mentioned in *Karoo Boy*. District Six, Cape Town, was once "a close-knit, mixed community of freed slaves, merchants, artisans, labourers

¹⁴⁹ E.g. characteristics of the person's hair, color of skin, facial features, language, socioeconomic status, habits.

and immigrants”, as well as “a vibrant and heterogenous neighbourhood.”¹⁵⁰ According to Apartheid state authorities, this area was classified as an inner city slum, thus subjected to a ‘slum clearance project’. In 1966, 60.000 people were forcibly removed to the arid and barren areas aptly known as the Cape Flats, while their houses and homes were flattened and destroyed by bulldozers.¹⁵¹ Afterwards, District Six was declared a white residential area according to the Group Areas Act. One of Mandisa’s flashbacks recounts this displacement. Through her innocent eyes, the reader is taken back in history, able to relive how she, her family and thousands of other people have perceived this imprinting and traumatizing experience.

Before Mandisa and her family are dislodged, her first person narrative voice recalls her childhood days in Blouvlei¹⁵² as a beautiful and carefree time. Although she has to do a great deal of chores like getting things from the market, clean the house, help prepare food, doing the laundry etc., this place is described as childhood heaven on earth.¹⁵³ But this kingdom should not last forever. It is on a weekend when she hears about the displacement for the first time. Serving her family and other men from the neighborhood ginger beer, she catches up rumors that “[t]he government is going to move all Africans to the Cape Town area to Nyanga.” (52) Obviously, no one can believe this: “Lies, lies, lies! All lies [...]. Nothing like this can ever happen.” (52) In Mandisa’s eyes, the government’s plan is surreal since moving whole Blouvlei seems impossible to her: “All? To the last one? Our parents laughed [...] There were so many of us in Blouvlei [...]. Millions and millions. Who could believe such a thing?” (54) Because of the sheer number of people living in Blouvlei, its inhabitants doubt that such a project might be feasible. Apart from that, Blouvlei has been the home to generations, the place they belong to and protected them from dangers.

¹⁵⁰ “The District Six Museum Homepage” 1996 and Thorne 1996:7, quoted in Altnöder, 96 respectively.

¹⁵¹ For more details on the history of District Six, see the District Six Museum homepage: <http://www.districtsix.co.za/>.

¹⁵² The community Blouvlei is modeled on Sindiwe Magona’s childhood home “Blaauvlei”, a squatter location outside Cape Town (c.f. Altnöder, 97).

¹⁵³ Yet, the real-life location where Magona spent her youth is rather the opposite. Blaauvlei was a “painful lived experience” where Magona spent her time in “mouse-infested shacks constructed of tin, cardboard and newspapers without running water or electricity.” (Hlongwane 2004, quoted in Altnöder, 97).

The sea of tin shacks lying lazily in the flats, surrounded by gentle white hills [...] gave us (all of us, parents and children alike) such a fantastic sense of security we could not conceive of its ever ceasing to exist. Thus, convinced of the inviolability offered by our tremendous numbers, the size of our settlement, the belief that our dwelling places, our homes, and our burial places were sacred, we laughed at the absurdity of the rumour. (54)

Unfortunately, the community has to learn that the government's plans are serious: "[...] the government was not laughing. The government never showed its smiling teeth when dealing with any matter in connection with Africans." (55) And for true, after some time has passed, Mandisa is terrified when a plane, "[f]lying so low, my friends and I could see the people in it. See their pink-pink skins [...] see to the dark glasses hiding their coloured eyes" (57), drops notices of Blouville's displacement. In Mandisa's naïve perception she compares the leaflets to birds, unable to fly, but soon "a shock wave split my body." (59) The silent birds the plane has dropped mark the end of the Blouville settlement. "I looked at the paper in my hand. Writing. In big letters. Spelling errors. Whoever wrote this, can't have gone far in school, I thought." (59) After all attempts to have the decision revoked fail, Blouville's inhabitants find themselves under siege at the early hours of September 1st, in 1968. In great and shocking detail, Mandisa recounts the day's horrible events. She is woken by her father and told that "'[w]hites are pulling down our houses'. Tata said the words gently, with no hint of emotion whatsoever. [...] 'Come and see', Tata said, then *taking Khaya and me by the hand*, he lead us out of the house." (64) [emphasis added] Mandisa's father wants his children to witness the whole scene, to witness the injustice and inhumanities that take place right in front of their home. He wants his children to comprehend and see the Whites' atrocities. Therefore, he takes his children by their hands, leading them outside to make them aware of the white man's destructive powers.

Menacing. [...] An army of invasion: a fleet of police. Vans. bulldozers and army trucks surrounded the location. Completely. In its entire vastness, Blouville was surrounded and contained. [...] out of each of the army and police vehicles and bulldozers sprang uniform-clad white men. Hundreds of them. In a cloud of pink-fleshed faces peeping from beneath heavy helmets, [...] the white

men set upon the tin shacks like unruly children destroying a colony of anthills. (65)

In this quote, Mandisa compares the shacks' inhabitants to ants who are at the mercy of their conquerors. Thus, she stresses the inferiority of her people that is treated like flies, rats, harmful vermin, who can do nothing but flee to save their lives. Mandisa's description of that day is indeed horrible. Witnessing such an event at the age of eight, it is no wonder that thousands of people, both young and old, come out of such situations suffering from severest traumatization.

Some of Blouvillei's more stubborn residents chained themselves to the doors of their homes. But the door frames were pulled down just the same. Pulled down with those poor desperate souls chained right into them. With eyes bright with suppressed tears, our parents pulled down their homes [...]. (65f)

The destruction of their homes is followed by the community's trek to their new homelands. Mandisa's narration of her people's exodus reminds the reader of the Holocaust, with thousands of Jews being packed and herded together in Ghettos or Concentration Camps, as well as other instances of genocide and humanitarian catastrophes in Africa.

[...] our parents trekked. Dejected and dispirited, but determined to build anew [...]. They trekked. [...] A long line of wearied humanity: children, women and men, following their noses, going to a place they had never seen before [...]. They trekked. Leaving their lives flattened to nothing behind them. Government vehicles hounding them, bayonets prodding their backs; confused, bedraggled and spent [...]. (66)

When the trek finally reaches their new 'homeland' they find themselves literally in the middle of nowhere. The land is barren, arid and dead. Nothing good will ever happen in this place, which is ironically called 'Guguletu', translating 'Our Pride'. "The people who live in 'Our Pride' call it Gugulabo – Their Pride. Who would have any gugu about a place like this?" (27) Mandisa's first impressions of that place are still imprinted in her mind. One of the things she vividly remembers is that there has always been trouble in Guguletu:

[s]ince the government uprooted us on the arid, windswept, sandy Flats. [...] This place is like a tin of Sardines [...]. People everywhere you looked. Stray dogs. Peddlers. Children roaming the streets aimlessly [...]. And then the forest of houses. A grey, unending mass of squatting structures. Ugly. Impersonal. Cold to the eye. Most with their door closed. Afraid. (26f.)

