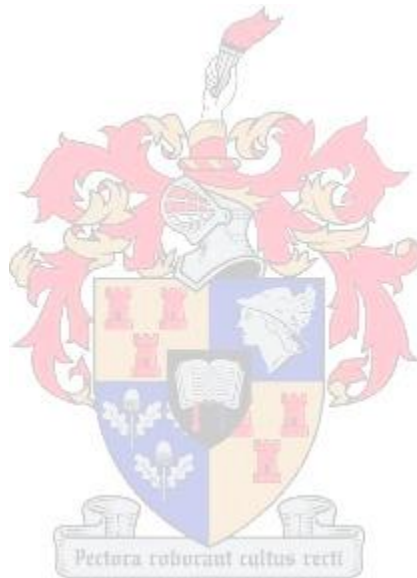


**Literary Non-Fiction and the Unstable Fault Line of the Imaginative and the Reportorial: Antjie Krog's, *Country of My Skull*, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's, *A Human Being Died That Night* and Sindiwe Magona's, *Mother to Mother***

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Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of Stellenbosch



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December 2012

## **Declaration**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.

Signature:

Date:

## **Acknowledgments**

To my supervisor, Dr. Shaun Viljoen, who encouraged me to pursue this degree, who nudged me to link the words on the page to an emotion, a memory and reality. Thank you for your guidance and patience through this deeply inspiring process.

To my husband for all the politically incorrect philosophical discussions in an attempt to decode many academic ramblings.

To my mother and sister for words of encouragement on cloudy days.

And to myself for hanging on when hope and inspiration seemed out of reach.

## Abstract

This thesis explores the representation of personal narrative and nationhood within the genre of literary non-fiction written around the theme of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The texts to be examined are Antjie Krog's, *Country of My Skull*, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's *A Human Being Died That Night* and Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*.

The texts by Krog and Gobodo-Madikizela tell the story of apartheid's legacy from two different viewpoints. Their texts are filled with spatial patches of personal narrative which emphasize the impact apartheid had on two different South African cultures, thereby linking the personal to the national by exploring a subjective truth in their narratives. Both these authors were involved with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in a professional capacity and through their respective ideologies the psyche of the apartheid perpetrator is examined, interrogated and analysed. Within the genre of literary non-fiction these two writers grapple with capturing the real, the objective, but simultaneously insist on doing so from a subjective vantage point.

Sindiwe Magona's, *Mother to Mother* also centres on the theme of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and on the psyche of the perpetrator. This time, however, the perpetrator's psyche is explored through the lens of a narrator-mother in an address to the victim's mother. The most significant difference between this text and the other two is that the Magona text provides a fictional account of the TRC case in question. The ethical implications of a literary text with documentary subject matter, of a text that explores the intersections between fiction and non-fiction, surfaces again, and to a larger extent than in the other two texts, thereby further unsettling the line between the reportorial and the imaginative.

## Keywords:

Truth and Reconciliation Commission      perpetrators      representation      Krog  
Gobodo-Madikizela      Magona      literary non-fiction      context      identity

## Opsomming

Hierdie tesis ondersoek die verteenwoordiging van persoonlike vertelling en nasieskap in die genre van die literêre nie-fiksie wat geskryf is om die tema van die Waarheids-en Versoeningskommissie (WVK). Die tekste wat ondersoek word is Antjie Krog se *Country of My Skull*, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela se *A Human Being Died That Night* en Sindiwe Magona se *Mother to Mother*.

Die tekste van Krog en Gobodo-Madikizela vertel die storie van apartheid-nalatenskap uit twee verskillende standpunte. Hul tekste bestaan uit gereelde ruimtelike kolle van persoonlike verhaal wat die impak van apartheid op twee verskillende kulture van die land beklemtoon om sodoende die persoonlike aan die nasionale te koppel en 'n subjektiewe waarheid van hul narratiewe na vore te bring. Albei hierdie skrywers was in 'n professionele hoedanigheid betrokke by die WVK en deur hulle onderskeie ideologieë word die psige van die apartheid oortreder ondersoek, ondervra en ontleed. Dit is binne literêre nie-fiksie waar hierdie twee skrywers swoeg om die werklike en objektiewe ten toon te stel terwyl hulle dit terseldertyd vanuit 'n subjektiewe oogpunt wil benader.

Sindiwe Magona se *Mother to Mother* draai ook om die tema van die Waarheids-en Versoeningskommissie en die psige van die oortreder. Hierdie keer, egter, is die oortreder-psige ondersoek deur die lens van 'n verteller-ma in 'n toespraak aan die slagoffer se ma. Die belangrikste verskil tussen hierdie teks en die ander twee is dat die Magona teks 'n fiktiewe vertelling bied van die WVK saak betrokke in hierdie geval. Die etiese implikasies van 'n literêre teks met 'n dokumentêre onderwerp kom weer na vore en tot 'n groter mate as die ander twee tekste, en daardeur word die fyn lyn van die literêre genres met 'n dokumentêre onderwerp omver gegooi.

## Sleutelwoorde:

Waarheids –en Versoeningskommissie    representasie    Krog    Gobodo-Madikizela  
Magona    konteks    identiteit

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Conceptualising Literary Non-Fiction

The literary history of South Africa comprises a wide range of output from indigenous folk tales, oral traditions to performance and written poetry, short stories and novels. David Attwell and Derek Attridge write that this range of literary output is often “influencing or infiltrating one another, and at other times ignoring or challenging one another” and that these “traditions have been constantly reworked and reinvented, creating an extensive body of literary art that continues to grow” (1). The demise of the apartheid government in the early 1990s brought about significant changes on many different levels of South African society. Having managed to construct a system of democratic governance post-1994, images of rainbow nationhood and multicultural celebration dominated various cultural forms in an attempt to project an image of a nation that had achieved reconciliation despite major challenges. However, the old inherited fault lines persisted and also took on new guises, and rising social challenges appeared to trouble this vision of the new. South African literature wasn’t immune to these changes. The array of literary genres continues to expand with various factions influencing, borrowing and challenging each other. The start of the new millennium opened up many debates regarding the direction South African literature would follow, now that the issues that were prevalent during the apartheid years were no longer so relevant. Writers like Coetzee, Gordimer, Mphahlele, and Fugard, whose literature mainly addressed apartheid themes, suddenly found themselves backed into a corner by the unfolding political transition in South Africa. The issues they had explored so thoroughly in their writings were now deemed to be less relevant.

Even though the end of state-sponsored racism opened up the country to the grey and “ordinary” subjects that writers like Sello Duiker address in their novels, this state of

transition in South Africa's history also created a movement towards exploring the different shades of blackness, whiteness, virtue and evil (Ndebele 152). The lines that used to be so clearly demarcated were blurring and as a result were being interrogated by writers like Antjie Krog, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela and Sindiwe Magona. Where the enemy under apartheid was the state, the enemy today takes on various forms and identities, often within oneself, or at other times within family dynamics, or the enemy is located in other social groups. These apartheid-related themes, previously unexamined and unconsciously suppressed in favour of the greater fight against apartheid, are now being explored in the literature, often in a new-ish and emerging genre called 'literary non-fiction'.