The situation in the newly inhabited township is terrible, the living conditions inferior. As the number of Africans outnumbers the houses by far, thousands of Africans have to build shacks out of tin and cupboard once again. The land is barren and desert-like. Hence the population can neither plant nor grow anything there. The once well-knit communities are torn apart, with each of the formerly neighbors living randomly distributed among the township. Lastly, the design of the new houses presses down on those they are to shelter. Guguletu is made up of hundreds of rows of identical, dark little concrete houses. In Mandisa's eyes these houses are "[l]ow as though trained never to dream high dreams." (27)

We came here and were confronted and confounded by all these terrible conditions: the loss of our friends, the distances our parents had to travel to and from work, the high fares we had to pay going to and from places with decent food shopping. And then there was the deadening uniformity of Guguletu houses. (34)

After Mandisa's forced removal from her fictitious 'childhood paradise' to this inhospitable space, "her innocence is substituted by a continual feeling of displacement, alleviated only through the memory of her idyllic childhood home. (Altnöder, 99)

In *Mother to Mother*, the role of home is of highest importance to the individuals' identity. Africans have inhabited this country over centuries until, due to white colonialism, they were expelled from their homelands to gated communities, restricted areas or ghettos, where the native population could not interfere with the white one. Apartheid policies demanded a strict separation, a spatial segregation of non-Whites from their oppressors. Undoubtedly, pictures of signs reading "Whites only" on South African beaches, buses etc. are still in everyone's mind. Over centuries, wars have been fought because of territorial affairs. Hence, the place to live, a space to

be is inextricably linked to an individual's identity and sense of freedom. The records of human history are rich of entries concerning minorities' repulsion from their homelands or their spatial aggregation within small territories. From the earliest beginnings of white settlement in South Africa, the relation between the arriving and the native population was tensed. On the level of historical flashbacks, Mandisa travels back to her youth, outlining her family's displacement and all of its consequences.

Major parts of the novel cover spatial issues as well as the role of the black community's new homeland. Therefore, various quotes from Magona's novel shall help to illustrate the prevailing atmosphere among their township, Guguletu. The problem of the all-overshadowing violence is dealt with separately in chapter 7.3.3.

Guguletu? Who would choose to come to this accursed, God-forsaken place. So great was the upheaval, more than three decades later, my people are still reeling from it. (48)

To add to the hardship of living in shacks, a vicious, gale-force wind blew ceaselessly through the area. [...] By night, it howled and wailed and shrieked like the despairing voices of lost souls. [...] A reminder of how we had been swept into this howling place against our will. Yes ... much against our will. (30)

My heart bled for myself and for what I'd lost, and for all those millions that had lost their homes. All those lives rudely disrupted, mercilessly plucked from heart and the familiar. That sea of shacks forever silenced. (33)

From the first days in this place, how different everything appeared. Different from how we had been in Blouville, how we had done things in that beloved place we called home. [...] this throwing together of so many, many people, all at once, into a new place. [...] All of them still grieving, yearning of the places they were forced to leave. [...] From now on, only white people would live in those places, places from which Africans and Coloureds and Indians had been driven off. The government had decided that residential areas would be segregated, strictly so, and by law. (28)

These quotes depict the inhabitability and the aridity of the landscape; they comment on the end of the community's traditional social networks due to

their mindless allocation among the townships. The quotes tell of the misery of a people, who were disrupted from their lives, “plucked” like vegetable from their common homelands and sewn over lifeless barren ground. In these surroundings, they have to make themselves acquainted with the neighboring strangers and get used to a desperate environment. The only things they have in common are the shared feelings of anger, resentment and hate, which unite the community against their enemy.

As mentioned in chapter 7.3.2, the two worlds of White and Black are strictly marked-off areas. In their efforts to create a spatially segregated people, Apartheid’s officials invented one discriminating policy after the other to banish the black and colored communities to remote outskirts. Forced removals, evictions from ancestral homes and the active destruction and reinvention of neighborhoods were the outcome of these politics. The notion and role of race is inextricably linked to the spatial landscape of South Africa. Hence, Apartheid has created a geographical landscape that “is the product of a complicated and nuanced reconfiguring of socio-spatial relations – of racial identities invented by inscribing them in space”. (Elder, 153)

Despite the devastating effects of relocations on the minorities, they have not succumbed to their fate. Though their path to freedom was littered with indescribable pain and sacrifices, Apartheid finally came to an end. Nevertheless, the grief and sorrow caused by the Whites will not cease to be overnight. The wounds of those who survived these days of turmoil will still need sensitive treatment.

Yet, even today we still laugh sad laughs, remembering our innocent incredulity. Our inability to imagine certain forms of evil, the scope and depth of some strains of ruthlessness. We laugh, to hide the gaping hole where our hearts used to be. Guguletu killed us ... killed the thing that held us together ... made us human. Yet, we still laugh. (33)

7.3.3 Inter- and intra-racial violence

Violence is a rife. It has become a way of life. When a husband leaves for work of a morning, there is no guarantee he'll safely find his way back home come night. [...] Between drunk drivers of stolen cars, the police, tsotsies, and those who kill those with whom they do not see eye to eye in matters political – safety has become quite, quite fragile. (45)

The last issue to deal with is closely linked to the politics of space, if not a result of it. Mandisa's narration introduces the victim's mother as well as the reader to South Africans' experiences under Apartheid, such opening the path to the novel's most decisive theme: apart from accusing Apartheid politics, the novel's main objective is to find understanding in/with the narratee, to acquire sympathy for her people by showing what is behind the curtain. Yet, something that even Mandisa is unable to understand is the incredible violence that has shattered South Africa. The following lines depict scenes that exemplarily show the violence as an unfortunately integral part of life in black townships. Therefore, the analysis reflects on occasions and reasons of violence as well as the genesis of inter-racial and intra-racial violence.

In the course of the South African's struggle for freedom, the black townships aroused tragic awareness by the high share of barbaric acts of crime. The news and media were filled with reports of murder, assault, rape and death. In other words, the townships were governed and dominated by violence. "For years ... many, many years we have lived with violence. This was nothing new to us. [...] The night is quiet, punctuated now and then by the sound of gun fire. Nothing unusual about that these days, not in Guguletu." (69f.) For decades, non-South Africans were advised not to travel to this country for safety reasons. The literary landscape that has emerged over the past years is full of descriptions of violent scenes. All the novels dealt within this thesis illustrate several instances of barbaric violence or even center around instances dealing with rape or death. It is simply an utmost tragic fact that violence in South Africa has been as common as the sun's daily rise and set. "What is the matter with our people? [...] Is it not

enough we kill each other as though the other is an animal and one is preparing a feast? Is that not enough evil?" (45)

The township Guguletu is described as hell on earth. Throughout Mandisa's narrative account she tells of numerous crimes that seem to be common-practice in township-life:

Guguletu is a violent place. Every day one hears of someone who was killed ... or nearly killed. Often more than one. Every day – rape, robbery, armed assault or other, more subtle forms of violence. Every day. Guns are as common as marbles were when we were growing up. (44)

It is in this atmosphere that young Mxolisi, representative of thousands of other young South Africans, is forced to grow into life. An environment that has shaped and coined him and others sustainably. It is against this backdrop that the white victim enters the black township, "the capital of hell where all evil is gathered." (Altnöder, 100) For sure there are few Whites who would dare to cross the racial and spatial divide. But, as Mandisa recounts later on, the victim obviously lacks an "*inborn sense of fear*" as she "*must have been the type of person who has absolutely no sense of danger when she believes in what she is doing.*" (2) [original in italics] Although the white victim knows of the prevailing violence that governs the township, she has never spent a thought on any risks. In her naïve believe that doing good and help the people might protect her, she enters Guguletu. Yet, as Altnöder observes¹⁵⁴, it is not only her ignorance that led her to ignore the danger but rather her "self-fashioned cultural identity, as a White comrade that allowed the victim to ignore the questionable dictum that this "place was not for her"". Moreover, her deed suggests that fear or even "an inborn sense of unease" are not to be taken as granted and natural but rather may be the result of one's environment. Nonetheless, by transcending the boundary line she obviously is the exception from the rule and, finally, the one who is killed for this transgression.