Literary non-fiction is still a young genre in South Africa, so much so that there is still some confusion in literary circles as to what exactly the genre is and what it is to be called. In South Africa it is mainly referred to as "literary non-fiction". Internationally however it is often called "creative non-fiction". Duncan Brown describes it as "writing which makes its meanings at the unstable fault line of the literary and journalistic, the imaginative and the reportorial (Brown 1). Hedley Twidle asks what exactly "literary non-fiction" signifies and how one "can trace the appropriate lineages for the array of non-fictional modes that are simultaneously drawn on" (UCT research seminar 2011). Antjie Krog, acclaimed poet and author of a trilogy of works in the literary non-fiction genre, quotes a Dutch book buyer, who defines literary non-fiction as a genre that is "better written than non-fiction, [with] more skill, more craft, more literary devices and better language" (qtd. in Brown 2). Lee Gutkind states that "Ultimately, the primary goal of the creative non-fiction writer is to communicate information, just like a reporter, but to shape it in a way that reads like fiction" (11).

Hedley Twidle suggests that the "case of contemporary South Africa presents an interesting departure from the American model of creative non-fiction" and that the "flamboyance and plenitude of this model must be met in the southern African context with ideas of limit,



caution, cultural untranslatability and perhaps unintelligibility” (Twidle 7). Contemporary South Africa often stands accused to be one of the major contributors for the decline in interest in fictional literary works. Apartheid created an environment that was conducive for the creation of fictional literary works and the post-apartheid state seems to favour works of the non-fictional variety. Twidle, however, argues that instead of “hinging on the tired issue of fact or fiction, a genre-based approach” will allow for more probing into the “reality effect” that the different written modes represent (Twidle 7).

Literary non-fiction within the local and global context is a genre that is currently defined by its lack of established conventions. Barbara Lounsberry, however, suggests four key characteristics of the genre: “A documentable subject matter, extensive research, the scene (for reviving the context of events) and a style of writing that resembles literary prose” (13). Antjie Krog reveals to Duncan Brown that she

depend[s] on three devices [when writing literary non-fiction]: a literary form to tell the non-fiction; trust[-ing] the capacity of language to capture the in-capture-able; the pronoun ‘I’, which immediately creates space allowing for an individual take on facts, a deeper reading and interpretation of the non-fictional reality. (3)

Within the genre of literary non-fiction writers also struggle with an ethical dilemma. They work in a genre that has a factual or documentary context, so how do they manage to steer away from falsifying and fabricating events? How can they not fabricate when they produce texts that have to read like literary prose? Krog reveals:

I don’t know anymore where the lines run. The moment one uses something as unreal as language to describe a live-three-dimensional complex moment, one is already falsifying, fictionalising by deciding which angle, which words to use what detail to leave out. So in one way I would say [there is] nothing that has been written [that has] not already been heavily tampered with; even the simplest journalism is inadequate in

giving a single fact in its complete fullness – the moment there is language, reality is already affected. (Brown 2)

The first book in Krog's trilogy, *Country of My Skull* (1998), is probably one of the most widely acclaimed works of South African literature. The text is a summation of Krog's experiences as a journalist covering the TRC hearings for SABC<sup>1</sup> radio. Meg Samuelson describes it as being “crafted as an intricate guild of voices and registers” (“Writing Women” 771). Leon de Kock states that it is a “multi-voiced act of narrative ventriloquism [...] which seeks to translate the experience of pain and trauma from barely reachable repositories of subjectivity and cultural specificity into a more generally accessible idiom” (746). Although it is a widely examined literary work, I will engage with *Country of My Skull* within the context of literary non-fiction, seeking to discover how Krog uses literary style and technical aspects of the genre to stay within the ethical boundaries of her subject matter.

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's *A Human Being Died That Night* (2003) was released five years after *Country of My Skull*. As Gobodo-Madikizela's contribution to the literary non-fiction genre, it contains many of the elements that Krog uses. *A Human Being Died That Night* tells the story of Eugene Alexander de Kock, the commander of apartheid's death squads. The case of Eugene de Kock was probably the most widely reported of all the cases that appeared before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission<sup>2</sup> (TRC) during the late 1990s in South Africa. People could not fathom how such wrath and ruthlessness could be conducted by one human being. Eugene de Kock was sentenced to two life sentences and 212 years in prison for

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<sup>1</sup>South African Broadcasting Corporation (the state broadcaster)

<sup>2</sup>The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was a court-like body assembled in South Africa after the end of apartheid. Anybody who felt they had been a victim of violence could come forward and be heard at the TRC. Perpetrators of violence could also give testimony and request amnesty from prosecution.

the crimes he committed during the apartheid period in South Africa. He subsequently applied for amnesty from the TRC in an attempt to get his sentence reduced.

Gobodo-Madikizela, who was serving on the TRC's Human Rights Violations Committee, was instructed by the TRC to engage with De Kock on a one-on-one level so they could gain some insight into the mind and psyche of the man widely known as "Prime Evil". Gobodo-Madikizela spent a total of 46 hours over a period of six months interviewing De Kock and *A Human Being Died That Night* was produced as a result of the interactions she had with de Kock. Eugene de Kock was granted limited amnesty by the TRC. This meant that he received amnesty for some of the crimes the TRC felt were politically motivated. He thus had to continue to serve out his 212 year sentence for the other crimes he had committed. Gobodo-Madikizela makes use of a number of literary devices to tell the story of Eugene de Kock. The question of ethics and the fabrication of events also surfaces in her text and I will investigate how she navigates the ethical by means of the literary.

*Mother to Mother* (1998) by Sindiwe Magona also deals with factual subject matter, like the Krog and Gobodo-Madikizela texts. Daymond and Visagie reveal that in this case Magona turns to fiction to explore the "personal and communal self-destructiveness that has troubled his [her] own life" (731). If, as Krog suggests, when language enters the equation, reality is already being tampered with, what is it that makes the Magona text any different than the other two texts? Can we quantify the amount of falsifying that goes into producing a text? What are the ethical implications in her case? Does writing a literary work in fictional form absolve her from the ethics of reportage and its legal complexities and allow more freedom with regard to representation?

This brief introduction to the trajectory of my study needs to be understood along with a few key contributing factors that will be more closely examined in the subsequent chapters.

Firstly, the three texts were selected by virtue of their common subject matter, which is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its role in informing and enlightening the citizens of South Africa as to the extreme brutality of the apartheid system. All three texts tell the human story behind one or more of the cases that appeared before the commission. Secondly, I have decided to incorporate writers that feature prominently in literary scholarship but who have not yet been thoroughly researched in the context of the genre of literary non-fiction. *Country of My Skull*, for example, is probably one of the most widely researched texts in contemporary South African literature, but often scholars, like Margaret Daymond and Andries Visagie (for example), classify the text as autobiography, and as a result criticise Krog for incorporating fictional elements into a book that has a largely documentary context. This study will examine Krog's text as the first in a trilogy within the literary non-fiction genre.

Krog and Duncan Brown, a South African literary scholar, had a very enlightening conversation on literary non-fiction at the University of the Western Cape in 2011. This conversation proved to be a seminal source for my understanding of the genre and informs many of the issues I interrogate in this study. In this conversation between Krog and Brown, Krog elaborates on her understanding of the genre. She sheds light on the prerequisites for a work to be classified as literary non-fiction. She also explains what it is that makes the genre of such contemporary significance, thereby also informing readers about its origins and influences.

The chapter on Gobodo-Madikizela text will follow the analysis of the Krog text because her text is richly laden with the literary devices and stylistic elements that Krog argues are features of the genre. Although the question of ethics is present in the Gobodo-Madikizela text, this is less evident than in *Mother to Mother*. The ethical dilemma in the three texts will be addressed as part of a comparative study in the remaining chapters. The ethical dilemma in this case refers to the degree of fictional disruption to the real. How much fiction can be

accommodated in order to make a narrative function as a cohesive whole, and how does this reflect on the historical accounts of the TRC cases in question?

The final factor in my study is the use of the pronoun “I” in the literary non-fiction. As Krog suggests, the use of the I “immediately creates space allowing for an individual take on facts, a deeper reading and interpretation of the non-fictional ‘reality’” (Brown 3). I will analyse the three texts and also explore the impact of the writers’ personalities on their texts. I will also ask whether their geographical positioning had an influence on the use of the first-person pronoun in their texts. Mary West, who examines white women’s writing in post-apartheid texts, writes that “though writers who live elsewhere are no less interested in examining their South African identity, theirs may necessarily be a different kind of exploration to those who have stayed in the country to experience and witness (to) the changes that the last decade has brought” (5).

Taking these factors into consideration, this study will use the three primary texts to untangle some of the questions about the genre of literary non-fiction to establish more clearly what the genre signifies and represents.

## Chapter 2

### Anguished Self-reflection in Krog's *Country of My Skull*

#### 2.1 Introduction

*Country of My Skull* is arguably Antjie Krog's most acclaimed work to date. Krog juxtaposes national politics with personal reflection to provide the reader with a clear trajectory of what the TRC aimed to achieve. In this work she explores the countless facets of apartheid trauma by means of the TRC proceedings and offers an insider's perspective on dissecting individual and collective guilt to achieve a sense of home and belonging against perceived threats, isolation and dispossession from familiar factions. Krog's search for a new consciousness on both a personal and a national level renegotiates interrelations between body, landscape and nationhood, as the title suggests.

In *Country of My Skull* Krog attempts to encode the imaginary of the TRC by rethinking narrative intersections between speaker and audience which are framed by an assemblage of TRC excerpts and patches of fiction. These narrative guides, often disguised as personal reflections through the use of the pronoun "I", guides the reader to gain a sense of the narrator's displacement and dispossession. It is also through these personal reflections that she manages to "capture the in-capture-able" (Brown 3). Her reflections are informed by accompanying TRC excerpts which link the personal to the national, thereby suggesting that her personal narrative could easily become the narrative of many others who may still be occupying "a space of anguish", as Ndebele reminds us. While locked in a space of anguish, Ndebele argues, "you enter and live in the world of pretence. There, you make no choices; you amble along from one ethical challenge to the next, doing your best" (Ndebele 1).

In their contribution to the recently published *Cambridge History of South African Literature*, Margaret Daymond and Andries Visagie address the “confessional” and “apologetic” modes that were present in “white South African autobiographies” in the 1990s (717). They suggest that these modes of confession and apologia were often translated into a “defence of individual beliefs” to connect the “personal to the broader cultural and socio-economic context”. They argue that post-1994 “writing in English by black and white has presented a continuing desire to speak truthfully about the impact of power relations on selfhood [...], but self-reflection has become less anguished in the context of [...] nation building” (717). Their assumption that South African writing post-1994 has become less anguished is most likely rooted in the belief that the issues that were prevalent during the apartheid years were no longer relevant, since the demise of the apartheid government had brought about significant changes on many different levels in South African society. These changes also affected the South African literary arena – but did writing by South African authors really become less anguished in the space of a few years?

In an interview with Rachel Swarns, David Attwell comments about post-apartheid literature in South Africa: “Under apartheid, the issue was race and resistance. Now that the battle has been won, there is a larger canvas for these novelists to work on” (Swarns 1). In the same interview Zakes Mda describes what it was like to write under apartheid: “the past created ready-made stories. There was a very clear line of demarcation between good and evil, you see? Black was good; white was bad. Your conflict was there. There were no grey areas” (Swarns 1). Krog is one of the writers who were brave enough to explore the grey areas that emerged after the demise of apartheid. Surely, the issue was no longer the fight against apartheid, but rather the complexities to be dealt with after apartheid. Even though apartheid was officially abolished, its aftermath was still very evident, and hugely unexamined; through her writing Krog attempts to shed light on the vulnerabilities of living in the period of transition.

Daymond and Visagie use Breytenbach, Coetzee and Krog as examples of Afrikaans writers who have published confessional works in English, “presumably because Afrikaans had as yet relatively few confessional practitioners” (721). When examining Krog and the ideas in her text, Daymond and Visagie analyse the text as an example of autobiography. They interrogate her use of fiction in the text and state that “fictionalising is also a reminder that autobiography itself is a confluence of fiction and fact” (721).

*Country of My Skull* was published in 1998. South Africa was then a four-year-old democracy. My concern with the statements of Daymond and Visagie is two-fold in nature. To see the text exclusively as autobiographical (in order to sustain an argument for the use of fiction) is too narrow an assumption. To presume that the text was published in English because of the lack of “confessional practitioners” in Afrikaans suggests the need for further research. In the context of nation-building, four years is a very tight timeframe for engaging in the act of self-reflection. I will argue that Krog’s narrative is indeed very anguished, contrary to Daymond and Visagie, who suggest that writing post-1994 has become less anguished. Though it contains autobiographical elements, the text cannot be read as exclusively autobiographical. I am more inclined to agree with Leon de Kock who describes it as a “multi-genre, many-voiced act of narrative ventriloquism” (746).

It is my opinion that Krog published her *Country of My Skull* trilogy in English to make her literary offerings accessible to a wider audience, both locally and internationally. She states to Duncan Brown:

I suspect it has something to do with our history of ‘apartness’. That we are continually busy translating ourselves, our landscapes and our experiences of other communities to one another. We can perhaps not begin to value each other’s fantasies or fictions, if we don’t understand the realities that gave rise to them. (1)



These comments are significant in the sense that she wants to change what had become the norm in the past. She wants her writing to transcend the language barriers that previously made her offerings only available to a select few. She expresses a need to connect to a new form of writing and a new audience by translating herself and her art, thereby ensuring that her reading audience gains a better understanding of the diverse realities of all South Africans.