Apart from the numerous other murders and brutal events Mandisa tells of, the homicide of the white woman remains the most outstanding one in the

¹⁵⁴ Compare Altnöder, 100f.

novel. While the death of black persons is hardly worth mentioning, the murder of a White is setting the nation on fire. By killing her, Mxolisi crosses the racial boundary line as well. Mandisa states that “[m]urderers are countless as the trees of a forest in this Guguletu of ours” (45), but “killing a white woman was quite another thing.” (44). Incidents of intra-racial violence have become daily routine among the townships, incidents that are not worth mentioning anymore: *“White people live in their own areas and mind their own business – period. We live here, fight and kill each other. That is our business. You don’t see big words on every page of the newspapers because one of us kills somebody, here in the township.”* (3) [original in italics] Mxolisi’s mother fears that the police would surely crucify the murderer for his deed, a statement that hints at the police’s biased position under Apartheid. Since (more or less) only white persons work for the police, their common practice in such cases is clear; in fact, they would do anything to find someone to blame for the deed: “[...] the police will pull this township apart [...]” (45) And indeed, the scene Mandisa returns to that afternoon reminds her of the relocation, the upheaval she had to experience. Guguletu has turned to a “pandemonium”, is “under siege” with hundreds of “Saracens” (36ff.) filling the streets like ants. In this scene, Mandisa’s initial loss of childhood is “paralleled by a mother’s disillusionment when she is forced to acknowledge her son’s guilt.” (Altnöder, 101) All the turmoil, the crying and the all-overshadowing fear that define the township’s atmosphere, leave children highly confused, terrified and traumatized.

In Apartheid South Africa, police slogans like ‘to serve and protect’ do not relate to the black township communities. The police are highly feared and hated among the population as they bring sorrow and malice in most cases. Mandisa’s description of Guguletu’s police station underlines the police men’s random brutality:

The police are not our friends. They are this day worse than ineffectual. [...] They are an endless source of irritation, at best. At worst, a presence we dread, an affliction. We know that many innocent people have died in their hands. Their blood-stained hands. Died. Killed by the police. With impunity they killed our people in the past.” (44)

There are loads of instances that tell of the brutal and barbaric practices of Apartheid's executive forces. An endless number of people has died in their hands as a consequence of interrogations, torture, mistreatment or sheer random acts of senseless violence (if violence may ever make any sense at all). The police undoubtedly crucially influenced and enforced the Blacks' feelings of hate and oppression. Their chicanes like passport-controls and house-raids must have evoked the deepest-buried feelings of resentment and anger among the black and colored population.

Unfortunately, Mxolisi's childhood and youth are severely influenced by the police as well. Moreover, his life is deeply influenced and affected by several other traumatic occasions. The reader learns from Mandisa that Mxolisi grows up extraordinarily fast, both in physical as well as intellectual terms. In the violent climate of the township, his intellectual capacity enables him to "[...] tell the difference between the *bang!* of a gun firing and the *Gooph!* of a burning skull cracking, the brain exploding" (146f.) at the age of four. He is able to do the war cry of the comrades, "poised in a defiant stance, his tiny fist up in the air [...]." (ibid.) Nonetheless, it is also at the age of four when Mxolisi goes through his hitherto most formative experience. One day, when Mxolisi visits his childhood friends at home, these two young boys rush into the house as they run away from the police. Hiding successfully in the wardrobe, the police want to give up their search for the boys when Mxolisi, mistaking the whole scene for the game hide and seek, reveals his friends' hiding spot:

The boys jumped out and made for the window. But when they hit the back garden the police were waiting, and shot them then and there. He was struck mute by what he saw the police do to the two boys. His beloved friends. After that, he zipped his mouth and would not say one word. Not one word more – for the next two years. (148)

The novel does not disclose what the two boys have done; nevertheless, they were murdered in front of their parents, their friends, without trial, without anything. Simply killed. Such deeds can only remain inconceivable to normal people, the parent's grief, their anger and frustration beyond imagination. Apart from the emerging hatred, it leaves young Mxolisi deeply

traumatized. He does not utter a single letter for the next two years. Since “this child has seen great evil in his short little life” (154), “[the doctors] could not plant what the police had scorched away by their violent actions.” (150)

This scene is juxtaposed with the police raid in Mandisa’s house. When the police try to chase down Mxolisi, they come and turn Mandisa’s home upside down. Mandisa’s family fear for their lives since they are beaten and humiliated by the police. Just like Mxolisi as a young boy, it is now his sister who is scared to death. “They’re going to kill us! Mama, they’re going to kill us!’ [...] Her eyes are wild with fear [...] wider than the Sahara.” (83) Mandisa, her husband and their other son Lunga are beaten by the police, their house totally devastated. The only thing they leave is a great void; the family fearing for their eldest son, their daughter shocked and terrified, the house destroyed. All of them humiliated and treated unjustly. “The police were gone. Gone to wherever they had come from. We could not. [...] We could never go back to who we were before they had come. [...] Nothing would ever be the same for us.” (87)

After these occasions of inter-racial violence, the novel’s analysis closes with a brief look at the development of intra-racial violence, a sociologically highly interesting fact. In the course of the student riots starting in the 80s, acts of violence were not only restricted to destroying white people’s property and lives, but evermore directed at fellow black people who were suspected of collaboration with the Apartheid government. “[...] our children graduated from stoning cars, white people’s cars. They graduated from that and burning buildings. [...] Now, they started stoning black people’s cars. And burning black people’s houses.” (75) As a consequence, “[...] war-like circumstances rendered townships all over South Africa sites of violence.” (Altnöder, 193) Due to the policy of their leaders, the townships were made mostly ungovernable with living reaching their lowest. It is here that some sort of anarchy and brutal rituals have started to govern the people’s lives. Representatives of Apartheid politics did not interfere with these new conditions since Blacks killing each other were not seen as unduly worrying. Nevertheless, the never-ending violence crucially influenced the lives of

those who could not escape the townships. These times were especially cruel for women since rape was the order of the day: “[t]he safety of girl children has become a burning issue in Guguletu and all places like Guguletu. Every day, one hears of rape. Rapes, not a rape. Rapes. Which means that, each day, more than one woman or girl or child is accosted.” (38) Unwanted pregnancies were some of the major problems caused by the countless number of rapes, not to mention the thousands of women and girls who suffered traumatizing shocks.

Apart from the political situation that urged people to carry out acts of violence in the name of freedom, the Blacks’ desperate living conditions did its bit too. Thousands of people who lived under impoverished conditions, who lacked decent food, clothing and housing, esteemed crime as the only way to improve their lives if a little. For people who daily struggle to survive, who fight for their existence, human life is worth nothing. Moreover, as children were exposed to and consequently used to acts of violence, such deeds were not esteemed as uncommon or ‘wrong’. It is a kind of vicious circle the black African population was stuck within.