To accommodate this need for a new expanded version of her writing Krog writes in modes that disrupt conventional genres, and her recent works in English are more aligned with the genre of literary non-fiction. As stated in my introduction, this is still a relatively young genre in South African Literature and one without established conventions. I will examine *Country of My Skull* within the context of the parameters given by Krog (literary form, capturing the in-capture-able and the use of the pronoun 'I'). These parameters form the framework for her offerings in literary non-fiction. I will thus use them as a baseline to critically engage with her text and to establish how she applies them to the genre of literary non-fiction.

## **2.2 The Pronoun 'I'**

*Country of My Skull* provides us with an intricate mix of third- and first-person narration. The excerpts from the TRC hearings are presented in the third person, whilst Krog's personal reflections are given in the first person. During the third-person narration the reader knows where they are in the story and whom to pay attention to. Her periodic use of the first-person narration is present for small sections of the storyline; the first-person narrative disappears for long stretches, allowing the reader time to link the personal to the national. Krog states that the use of the pronoun 'I' in her texts

immediately creates space allowing for an individual take on facts, a deeper reading and interpretation of the non-fictional 'reality'. The 'I' also allow me personal access to fact

[...]. At the same time, the ‘I’ is also immediately ‘multi-voiced’ – its meaning determined by the countless previous contexts of the word ‘I’. (Brown 3 – 4)

When Krog uses the pronoun ‘I’ in her literary non-fiction texts she creates an environment where the reader can rely on an account of events which is conceived from a place of sincerity. The reader knows that what is being read is not an objective, journalistic account, but a personal and subjective version of events as encountered through the lens of Antjie Krog. This is evident in the words she chooses, in her expressions, in the ordering and selection of events and in the rhythm in her language usage. When she is asked in the book about the ethical element in her stories she replies, confidently:

I’m not reporting or keeping minutes. I’m telling [...] I cut and paste the upper layer, in order to get the second layer told, which is actually the story I want to tell. I am busy with the truth...my truth [...]. Seen from my perspective, shaped by my state of mind at the time and now also by the audience I’m telling the story to. (170)

The reader gets an implicit sense of what she means when she talks about the “Broederbond” and the Mentzes having a “musical bloodline” (96). We know exactly when she regards someone as admirable or contemptible or when something is important rather than trivial. There is an inherent intelligence at work behind the chosen words.

The tone of the narrating voice is just as important to the story. The tone is what is in and between the lines. It is Krog’s sense of right and wrong, or of what she finds humorous, and it reveals when she is awed, confused and saddened. Seen within the context of her use of the pronoun ‘I’, a pattern can be traced through the narrative of the text. At different times, and sometimes simultaneously, the ‘I’ represents Antjie as reporter, woman, sister, daughter and colleague. In each of these roles she is being called upon to represent a section of her community. During the course of the narrative she finds it increasingly difficult to uphold the values demanded by each of these roles. In turn, each of these roles also allows the reader to access a deeper reading and interpretation of the non-fictional reality. What proved to be

challenging, even for a writer of Krog's calibre, was maintaining integrity within the context of her subject matter. In her conversation with Duncan Brown as well as in an earlier publication, "I, me, me, mine", she mentions how difficult it is for writers of literary non-fiction to know exactly where the lines run and how much complexity there is in the act of presenting a fact in its complete fullness.

Krog turns to Literary non-fiction because she felt "the imagination is at a disadvantage" ("I, me, me, mine" 102). She elaborates that she does not know the black voice well enough to tell their story "convincingly" ("I, me, me, mine" 103). Her use of the pronoun "I" is thus employed for a number of reasons. She reverts to using the "I" because it is the only persona she can give an honest account of. It gives her complete control and allows "breathing spaces around the facts" ("I, me, me, mine" 103). These breathing spaces around the facts means that she is given the opportunity to bend the facts to suit her storyline, claiming that "[m]any of the things said by 'I', I would never say" ("I, me, me, mine" 104).

The use of the "I" allows Krog narrative freedom to shape her stories so that the intended message get conveyed while managing the "narrative integrity" of the text "through an open and de-centred, multiple self" ("I, me, me, mine" 105). Krog's navigation through these multiple selves will be covered in the following paragraphs.

The first use of the pronoun 'I' occurs within the opening pages of the text and describes Krog's visit to her parent's farm in the Free State. Her childhood bed is compared to a "womb" into which she "crawls" whilst "overcome with the carefreeness of her youth" (4). Her utopia of carefreeness in her childhood bed is soon disrupted by the sound of a two-way radio and of her brothers trying to avert a cattle-stealing episode on the farm. Krog is pulled from her warm and safe "stinkwood" bed to the dining room where her parents are already anxiously awaiting news from her brothers (4).

Krog thus introduces the use of the pronoun 'I' when she is on her parents' farm in the Free State. Her idyllic womb-like scene of platteland paradise is turned into one of anguish and suspense with the cattle-stealing incident. Whether Krog's short-lived utopia in her childhood bed is real or imagined is secondary to the symbolism of what this scene represents. It navigates the fine line between fact and fiction "to allow the self to imaginatively disregard the borders between fact and fiction and write life as a narrative within a narrative" ("I, me, me, mine" 107). This first usage of the "I" greets the reader in the telling of Krog's past, how she remembers it and what it meant to her as a sister and a daughter. Comparing her childhood bed to a womb tells the reader that there was no place where she felt safer than at her parents' farm. It was her sanctuary, her home, her safe place. The invasion of her home by the cattle thieves upsets her, but what pains her even more is the anguish on her parents faces, "[...] in the grey moonlight their faces seem carved to pieces" (5). She realises what they have to deal with each time there is an incident of this sort and she feels helpless.

The cattle-stealing incident which features the first use of the pronoun 'I' is significant because it reveals the origin of Krog's sense of displacement. It helps the reader to understand where she finds herself emotionally. Her childhood home is no longer her safe haven. Her parents were facing daily dangers on their farm. Krog has lost her sense of home and that is the critical inference the reader makes with her first use of the 'I' in the text. It is not only her childhood home she feels estranged from:

I walk into my home one evening. My family [...] seem like a happy, close-knit group [...] I stand in the dark kitchen for a long time. Everything has become unconnected and unfamiliar. I realize that I don't know where the light switch is [...] I enter my house like a stranger. And barren. I sit around for days. Staring. My youngest walks into a room and starts. 'Sorry, I'm not used to you being home'. (47-49)

Krog's spatial displacement from her childhood home as well as from her current home suggests what the TRC psychologist explained as follows: "[t]he more you empathize with the victim, the more you become the victim; you display the same kind of symptoms – helplessness, wordlessness, anxiety, desperation"(170). The spatial displacement of Krog as the daughter and mother is doubled by the displacement testimonies of the victims who appear before the commission. The TRC psychologist warns Krog and her fellow journalists about copying the behaviour of the victims as a way of dealing with the enormity of the TRC hearings.