In the course of her narrative account, Mandisa comments on their children’s role among the liberation struggle. In her opinion, what might have started with the best of intentions, somehow got out of control.

Our children fast descended into barbarism. With impunity, they broke with old tradition and crossed the boundary between that which separates human beings from beasts. Humaneness, *ubuntu*, took flight. [...] It went and buried itself where none of us would easily find it again. (76)

Their children have turned to a barbaric lot with neither ethical nor moral core values. Blinded by their leaders, they have become instruments, submissive merciless tools who would stop at nothing in their fight for freedom. “These tyrants our children have become, power crazed [...]” (24) Nevertheless, in Mandisa’s eyes, it is not her son who is to blame for what he has done. Mxolisi has been instructed and infected by his leaders’ messages to carry out violent actions. According to her, not her son should be convicted but those who have poisoned his mind:

[s]hame and anger fill me day and night. Shame at what my son has done. Anger at what has been done to him. I am angry at all the grown-ups who made my son believe he would be a hero, fighting for the nation, were he to do the things he heard them advocate, the deeds they praised. If anyone killed your daughter, some of the leaders who today speak words of consolation to you [...] are your daughter's murderers. (199)

As a last point and probably one of the most abominable and monstrous inventions of black township life, Mandisa recounts the first instances of "necklacing", a detestable way of killing that used to become 'fashionable' in township life. Thousands of murderers, criminals or collaborators died by the necklace, the South Africans' guillotine:

A black man from Guguletu. [...] The children put a garland around his neck, an old, worn tyre. Then, into the tyre they poured some liquid. [...] In a flaming heap, the man fell to the ground. Cheers rose from the crowd. [...] The spectators were positively mesmerized, dazzled by the brilliance of their handiwork. [...] THE NECKLACE. A new phrase was coined. That is what we chose to call our guillotine. Not many of our leaders came out and actually condemned the deed. [...] They said it would lead us to freedom. [...] I had not known that it was our own people who stood in the way of the freedom we all said we desired. (77)

Mother to Mother does not only condemn Apartheid's brutal costumes, but critically reflects on intra-racial violence within the black community as well. It depicts a people's atrocities and inhumane crimes as authentically as no other novel. Reading *Mother to Mother* is a desperate voyage through a country's devastating past. Representative for too many places in the world, the novel shows the effects of hundreds of years of stubborn hatred that is deeply rooted within a people's history. Although many of them may not even know how things came to be as they were under Apartheid, certain feelings still never seem to stop to haunt the 'Rainbow-Nation'.

And I hear there are churches and other groups working with young people and grownups. Helping. So that violence may stop. Or at least be less than it is right now. That is a good thing. We need to help each other ... all of us, but especially the children. (201)

8. Conclusion

The historical heritage shared by the South African people is of highest complexity and confronts it with loads of problems still to overcome. The fall of Apartheid rang in a new era with new possibilities, new chances and new hopes, yet, the demons of the past have not vanished over night. Although South Africa is the country with the fastest and best growing economy, industry and welfare on the whole continent, not everyone is able to participate and enjoy the prospects and benefits of this change. South Africa still faces social problems as crime and unemployment; medical supplies and institutions need to be improved, and, the non-white population still suffers from an insufficient education system leaving them with fewer future possibilities. Though the nation hosts the World Soccer Championship 2010, such pointing the way to the country's future, many issues seethe offside the newly erected soccer stadiums. While it is up to the country's political leaders to change these circumstances on an institutional and national level, the creators and authors of literary narratives seek to reconcile the nation on a more subtle level. Besides public and official efforts to overcome Apartheid's inequalities and atrocities (e.g. the TRC), literary creators handle and work up the country's past in novels, poems or other narrative forms, making use of the immense potential literature conveys. Hence, the author's work should be seen as an integral part and effort on the way to a new Rainbow Nation, an unbiased South Africa which has been finally able to overcome its desperate history.

A drop of bitterness concerns the practical value and benefit of these literary works. In most cases, it is wishful thinking to believe that a novel, a poem or any other form of written work may easily cure the country's scars. Many of the people who still suffer from Apartheid's remnants will not be able to enjoy a better life as their history and suffering have been written down. In many cases, these people do not even have the educational or financial ability to get access to these works. Consequently, it is up to those 'outside', to those who share these abilities and above all, those who feel the urge and desire for change. The present globalized world shares these opportunities. The international media, diverse NGO's as well as other human-rights

organizations are granted the ability to reach and address the world, to get people from all over the planet to recognize and name and shame instances of injustice. With global help as well as political, economic and financial pressure, countries may be forced to change to and adapt a moderate and equal form of government.

Nevertheless, in the aftermath of political transformations, literary works as well as all other forms and ways that carry a message are incredibly important devices to come to terms with the past. Thanks to the creative potential of mankind, there are numerous ways these narratives can be represented. These may be drawings, paintings, sculptures, installations, movies, music, dances or written forms as novels, poems, memoirs, myths, tales, testimonies, diaries, satires or dystopias. As long as the reading community may find their place within the narrative, as long as they understand and grasp its intention and are ready to accept their position as well as their faults and misdeeds within a wider scope, then the narrative as a healing device will work out.

This paper attempted to illustrate the possibilities of such narratives to heal a nation. The works of four famous authors were dissected and analyzed bit by bit in order to find means and ways to represent the experience of trauma in a written narrative form. As a consequence, various techniques and stylistic elements that are used to represent, symbolize and process traumatic memories could have been selected from the novels discussed.

One of the most common themes to be found throughout the novels concerns diverse forms of loss. In a way, it is representative for the whole nation since a vast amount of the population had to experience some kind of loss. In the novels, the reading community comes across loss in its most desperate form that is the loss of a beloved one. Sons or daughters, mothers or fathers, friends or relatives, all of the novels discussed feature loss as a consequence of homicide, rape, going-away, finishing with the past, relations' break-ups or deepest disdain. But, loss is not only limited to the personal level: there is the loss of hope, love, innocence, freedom, happiness, compassion, self-esteem or the desire to live which the

characters have to face. Hence in most cases, loss is the reason for a character's trauma. Loss often triggers off a chain of events that most often does not improve a person's life. Consequently, characters may suffer from multiple traumas that leave their souls deeply bruised. The characters' ways to cope with loss are as manifold as the reasons causing it: some try to leave everything behind and flee to far remote places; some try to cope with loss by plunging themselves into work; others seek a way out by starting new relations. One thing that all have in common is that right after the tragic event, no one is able to talk about their loss or verbalize their feelings. As traumatic experiences tear one's self apart and leave the person's mind shattered, the victim is unable to remember and confront the event. It is only months, years or even decades later, that victims are finally capable of remembering, of finding the strength to talk about what has happened. Their memories, yet wreathed in mist, start to unveil, enabling them to remember and confront whatever has caused their pain.

Another prominent feature is the use of dreams. Memories are the most decisive means to get access to an experience. Already Freud discovered and stressed the importance and potential of memories. But, how could one access the memories that resist integration in a person's mind? While applied psychology has tried to seize these memories by e.g. hypnosis, authors are in the need of other ways to represent and illustrate memories. Therefore, day-dreams, waking-dreams or nightmares symbolize the characters' inner struggle to cope with their traumatic memories. Events perceived as dreams turn out to be the actual memories and experiences caused by the traumatic event. There are several instances when the characters believe to be sound asleep, experiencing a nightmare. Actually, they relive the events that have caused their trauma but are unable to remember them. The narrative accounts present these instances as dreams, flashbacks or flashforwards, leaving the reader in the dark about the truth. It is only in the end of the narratives, when finally the meticulously spun threads come together to reveal horrific scenes that shatter one's innermost being.