Judith Butler investigates the limits of self-knowledge and, more specifically, the capacity of the subject to give an account of herself or himself to others. She writes, "It is only in dispossession that I can and do give any account of myself" (37). Butler alludes to the idea that the subject cannot accurately assess itself whilst still in the situation that requires assessment. Only when the subject is taken out of the environment to be assessed can he/she give an account of herself or himself in that environment. The fact that Krog lost her sense of home gave her the ability to take a step back and re-assess herself in relation to her family, her community and her country. Only once she was "home-less" could Krog identify and establish linkages with those she was reporting on in her work for the TRC. Where before there was a lack of vulnerability, Krog was now at the appropriate place emotionally to grasp what was happening around her. Butler goes on to claim that "my very formation implicates the other in me [...]. My own foreignness to myself is, paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection with others" (84). Butler's claim reflects what happens to Krog in the early stages of her text. The loss of her sense of home opens Krog up to explore other facets of her being. She had to realign the beliefs and ethics she was raised with. In dispossession she learns to think more broadly, and differently, and in doing so, she manages to make an ethical connection with her reader.

By re-establishing and reconfiguring her connection with herself and ‘others’, Krog negotiates the literal and figurative landscapes of a nation in transition. Her descriptions of her parents’ farm are in stark contrast to the TRC accounts and descriptions of Vlakplaas.<sup>3</sup> Various references are made to Vlakplaas during the course of the text. The testimonies of the Vlakplaas operatives before the TRC revealed images of murder and torture and yet these things were done to ‘protect’ *Volk* and *Vaderland*. Chapter 8 of Krog’s text centres on the testimonies of a number of Vlakplaas operatives. She reflects:

They are as familiar as my brothers, cousins and school friends, between us all distance is erased [...]. Whether your name is Jack or Paul or Johannes – it means something. In some way or another, all Afrikaners are related [...]. From the accents I can guess where they buy their clothes, where they go on holiday, what car they drive, what music they listen to [...]. In a sense it is not these men but a culture that is asking for amnesty. (96)

These men asking for amnesty are part of Krog’s “culture”. It is her “culture” asking for amnesty. She is torn between her profile as reporter and her status as an Afrikaner. The all-to-familiar cultural patterns and codes could not be overlooked by Krog: “I am powerless to ignore what vibrates in me – I abhor and care for these men” (97). Krog becomes an active participant in the story at this point. She is no longer just the daughter or the reporter. The lines between her different roles are blurring. As a reporter she wants to remain objective whilst reporting on the TRC testimonies, but she identifies with these men and cannot help relating to them. The horror of this realisation does not allow her to detach herself from the people and events in her story. She is consumed with shame and guilt, yet she is always aware of an “invisible audience – the imagined audience on the horizon somewhere – the listener decodes the story in terms of truth. Telling is therefore never neutral, and the selection and ordering try to determine the interpretation” (85).

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<sup>3</sup> Vlakplaas is a farm 20 km west of Pretoria that served as the headquarters of the South African Police counter-insurgency unit C1. Vlakplaas functioned as a paramilitary hit squad centre where political opponents were kept after being captured. Vlakplaas was the site of multiple executions of political opponents of the apartheid government.

In an interview with Roelf Meyer towards the middle of the book Krog's tone grows increasingly more agitated. The denial by the leaders of the old dispensation of their complicity in atrocities committed in the name of apartheid angers Krog. She expresses her dissatisfaction with the situation:

I look at the leader in front of me, an Afrikaner leader. And suddenly I know: I have more in common with the Vlakplaas five than with this man. Because they have walked a road, and through them some of us have walked a road. And hundreds of Afrikaners are walking this road – on their own with their own fears and shame and guilt. And some say it, most just live it. We are so utterly sorry. We are deeply ashamed and gripped with remorse. But hear us, we are from here. We will live it right – here – with you, for you. (99)

Krog's tone of voice undergoes a change at this stage in her text. In conversation with Duncan Brown she mentions: "I cannot speak on behalf of Afrikaners, but I can speak as an Afrikaner" (3). She shows remorse as an Afrikaner. She is sorry as an Afrikaner. She apologises as an Afrikaner. But it is her apology, not an apology from all Afrikaners. Her shame and guilt for what happened during the apartheid years is very apparent in the quoted passage. Her tone is softer, more reflective and has a rawness to it. Even though she speaks as an Afrikaner, she uses the plural form: "we are", "hear us" and "We will". Who are these 'others' included in her "we"? Is she talking about the men who applied for amnesty? Is she talking about her family? More importantly, why does she feel the need to apologise on behalf of these 'others'?

Mary West asks the same questions with regard to Krog and her struggles with the white Afrikaner identity. In a conversation with Professor Njabulo Ndebele, Mary West sets off to find out how Krog "confronts these difficult South African dilemmas [...] without seeming to justify offensive conduct [...] or explain it away" (West 116). Ndebele responds,

Krog does not really seek to explain. Rather, she explores in such a way that illumination emerges – an illumination that offers ethical guides rather than definitive explanations. She offers insight rather than instruction. This is potentially the most humanising approach to knowledge in a democracy still in a restorative phase. Krog invites you to the complexity of events in a phase that produces high intensity collisions. Her engagement with these events has the potential to destabilise assumptions. (West 116)

Krog deals with the complexity of events in a manner few authors do. Because she is part and parcel of those privileged by apartheid we get an insider's perspective on the ethical dilemmas she and her fellow Afrikaners find themselves in. Most authors would be sceptical or even wary of displaying such personal vulnerabilities in a public arena, but Krog is willing to risk it. This act on her part shows that she deemed national issues to be more valuable than her personal struggle with her Afrikaner identity.

### **2.3 Capturing the in-capture-able**

When Krog talks about capturing the in-capture-able, she refers to the ability of a writer to transcribe a remarkable real-life situation into words on a page without losing the elements that make it so remarkable. Even though the reader is not present when the event occurred, a good writer should be able to recreate that moment with his/her words in a manner that retains the intensity. In capturing those remarkable moments/events there needs to be a working relationship between literature and the imagination. Those moments need to be brought to life for the readers, yet the writer needs to give the reader enough scope to exercise his/her imagination as well. Elaine Scarry, in *Dreaming by the Book* (2001), speaks about “instructions”, meaning that the writer gives the reader a set of instructions on how to imagine or construct an object (6). For example, Krog describes Vlakplaas to the reading audience, but what she is actually doing, according to Scarry, is to give the reader a set of instructions of



how to imagine or construct Vlakplaas. It shifts the focal point of her “instructions” from the object to a mental or cognitive process.