Another prominent theme that accounts for several instances of traumatization is related to questions of home, place and identity. While Chapter 7 is most representative for these issues, there are also numerous other novels where a person's tearing apart from home causes a mental distortion. In this case, it is not a question of the color of one's skin. To find one's place in the world, to have a space to take refuge or to belong somewhere, are some of humans' basic needs. To rip someone out of these familiar surroundings may leave a person's psyche distorted.

One of the most common themes that is inextricably linked to trauma concerns all forms of violence. Unfortunately, violence has shaped the South African political and social landscape far too long, inevitably leaving its stains of blood on the country's surface. While violence is most evident on a physical level, the novels offer numerous instances of psychical violence as well, both claiming their victims. Being treated like cattle, regarded as worthless beings, subjected, exploited, tortured, killed, with no voice to raise, are conditions no 'normal' or civilized human being may ever understand. Yet, innumerable South Africans have gone through their hell on earth, leaving them with feelings of anger, bitterness, desolation, despair and frustration, breathing vengeance on their perpetrators.

Yet not without difficulties, South Africa seems to be on its way to a 'normal' future, trying to forget the past's atrocities. But, will this people ever be able to forget? Should they ever be able to forget what has happened in their country, what has been done to their people? The saying goes 'time heals all wounds', but for sure, what has happened in this country should never pass into oblivion. Therefore, it is the duty of literary creators to write down their country's and people's history, to pass on the burdensome legacy to future generations, ensuring that certain things will never recur. Hence, these literary narratives hopefully

[...] bear the potential to contribute to the discursive initiation of the non-racial Rainbow-Nation, to tentatively inscribe "new" subject positions into this unfolding post-apartheid time-space and, eventually, to encourage the subject's ethical encounter with the Other's difference." (Altnöder, 209)

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11. Appendix

11.1 The Living Dead: An Interview with Susan Mann¹⁵⁵

MB: I am familiar with Anne Michaels' work, the Canadian novelist and poet. There are two epigraphs at the beginning of your novels that you have probably taken from her poems. Do you know *Fugitive Pieces*?

SM: I do know *Fugitive Pieces*.

MB: It's notably about loss and the traumatic experience of witnessing the death of one's parents in an extremely violent way. My first question concerns the sort of dialogue that I sense between your writing and Michaels' work. Is *One Tongue Singing* a kind of answer to *Fugitive Pieces*?

SM: I would love to say yes, because that would imply a whole other level of meaning for myself, but if it is, it was not consciously so?. I did read *Fugitive Pieces* and it remains one of my favourite books ever. I am sure that – as everything that we read and everything that we see – it is lodged somewhere in my subconscious. Perhaps that did have some kind of influence, but if it did, I am not consciously aware of it.

MB: I am thinking of *Quarter Tones* particularly and its very poetic language. I could sense that connection to *Fugitive Pieces*, which I loved, because it's also one of my favourite books.

SM: Well, *Fugitive Pieces* is a fantastic book, but I also really like Anne Michaels' poetry. I know that not everybody does, it seems to be a quite controversial thing, but I think that her poetry is exquisite. There are just a few lines in her poetry that have seemed so important and that's why I have lifted them; both epigraphs come from her poetry, yes.

MB: I'll stick to *One Tongue Singing* now. The book's chapters alternate between Zara's past and present but, of course, Zara's past is present and presence. How can you translate trauma into fiction, given that trauma is something that can re-occur and seems to be almost beyond or outside of time, and that fiction requires a kind of linearity?

SM: I am not sure about the linearity because, as you correctly pointed out, her present is also her past. But I think if you are asking how I went about doing that, I simply really sought to work almost like an arrow: the two paths working together towards a point, a combination, a climax at the end; the two paths always separate, supporting one another in their way. And I suppose by doing that, you enable a kind of flashback. Not only a flashback that hints at traumatic events, but also a sense of foreboding, like a flashback forward, if you like. By using two different timeframes you can do that, so that you can give the story a creator's sense of impending trauma. It's a kind of finding out while you are writing it. It's not something that one

¹⁵⁵ *The Living Dead*: transcript of an interview with Susan Mann not yet published. .

mechanically sets out to do, it's something that just really happens through the flow of the writing.

MB: For me Zara is one of the most challenging characters that I have encountered in my reading. In a way she challenges the category of the flat character. In fact, readers could argue that she is a flat character, that she doesn't really develop throughout the narrative. However, my reading about trauma and the effects of violence, numbing, dissociation, the sense of living under a bell jar and amnesia, explain for me Zara's paralysis. How do other readers read Zara?

SM: Zara, I think, is quite controversial from what I have seen in reviews. There was somebody who used that exact word. They said that she was a flat character, and that they couldn't understand why. And she was always dirty, and why on earth would anybody be remotely sexually attracted to her? It was completely beyond them.

And then there have been other people who commented much in the way that you just have, that psychologically trauma can definitely have a shock value. If you're highly sensitive and you witness something that's as traumatic as your mother being murdered, I think that the weight of that shock can definitely silence you forever. I think that made perfect sense to me. I think that her silence actually is quite, I want to say, *vocal* – but that's not the correct expression. There is quite a lot in her silence; she says a lot with her silence. I also think that it would have been completely, if you like, psychologically incorrect if she had been overbearingly chatty. It wouldn't have made sense; it just wouldn't have tied in with somebody with her depth.

MB: When the police want to get information from Zara about her mother's barbaric murder, the grandfather refers to her eyes as "the emptied-out eyes of the living dead" (Mann, *One Tongue* 225). Now 'the living dead' seems to me an appropriate way of describing the inner landscape of a person that has been literally shattered by a traumatic event. Could you comment on this, and what would this imply within the South African context?

SM: Well, it's difficult. As you know, there are lots of people who have suffered all different kinds of trauma, whether it's political trauma or violence. We are a violent nation, and there are a lot of people who have suffered all kinds of violence. I don't think I know enough about psychology to make a blanket statement. All I can say is that, individually, people have different ways of managing violence; people react differently to trauma. One person who is mugged and hit over the head and kicked in the ribs and nearly shot might actually see the positive side of that. It sounds peculiar, but I have heard of that as well.

MB: Are people developing a sort of resilience?

SM: Yes. Well, when the person that I am thinking of was mugged, she thought that her time had come, because in South Africa that's what you think. You think okay, well this is it. My number's up now and this is my turn, because it has happened so often. But then, through the process, through the thought that she might die, this person actually realized how many

negative things she had been carrying with her, and she managed to have a change of outlook on her life – so that had a positive effect. But mostly I think that trauma can have a stunning effect. Stunning from the point that it can stun you into silence and that it can go underground; it can go into your psyche in a negative, dark way.

MB: And you start to live in between life and death, in a sort of third state?

SM: Well, I think one could perhaps become a bit preoccupied with death. Death could become far more a part of one's life, far more real, and an obsession. I think Zara was particularly preoccupied with death.

MB: In Coetzee's *Foe* Friday's tongue has been cut out. You are also very much concerned with the issue of language. Is your endeavour similar to Coetzee's: in a way, symbolically trying not to speak for the other, for the pain of the other, but nevertheless conveying its suffering?

SM: You mean with Zara not speaking? No, it wasn't, quite simply.

EM: What you said before was that silences can speak, and I think it's the same in Coetzee's *Foe* and also, of course, in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*, where David can't tell the story of Dulcie, but nevertheless the whole book seems to be circling around that silence, that impossibility to speak.

SM: It becomes 'the elephant in the room'. 'The elephant in the room' is an expression we use to describe the thing you don't speak about, but that is so big that you speak about it through absences. So yes, I think silence has a huge role. I also think verbal communication is only one way of communicating and Zara does this through her paintings. She does have her way of communicating. You could almost call her autistic, but in her way she still manages to communicate with the world, she just doesn't do it verbally.

MB: Quoting Coetzee, "pain is truth" (*Doubling* 248) and "truth is related to silence" (*Doubling* 65). I was wondering whether South Africa needs more a theory of silence than a theory of narrative, if the country is to heal.

SM: Perhaps there is a time for both. Perhaps there is a time for silence and a time for narrative. If I think in terms of the TRC, I think that that was very important, to stand up. Although the TRC itself is very flawed and has come under a lot of attack, I still think that for people to stand up and tell their story was an important launch pad for healing. But that's it. I think that if you had the TRC every week, if that's all it ever was, if South African literature was only ever about apartheid and the pain and the suffering, by repetition we would lose any kind of power. So I think there is a time also for withdrawal and for time out, to change themes.

MB: In both *One Tongue Singing* and in *Quarter Tones* memory is, of course, a central theme. However, from the structure of these texts and from the different points of view you've chosen, it is clear that the former deals more with what psychology calls traumatic memory, and the later with narrative memory. Would you agree with that?

SM: Yes, I would agree with that. In *One Tongue Singing* Zara is dealing with traumatic memory and that is a strong part of the plot and of the structure. In *Quarter Tones* it's more a question of coming to terms with memory, processing her memory in a way that makes sense, so that she can move on.

MB: This memory is there in a narrative form, in a way.

SM: Yes, memory is key to that.

MB: Of course the role of the reader is also very important: In *One Tongue Singing* the incipit is detached from the narrative and the reader is not only introduced into the leitmotif of this text, but also needs to do a constant re-piecing and remembering for the story to work. Could you comment on this device and on the role of the reader in this structure?

SM: You mean that there is quite a lot asked of the readers, because they need to bear two different contexts in mind?

MB: I am thinking about the remembering and the piecing together of the plot that is required of the reader.

SM: Yes. The reader does need to take quite an active role in making sense of the two plots and working it out. I would have hoped that the clues were not too cryptic and that the readers were able to make the connections in a way that made sense and was not stopping them from the story. I would not want to be cryptic beyond understanding.

MB: I would like to turn to Zara's paintings and Zara's art now. Zara's paintings are intense and powerful; however, they don't seem to liberate her, on the contrary, Zara seems to be possessed. Do you think 'possession' would be an appropriate term for Zara's state?

SM: I am not sure how one would differentiate between 'possessed' and 'obsessed'. I think 'possessed' almost implies that she is taken over by a force that is not hers. If that were true, then I would suggest that that force is her memory. If she is possessed by anything, it is the memory of the trauma that she witnessed, which would lead to a kind of – as I mentioned earlier – obsession with death and a perpetual attempt to engage with death, to almost find some kind of redemption for what she witnessed, some kind of understanding, so that she can do what she will never be able to do, which is to make sense of it, because there isn't any sense to make of it.

MB: To what extent can Zara indirectly get re-traumatized by her paintings?

SM: I never thought of that, that she traumatises herself by the drama of her work.

EM: The paintings are very cruel, aren't they?

MB: The theme and the topic – these animals, the attack – don't seem to change in her work.

SM: She perpetuates the pain.

MB: Yes. So, could that be re-traumatizing?

SM: I think it probably could be re-traumatizing, but, as I said, I think it's also her attempt to try and make sense of something that has no sense. So it would be perpetual; you would need to keep on revisiting it in the same way without any results, I think.

EM: Both your novels, *One Tongue Singing* and *Quarter Tones*, deal with art. Music, and art in general, seem to be very important for you. Why is that so? Do you have a special relation to art outside writing?

SM: You mean art as in painting – fine art?

EM: Painting, sculpting, etc.

SM: I have an interest in it, but I am not any good at it at all. So it's not another hobby or something that I pursue myself. I have an interest in it, a fascination for it. Perhaps even deeper than that, though, I am particularly interested in artistic temperament. So, whether it manifests in a musician or in an artist or a writer, I am particularly interested in what drives artistic temperaments.

EM: Art seems to be a way of dealing with trauma, coping with trauma, like Zara does in *One Tongue Singing*. Would you agree with Tutu's view that South Africa's people are a traumatized people, and if so, in which way does trauma still manifest itself in contemporary South Africa?

SM: I think I would definitely agree with Tutu's view on that, and it manifests itself on so many levels and I think most of them are very subtle. – Gosh! That's a very big question.

EM: Take your time.

SM: I think the way that South Africans accept violence is unusual, and perhaps that could be a symptom of a traumatized nation, that it's normal for us, we have normalized it. If somebody gets murdered here, it doesn't even make the newspapers, unless it has some weird bizarreness to it. It has to be a mass murder or something like that. We normalize crime and we normalize violence here in a way that I don't think is normal at all. So, just from that point of view, I think that we are a little bit peculiar.

EM: Would you say that there are different types of traumatization with regard to the different ethnicities?

SM: What do you mean? Do you mean that certain ethnicities are particularly subject or particularly prone to certain kinds of violence?

EM: That was an idea that just crossed my mind, but when Tutu says that South Africans are a traumatized people, there is no cultural identity so far. Maybe the black population experiences trauma in a completely different way from the white population. The whites may be suffering from guilt, the blacks suffering from violence or from deprivation. So, I am wondering if we can speak about *one* trauma as far as South Africa is concerned.

SM: I think that a lot of the black population does suffer from a lot more violence than white people do, but that's not to say that white people don't endure a lot of violence as well. There is a lot of violence. I think we are speaking about different kinds of violence: physical violence, which we all are prey to, but particularly black communities, then there is a kind of emotional violence. Perhaps that's where something like white guilt can come in. There is still a lot of white guilt, and I think that at the moment you probably couldn't get a more politically correct person than a white South African. They are so very careful not to make any kind of comment that could in any way incriminate them, so that they would be put back into that box, back under that label. But I think this *emotional* violence and this *political* violence – they have so many different levels.

EM: Painting in *One Tongue Singing* is Zara's way of expressing herself. It is a non-discursive art, like music in *Quarter Tones*. You are a novelist, however, depending on words and verbal discourse. Is this a contradiction to or even a depreciation of the belles-lettres, or a productive juxtaposition?

SM: I would like to see it as a collaboration with the other arts. I think that any art can only go so far, and I think that just as there are words in other languages that you can never translate, there are expressions and there are nuances of feeling that can't be named, that perhaps can be expressed through one art, and not so much through the other. So, I have full faith in the power of words, but I think that can only go so far. At some point something like music can take over, or something like a painting or a sculpture. The power can be transformed in another way and communicated. So, I prefer to see it as collaborative rather than a lack of faith.