Though very insightful and widely acclaimed, Scarry’s book pays minimal attention to the importance of the reader’s own visual memory. She draws heavily on her own experience to clarify the creative writing processes of poets and authors, but there seems to be a lack of connection between the cognitive and the cultural. What has handicapped Scarry is what makes Krog’s text so significant. Even though Krog draws more heavily on her own experiences than does Scarry, she does not underestimate the link between the cognitive and the cultural. She realises that “A clump of trees” alongside the “thin stream that trickles over cracked earth” will have a different meaning when presented to someone from her own country as opposed to someone from abroad who reads her book (98). The local reader might interpret the clump of trees with neighbouring stream as the essence of the South African veld, whereas a reader not familiar with South Africa might imagine a drought-stricken region where no animal can survive. Krog does not prescribe or give instructions; rather, she explores the landscapes and scenes in her text in a way that enlightens, as Ndebele reminds us. She leaves it up to the reader to decide how they want to interpret the clump of trees alongside the stream, thus drawing their own conclusions constructed from their own visual memories.

Another of Scarry’s techniques to improve the creative process of writing is exploring the mimetic aspect of sensory content. While words on paper lack a visual component, they have the ability to engage the senses of the reader in a way that awakens the imaginary realm. Light, touch, taste and sound can be described so that the reader becomes part of the sensory perception that the writer wants to create. Krog has a unique ability to connect intensely with her surroundings and in doing so she also draws the reader in to experience that intensity with her: “We lie on our backs in the autumn. The leaves shift like coals from the burning trees.

Your voice smells of bark [...] The flaming season plunges into us. And it lies heavily on my arms – this late inopportune lust to abandon what is seen to be my life” (168). The rush of colour from the trees and leaves immediately transports the reader to a windy autumn day in the imagination. Autumn, the precursor to winter, even though spectacularly draped in warm colours, holds other memories for Krog. She feels overwhelmed by all that is happening in her life. Her mind is too consumed by TRC tales and tribulations. She is dissatisfied with where her life is: like the season – burning, leaves turn into coals, falling without notice, too heavy for her to carry. Her background as poet gives her an advantage over other non-fiction writers, and allows her the freedom to appeal to the reader and guide him or her along the path she has carved.

## **2.4 Literary form**

The lack of established conventions within the genre of literary non-fiction means that it borrows elements from other genres. For example, when we explore the literary form it uses we discover that it includes many elements that actually originated with the novel. Krog lists literary form as one of the three devices she depends on when writing within the genre of literary non-fiction: “by literary form I mean a basic story-telling technique: a beginning, a build-up to a climax and a conclusion” (Brown 3). Krog is thus telling archetypal stories, stories the reader is familiar with. What makes her stories different from the versions that appeared on television and radio during the time of the TRC proceedings is that she wasn’t “reporting or keeping minutes”(170). She is using the literary form of the novel to give the TRC stories a narrative structure.

Because Krog, like so many other non-fiction writers, deals with a documentary subject matter and because the TRC proceedings contained so many ‘good’ stories, the writers involved in the proceedings found it very difficult to let their written stories do justice to what

actually happened. Krog had to improvise technically, hence her decision to use the genre of literary non-fiction. Through her narrative engagement in this genre she employs various literary devices. Her frequent first-person narration, which is woven through the TRC stories, provides the important ‘golden thread’ that binds the text together as one cohesive unit. Her use of the pronoun ‘I’ by means of first-person narration provides the autobiographical element of the narrative. She is creatively stretching the limits and boundaries of the genre by incorporating autobiography, using literary forms adapted from the novel – and doing all this within the confines of a documentary subject matter.

Writing about the ‘New Journalism’ (an earlier form of literary non-fiction), Tom Wolfe claims that “beyond matters of technique, it enjoys an advantage so obvious, so built-in, one almost forgets what a power it has: the simple fact that the reader knows ‘all this actually happened’” (49). Because the readers already know the back-story, they are able to appreciate Krog’s effort to tell it in a manner that differs from the versions they have heard on television and radio. Krog’s rendition of these stories has a personal angle and provides a different dimension to the stories, a dimension that was lacking in the media reportage of the TRC proceedings. Instead of dwelling on the “how” (which was the focus of the media reportage) Krog was able to elaborate on the “why”. Her “why” offers insights into why certain political and social issues remain problematic in the South African context. She does not seek to provide solutions to the challenges facing the country. Her insights allow the reader room to ponder and to consider a different approach to a problem without any forcing of her views on her readers.

Speaking to Duncan Brown, she tries to explain the differences between fiction and non-fiction:

I would say: the fiction writer is saying: I am *making* a mirror, and if you stand here, it will assist you with your beingness in the world; the non-fiction writer is saying: I found

this mirror, if one stands here there is this reflection in the mirror - What does it mean? So you can choose different mirror-makes and different places for different reflections, the reader of fiction can dismiss both mirror and reflection as being too manipulated, far-fetched, etc. The reader of non-fiction cannot dismiss the non-fiction writer pointing to a particular reflection as being a fabrication. It is up to the non-fiction writer to convince the reader of how much is real reflection and how much is also nothing but manipulation. The non-fiction writer can choose a kind of mirror, small, oval, cracked etc, but she can never *make* a mirror. (Brown 6)

Krog's work on the TRC and the method she used to write about the TRC makes considerable sense when seen in the context of the mirror analogy. The reader is aware that the subject of her writing is the TRC (the object in the mirror). She is telling the reader exactly what kind of reflection is being dealt with. The reader knows that there are some parts of the book that are written in the first person and that these personal reflections contain fictional and autobiographical elements. The well-versed reader can figure out which parts are 'manipulation' (fictional) and which parts are actual reflection (more objective). Duncan Brown tried to establish how she goes about flagging for her readers the parts that are fictional. Krog replies to his enquiry:

If you read carefully you will see that these flags always refer to technique or strategy and never to inherent content. Most of these fictionalisations are to protect people while at the same time signalling that telling a story about the truth is a complicated business. (Brown 18)

However, making this distinction between what has been reported and what imagined is not ultimately the point of the work. Krog instead uses the genre of literary non-fiction to highlight issues of social and cultural difference that prevail in South African society. She writes about these in a form readers are familiar with in order to sustain their interest and engage them in a subjective, reflective and affective fashion. The documentary subject matter

adds realness to her stories, something authentic yet at the same time complicated. There is the issue of fictionalising events in order to improve the flow of the story, but where does one draw the line in fictionalising? Where do ethical questions come into play and how much fiction can be allowed (and still call it literary non-fiction)? Krog sums it up: “What I am saying through non-fiction is that I have problems, I cannot see the town in its entirety, but look, here are some patterns and they are saying: it is complex, wholeness is (im)possible, but here are the patterns” (Brown 17).

Krog’s self-reflection in *Country of My Skull* is anguished because she is dispossessed of what she held dear as the TRC process continued to unfold. She conveys this loss of ‘home’ through personal reflections that capture the real, but from a subjective and personal vantage point. Her skill in capturing the real from her own vantage point is shared by Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (see the following chapter) and even though motivated by a different set of cultural assumptions, this illustrates the complexities involved when writing in the genre of literary non-fiction.

## Chapter 3

### Humanising 'the Other': Gobodo-Madikizela's *A Human Being Died That Night*

#### 3.1 Introduction to the Eugene de Kock Story

Chapter one of this thesis introduced the genre of literary non-fiction and what this entails in the South African context. In Chapter Two Antjie Krog lists the necessary elements that allow her to write successfully in the genre of literary non-fiction. There are, however, many different facets of literary non-fiction and this chapter will delve more deeply into this quilt-work of borrowed elements from other genres. In many instances works of literary non-fiction read like novels, yet they also have some autobiographical content. In this factual or documentary context various genres are drawn on, merged and reconstructed to fit under the umbrella of literary non-fiction. The elements borrowed from other literary forms include dramatisations designed to elevate the importance of particular situations, while on other occasions the impact of events is minimized to emphasise other points of interest (Brown 13). The primary text in this chapter, *A Human Being Died That Night* (2003), contains both these elements.

The genre of literary non-fiction is often critiqued for the fine balance that needs to be maintained between known facts and the amount of speculation present in these texts. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela and Antjie Krog both make use of an authorial narrator to signal to the reader which parts of the story are real and which parts are imaginative constructs. In this chapter I will investigate whether the application of such a construct is effective or whether it creates an ambiguity that leaves the reader confused rather than enlightened.

*A Human Being Died That Night* tells the story of Eugene Alexander de Kock, the commander of apartheid's death squads. Gobodo-Madikizela's contribution to the literary

non-fiction genre contains many of the elements Antjie Krog uses to write in the genre of literary non-fiction. During the late 1990s Eugene de Kock received widespread media coverage through the TRC process in South Africa. His two life sentences and 212 years in prison preceded an application for amnesty from the TRC. Limited amnesty was granted for the crimes the TRC felt were politically motivated. He continues to serve out his 212 year sentence for the other crimes he committed. *A Human Being Died That Night* was produced as a consequence of 46 hours (over a period of six months) that Gobodo-Madikizela spent interviewing De Kock.

The TRC case that led Gobodo-Madikizela to conduct a series of interviews with De Kock was what became known as the “Motherwell Bombing” (13). It involved the killing of three black policemen from Motherwell who died when the car they were travelling in was bombed. De Kock was instructed by his superiors to “make a plan” to get rid of these men, who were stationed at the Motherwell police station, because they were threatening to expose their white colleagues’ involvement in the mysterious deaths of four black activists (13). De Kock’s request to meet with the widows of the slain men after his TRC appearance shocked Gobodo-Madikizela. She was even more shocked when the widows agreed to meet with him. She writes: “The image of the widow reaching out to her husband’s murderer struck me as an extraordinary expression – an act – of empathy, to shed tears not only for her loss but also, it seemed, for the loss of de Kock’s moral humanity” (15). Gobodo-Madikizela comments:

[w]hen violators of human rights allow themselves to be emotionally vulnerable, they are giving others a chance to encounter them as human beings. When this happens, it is inevitable for one to wonder: if they can *feel* like human beings, if they can share a human moment with those on whom they inflicted trauma, pain, and misery, why did the good side of humanity fail when it was needed most? (16)

When prodded by Gobodo-Madikizela about this case, De Kock broke down in tears in the prison interview room for the first time. Speaking through the tears he uttered, “I wish I could do much more than [say] I’m sorry. I wish there was a way of bringing their bodies back alive. I wish I could say, ‘Here are your husbands’ but unfortunately ... I have to live with it” (32). It was during this pivotal moment of the interview that Gobodo-Madikizela reached out and physically touched De Kock’s hand. The hand she touched was “clenched, cold and rigid, as if he were holding back, as if he were holding on to some withering but still vital form of his old self” (32). She was immediately ridden with guilt for openly showing compassion for this man who not too long before had killed so many of her people. She felt that she crossed a line in showing De Kock that she identified with his vulnerability. As she drove home from the prison she reflected:

I felt a sense of loss about De Kock, that the side of him I had touched had not been allowed to triumph over the side that made him Apartheid’s killing machine. That moment back in the interview room gave me a glimpse of what he could have been. Hard as the memory of having touched him was, the experience made me realise something I was probably not prepared for – that good and evil exist in our lives, and that evil, like good, is always a possibility. And that frightened me. (34)

Gobodo-Madikizela manages a level of kinship with De Kock that Krog struggles to achieve with her fellow Afrikaners in the TRC narrative, *Country of My Skull*. Although very different projects, both authors attempt to decode the legacy of the apartheid system through the lens of the TRC. The complexity of their task lay in the extent to which they, as authors, manages to identify with the vulnerabilities of their characters. Both authors make use of patches of personal reflection to assist readers to link their personal narratives to the broader TRC story. Isaac Ndlovu writes that it is “Gobodo-Madikizela’s use of the first person narrative voice in relating her conversations and encounters with De Kock makes her narrative reflectively compelling (191). Even though Gobodo-Madikizela’s engagement with the broader TRC story was much more focused and contained, it achieves a similar level of depth with regard to the



positions of the perpetrators mainly because of her usage of the first-person like Krog has done with *Country of My Skull*. Both Gobodo-Madikizela and Krog set out to find how it was possible for one group of humans to be so utterly hateful, revengeful and brutal towards their fellow countrymen.

What makes the two texts so different, however, are the markedly different personal ideologies of the two authors. Krog is stripped of her home in a literal and figurative manner. She is in search of an identity she can call her own and hopes that the process of the TRC proceedings can shed some light on a very dark and gloomy period of her life. The beliefs and values she had grown up with were shattered when the TRC process started unravelling the hidden agendas of a political system which had afforded Krog many of the privileges she had enjoyed since childhood. Gobodo-Madikizela, in contrast to Krog, grew up living a very different life. Early on in her text she reflects as follows:

I, like every black South African, lived a life shaped by the violence and the memories of Apartheid [...] In 1994 I was completing my doctoral fellowship at Harvard University. On the morning of April 27 I joined the many South Africans assembled at the state house in Boston where a voting centre for South Africans had been created [...] When I returned to South Africa in June of that year on a beautiful clear winter day, I became aware for the first time that in my past travels I could not have described myself as a South African. I could only say that I was from South Africa. (6)

Before 27 April 1994 Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela was part of a group of people that were regarded as “the other” in South African terms. They were non-white, non-citizens and basically, on many occasions, treated as non-human. In an interview she remarks that she grew up in Langa, an informal settlement in Cape Town. Her father was a qualified teacher but never taught because he disliked the Bantu Education System so much. Instead he worked

for a Jewish tailor, selling suits in the township (Sampson 1). Her early recognition of her outsider status in the city of her birth is evident when she says:

I couldn't help recalling that when I was a child living in the township, Cape Town had been out of my reach. As township dwellers, we were Cape Towners in name only. I never truly saw Table Mountain, the epitome of the beauty of this magnificent city, although it is within visual reach of the township; it was part of the world that had tried to strip my people of their dignity and respect, part of a world that reduced them to second-class citizens in their own country. (7)

Even though both Krog and Gobodo-Madikizela write in a non-fictional mode about the TRC process and the human interest element attached to it, they write from different ideological perspectives. Their intended outcomes, other than their personal journeys, are, however, rooted in the same sphere: they both wanted to engage with the perpetrators of these violent crimes to establish the motivation behind their deeds. Being able to engage with De Kock on a level where he trusted her enough to show her his vulnerabilities convinced Gobodo-Madikizela that there was hope for Eugene de Kock. The empathetic act of forgiveness by the widows of his victims surprised Gobodo-Madikizela. Their act of kindness and their understanding of his situation demonstrated to her that he was not completely evil and she wanted to share this knowledge with the world.