EM: It could also be a creative sort of conflict, I guess, like Coetzee uses silence, like Zoë Wicomb uses silence in order to become creative. Silence in the sense of being non-discursive, not using too many words.

SM: I think that knowing the right number of words to use is a writer's challenge. And definitely in silence there is a huge creative possibility, because it engages the readers a lot more than if they are bombarded with a whole barrage.

EM: It makes them imaginative.

SM: Yes. And I think that actually takes me to my Ph.D. topic, something that I have stumbled across in my research, that the more one has to intellectually or imaginatively engage with something, the more apt one is to

be moved by that book and the more the possibilities are for change within one's own perception.

EM: And leaving these blanks is a means of engaging the fantasy of the reader?

SM: I don't know. I don't know what John Coetzee's or Zoë Wicomb's intentions were with the blanks, I can't speak for them. But I can say that leaving the blanks would have a lot of creative potential. It's like the void: the void is full of potential.

EM: It also concerns your character Zara: there are a lot of blanks as far as that character is concerned, but this makes her mysterious, this makes her attractive for the reader, because the reader wants to find out what's going on with that girl, what's happening.

SM: I know. Some readers find her frustratingly opaque, as Michela touched on earlier.

EM: At the end of the novel Zara falls into the hands of a collector, let me express it that way, a patron who seems to be willing to provide for her and enable her to live from her art. Do you see this as a positive or as a negative ending of the novel? Or is it deliberately ambiguous, since we do not know anything about Zara's future?

SM: I saw that as a positive thing. I don't think she necessarily needed recognition. She was cut off enough from external reality not to need recognition from other people, but there is a small reality problem that people need money to buy food to live, so I just wanted her to have food on her plate. I wanted her to be able to sustain her reality, so I see this as a positive thing.

EM: Do you go further in your imagination once you have ended a novel? Do you imagine a future for your characters, or do you stop at that point?

SM: I stop, actually. I have been asked to write a sequel, especially for *One Tongue Singing*. Other rather strange things do happen: you come across people, and you feel like you know them, and suddenly you realize, but wait a minute, this is somebody I have written about. There is a little girl – she is eleven – who comes to my house now every Monday afternoon, who sits and paints the most violent drawings; unbelievably violent, exquisitely beautiful drawings, just while she's talking to you. She will sit and jut down dogs with fangs and at each other's throats. She is unbelievably talented, extraordinarily talented. She doesn't say much about anything. She likes to hang out with me. But she's got this long hair, and I look at her and I think "I am worried I created you. Where did you come from?" This is worrying. But she has no trauma in her past that I know of. I think she comes from a rather crowded family, and she is highly creative and she wants a little bit of time out. I don't think that there is any real trauma that I know of.

EM: This is reality imitating art in the Oscar Wildean manner of style.

SM: Yes, that happens, exactly.

EM: In *Quarter Tones* the rhythm of exile and homecoming seems to structure the novel. *Quarter Tones* shares this with quite a number of South African novels, for example Lisa Fugard's *Skinner's Drift*, Rachel Zadok's *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*, André Brink's *The Wall of the Plague*, or Zakes Mda's *Heart of Redness*. Exile and homecoming are prominent themes in the contemporary South African novel. Do you have to experience exile personally as a writer in order to be able to appreciate home? Or why, do you believe, is this structure so prominent?

SM: I think it's prominent for quite a number of reasons. One of the reasons might be that we South Africans had sanctions placed on us for quite a long time, up until our transformation, and that meant that people had to go abroad and stay abroad; it meant that people who were fighting in the struggle were thrown out of the country, were illegal. So there was a lot of exile happening. And exile brings with it questions of identity. As soon as you are a South African in a different country, your identity is challenged on so many levels, and if you are a writer you immediately turn to what you do to make sense of it. I don't think you need to be in exile to appreciate or understand home. When I wrote *Quarter Tones* I hadn't lived abroad for a long time, and I wrote it from that point of view, from that standpoint. I think I understood it without having to leave, at that point.

EM: The picture of South Africa one gets in *Quarter Tones* is a bleak one: rape, murder, assault, AIDS. The two main characters, however, Ana Luisa and Daniel, are convincing because of their humanity. This seems to open up a horizon for South Africa's future also in your novel. Is this something you consciously reflect as a writer, or does this just happen in the course of writing a story of two individuals?

SM: I think that you do find – certainly amongst my peers and the people that I mix with – a lot of people who are working towards some good. I don't know if this is peculiar to South Africa, but maybe it is. It's as though we are reinventing ourselves by finding meaning in something that we can contribute to. People that I know are making contributions, and I think they are making contributions because of their humanity. I think their whole focus is a shared humanity: "Let's get right back to grass level and grassroots and use what skills we have, what brains we have, what qualifications we have!" I know people who are economists and are working very much for budgeting, re-budgeting: How do we budget so that people who were previously disadvantaged can profit? People are engaged in South Africa, in rebuilding a country on a level that, I think, is higher than it might be in other countries. And I think they are finding meaning in it, which is always hopeful.

EM: And both your novels are hopeful in a way, although they also portray the darker side of life, certainly. There is this wonderful scene in *Quarter Tones* when Ana improvises on her flute and Daniel falls in with his drums. The two communicate throughout the night – union of two souls, so it seems, a communication without words – we had that before. As far as these two

people are concerned, language paradoxically seems to prevent communication. Would you agree with this view as far as Ana and Daniel are concerned, and why is this so?

SM: Yes, I think so. Truth and communication sometimes happen on a non-verbal level, and that rhythm particularly carries a certain frequency. It carries its own frequency and it carries its own messages of truth that sometimes gets beneath what can be said through words. And I don't think everybody is a natural communicator. Some people struggle to communicate, or for some people, who are particularly sensitive, some things are just too big to communicate, or they might not have the skill, or they might doubt their own ability to communicate with the integrity and the truth that that might require, whatever it is. That's where I think something like the rhythm of the drums or the rhythm of a flute might say something different or something more, and especially working together they might develop a kind of conversation that transcends words.

EM: Reading *Quarter Tones* one gets the impression that place is very important. The sense of place is very dominant: the home of the father, for example, the room of the father; 'a room with a view', however, which allows communication with Daniel and which allows joint mourning; mourning in the sense of this dialogue in music. How important is this sense of place or space for you in writing fiction?

SM: I think rooms and houses are hugely important to me. It can be the smallest space, but the space which a person occupies, in? the way that they relate to that space, is enormously important for me as a writer. I can't imagine writing without situating my characters somewhere, and that somewhere would need to reflect how they felt about and engaged with life. That room in particular not only spoke so much of the father's character, but it reflected her feeling about that, it was a very important room. Similarly, the cottage where Zara grew up in *One Tongue Singing* was a very powerful image for me. It wasn't a cottage I'd ever seen, but I saw it very clearly in my mind's eye.

EM: Would you say that you could set a novel outside South Africa, as well? Or does South Africa somehow come in here?

SM: I am hoping to. I am hoping to pack shortly, so we'll see. I'll be able to answer that in a little while.

EM: My last question: In *Quarter Tones* memory and forgetting seem to be competing with each other, striving against each other. She trying to forget what was before, also partly forget about her father, but then also remembering, of course, all these things. Do you see this as a necessary and creative conflict? Do you see the act of mourning as a bridge?

SM: I think that's a very beautiful way of putting it. I haven't thought of it that way before. I think that mourning would require a bridge between remembering and forgetting, and then re-remembering. If you even look at the word 'remember', if you divide it into 're-member', 'dis-member', 're-

member' – to kind of make sense of and file things in yourself in a way that creates integrity instead of fragmentation. So it's a way of going back looking at it, working it out in a way that it actually makes sense, that creates integrity.

EM: Thank you very much for this interview.

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11.2 Abstract

“Trauma and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel” is the attempt to illustrate and analyze the potential and possibilities of literary narratives as a means to cope (and eventually cure) people who had to suffer from traumatic experiences. After decades of suppression due to Apartheid, large sections of the population were confronted with horrific scenes and consequently severely traumatized. Violence, homicide, oppression, humiliation or rape are just to name a few of the atrocities the black and colored South African people had to face every day. Apartheid politics created a divided nation which, after its fall, is eager to heal the scars of the past in order to find common ground for a reunited peaceful future. While the healing of the nation, the attempt to ‘cure’ the cultural collective trauma, took place on political levels in forms of e.g. the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission), authors, poets, artists and other free-thinkers embarked on their very own ways to cope with the ‘South African trauma’ on multiple levels.

This thesis grounds on the basic hypothesis, that peoples’ traumatic experiences may be eased and even cured after working up their shattered memories on a textual and/or verbal level and consequently coming to terms with it. The cardinal problem of this process derives from the fact that traumatic memories are that inconceivable and beyond imagination, that they resist integration in a person’s mind and hence their representation.

After a general introduction to and description of the circumstances and the situation in South Africa (Chapter I), Chapter 2 is dedicated to a theoretical and analytical description of ‘trauma’. More precisely, the focus is on terminology, the medical history of the illness as well as on the historical development of trauma therapy. Since Sigmund Freud figures prominently in the field of traumatic neurosis, special emphasis is paid to his work which revolutionized and laid the foundation to the modern understanding of trauma theory. The chapter closes with a description of the therapeutic potential of literary narratives for traumatization.

The consecutive Chapters 4 – 7 attempt to apply these theoretical concepts to the works of four contemporary South African literary creators. Diverse methods as well as concepts, used by the authors to represent and comment on traumatic experiences, are at the centre of discussion. The analysis shows, that stylistic devices like the description or the reliving of day- and nightmares, as well as flashbacks or intrusive memories are some of the most common features to reveal forms of traumatization. Apart from that, the use of distinctive pictures, motifs or images on a structural level as well as the use of specific vocabulary and language (just like the deliberate absence of language) on a textual level, have proven to be other stylistic means to point out mental disorders. Nevertheless, in all of these cases the attempt to cure the traumatized can only remain as such, since there is neither a guarantee nor a precise guidance to a patient's recovery. Traumatization is an utmost subjective disruption of the psyche that every person experiences individually and differently. It is a mental disorder that may be triggered off as well as cured by the diverse factors. All these circumstances make trauma an illness of highest complexity whose cure can never be guaranteed. The victims have to endure an arduous and painful recovery process since their confrontation with the overwhelming horrible experience, hence its integration into the victim's life-narrative, is the only way to find salvation.

11.3 Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Arbeit „Trauma and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel“ untersucht die Auswirkungen sowie die Möglichkeiten der Traumaaufarbeitung durch literarische Werke. Nach Jahrzehnten der Unterdrückung während der Apartheid erfuhren große Teile der Bevölkerung eine schwere Traumatisierung. Gewalt, Mord, Unterdrückung, Erniedrigung oder Vergewaltigung stellen nur einige der Unmenschlichkeiten dar, welche die indigene südafrikanische Bevölkerung tagtäglich erdulden und über sich ergehen lassen musste. Als Resultat entstand ein gespaltenes Land welches nun, nach dem Ende der Apartheid, versucht die Narben und Scherben der Vergangenheit zu bereinigen um die Basis für eine gemeinsame Zukunft zu festigen. Während die Spuren des kollektiven kulturellen Traumas auf politischer Ebene durch Einrichtungen wie die TRC, die „Truth and Reconciliation Commission“ („Wahrheits- und Versöhnungskommission“), geheilt beziehungsweise ausgesöhnt werden sollten, machten sich Künstler, Dichter, Literaten und andere Freidenker an ihr Werk um dem südafrikanische Trauma auf multiplen Ebenen zu begegnen.

Die Grundhypothese dieser Arbeit geht davon aus, dass Traumatisierung durch einen Prozess geheilt werden kann, welcher die Aufbereitung des Erlebten auf sprachlicher und/oder textlicher Ebene initiiert und erst damit ein Auseinandersetzen sowie die Konfrontation der Opfer mit dem „Erlebten“ ermöglicht. Das kardinale Problem bei der Konfrontation mit Traumatisierung stellt hierbei jener Umstand dar, dass eine traumatische Erfahrung aufgrund der Unfassbarkeit, der Unbegreiflichkeit des Erlebten, aus der Erinnerung des Opfers „gelöscht“ wird und sich dadurch jeglicher Form der Wiedergabe, beziehungsweise der Erinnerung, entzieht.

Nach einer allgemeinen Beschreibung der Situation Südafrikas (Kapitel 1) widmet sich Kapitel 2 einer theoretischen und analytischen Begriffsbestimmung von Trauma. Im Speziellen wird auf Terminologie, Anamnese des Krankheitsbildes sowie die historische Entwicklung der Traumatherapie eingegangen. Das Kapitel schließt mit dem für diese Arbeit

wichtigsten Aspekt, nämlich einer Beschreibung der heilenden Funktionen und Möglichkeiten von literarischen Erzählungen (literary narratives) für Traumatisierungen.

Die nachfolgenden Kapitel 4 – 7 versuchen die in Kapitel 2 erörterten theoretischen Konzepte anhand der Werke vier zeitgenössischer südafrikanischer Autoren in die Praxis umzusetzen. Dabei wird untersucht, welche Methoden und Konzepte die Autoren verwenden um verschiedenste Formen der Traumatisierung darzustellen und zu beleuchten. Wie sich im Laufe der Analyse zeigt, sind die Beschreibung beziehungsweise das Erleben von Alpträumen und Tagträumen sowie Rückblenden und Erinnerungen eine der häufigsten Methoden um Traumatisierung der Charaktere aufzuzeigen. Daneben sind die gezielte Verwendung bestimmter Bilder, Motive und Themen auf struktureller Ebene, sowie die Benutzung bestimmten Vokabulars (genau so wie das absichtliche Fehlen von Sprache) auf textlicher und sprachlicher Ebene weitere Formen um auf die seelische Krankheit einzugehen. In allen Fällen kann jedoch der Versuch der Heilung lediglich als solcher Geltung behalten, da es weder eine Garantie noch eine sichere „Anleitung“ zur Heilung gibt. Traumatisierung ist eine absolut individuelle Erfahrung und wird von jedem Menschen anders erlebt, von anderen Dingen ausgelöst, und durch andere Dinge geheilt. All diese Tatsachen machen die seelische Krankheit des Traumas zu einer höchst komplexen Erkrankung, deren Heilung oder vollständige Genesung nie garantiert werden kann. Die Opfer müssen einen mühsamen und schmerzreichen Prozess durchlaufen da nur die Konfrontation mit dem Erlebten, und damit die Integration der alles erschütternden Erfahrung in die eigene Lebensgeschichte, schließlich und endlich zur Heilung führen kann.

11.4 Curriculum Vitae

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