In *A Human Being Died That Night* Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela attempts to humanise De Kock. This chapter will attempt to establish how she goes about humanising Eugene de Kock within the possibilities and limits of literary non-fiction.

Telling a story about a true event is a complicated process of storing memory, of adopting a point of view and constructing a narrative representation. Telling the story of Eugene de Kock, the mastermind behind some of the most gruesome apartheid murders, is even more fraught

with difficulty. Besides being consumed by all the media reports about Eugene de Kock, she had to remain objective as far as her role of psychologist was concerned. In addition she was plagued by the fact that most of De Kock's victims were probably black people, her people. Just as Krog struggled with her different roles in *Country of My Skull*, Gobodo-Madikizela had to carefully balance her different roles to ensure the successful completion of the task at hand. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela went into this process with facts about de Kock gathered from secondary sources. She recalls a documentary she had seen on television:

Jacques Pauw's documentary *Prime Evil* was screened on national television, allowing the South African public to see just how depraved De Kock and his cronies were. The image I'd been carrying of a chained de Kock sitting in a small prison chair, trembling and breaking down, was replaced by one of him as the evil one, merciless, lashing out violently at his victims, instilling fear and silencing them. (37)

What she had experienced with De Kock up to that point bore no resemblance to the events described by Jacques Pauw in his documentary. *Prime Evil* showed her the other dimension of De Kock's psyche, a dimension she as the writer did not have access to because of the factual nature of the genre she was working in. Gobodo-Madikizela's inability to access De Kock's evil side is what gives her text its distinctiveness. If she had to fictionalise her text she might have attempted an imaginative exploration of his inner being, but due to the non-fictional nature of her work (as personal reportage) she had to make do with what she had at her disposal. These limitations were not necessarily negative in nature. As the readers we accept that her narrative is about the real, but we also understand that it is a personal, subjective account.

Krog states that when she writes about the real she is "exploring the seams, the edges" (Brown 16). Further on she elaborates on the complexity and impossibility of telling a story in its complete wholeness and explains how she uses "patterns" to get around this problem (Brown 17). What makes this process so complex, according to Krog, is the instance when you make

the decision to start to use language to “describe a live three-dimensional complex moment” (Brown 3). She claims that when language enters the equation, “one is already falsifying, fictionalising by deciding which angle, which words to use and what detail to leave out.[...]even the simplest journalism is inadequate in giving a single fact in its complete fullness – the moment there is language, reality is already affected” (Brown 3).

Gobodo-Madikizela embarked on this complicated literary journey by also following a pattern. She did not set out with a preconceived notion of what the pattern would look like. Instead she chose to connect the dots of a pattern that was conceived by De Kock. She wrote her story according to the information she received from Eugene de Kock. What De Kock told her was his version of reality, seen from his perspective, and she relayed these thoughts to the reader, but adding her own interpretation of what was told to her. In so doing she attempts to humanise De Kock for the reading audience.

In an article she wrote for the *Mail & Guardian Online Edition* called “Towards an anatomy of violence”, Gobodo-Madikizela states that the main inspiration for conducting the interviews with de Kock was to understand the significance of

public acknowledgement of, and accountability for, past violations and suffering, what the phenomena of remorse and forgiveness mean, and how they emerge in encounters between family members who have lost irreparably on the one hand and perpetrators responsible for the loss on the other. (“Anatomy” 2)

Previous interviews she had with perpetrators of violent crimes revealed that the label “evil” fails to capture the “complexity of social and political dynamics”, when ordinary people start committing or supporting murderous violence (“Anatomy” 2). De Kock’s situation indeed presented a set of “complex dynamics”. It is my view that in the cases of Eugene de Kock and many others, the label “evil” should be revisited and re-examined. Simply labelling someone as evil is not sufficient. This holds true about any label. It may be that De Kock’s upbringing

moulded and shaped him in such a way that he became the person known as “Prime Evil”. Does that now mean that he is just a victim of his circumstances?

Each person is born with or develops an inherent moral compass. This moral compass allows one to distinguish between right and wrongful acts. It is difficult to believe that De Kock could not grasp the utter despicableness of his acts at the time he committed the deeds. Does this make him an ordinary person committing murderous violence, or does this make him a psychopath who doesn’t know the difference? Could De Kock be classified as ordinary in some respects, as Gobodo-Madikizela suggests, or was he simply living up to his Vlakplaas persona of “Prime Evil”, and manipulating Gobodo-Madikizela to serve his own agenda? How did he balance these two sides of his psyche in a manner that enabled him to retain a degree of normality and sanity in his day-to-day life? In order to attempt to answer these questions we need to examine the background of Eugene de Kock so the dynamics of his belief system can be thoroughly understood.

Eugene de Kock was part of the oppressive machinery of the apartheid regime. He was a first-class citizen by birth. He was still a teenager when he joined the South African Army. He came from a family whose roots were firmly planted in Nationalist politics. His father was a longstanding Broederbond<sup>4</sup> member. Gobodo-Madikizela told Lin Sampson: “So many white people hated black people not because there was anything wrong with them, but because they were taught that is what you do. It was an entire system that created a warped mind. I found that people who are driven by belief can justify any act to themselves” (1). Was hating blacks was thus part of De Kock’s belief system? It is not clear whether it was, but what is clear is

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<sup>4</sup>. Roughly translated as “Band of Brothers”. This was essentially a South African secret society composed of Afrikaans-speaking, white men over the age of 25. Although its political power was extensive and evident throughout South African society for many decades, its rituals and membership—by invitation only—remained secret.

that from childhood he was groomed to become what he ultimately became – the head of the apartheid death squads.

In *Country of My Skull*, Dr Sean Kaliski, a psychiatrist at Valkenberg Psychiatric Hospital, elaborates on how so many police officers under the apartheid system were ‘brainwashed’, “We believed black people were not human, they were a threat, they were going to kill us all and then waste away the country until it was just another African disaster area” (Krog 93). Krog consulted with Dr Kaliski after she interviewed Jack Cronje, a former Vlakplaas operative. During their interview, Cronje revealed to Krog that

this is what my life has come to...All that I have, my best years, all that I know of loyalty and honour, I gave to the police. Now I find myself disgraced by politics. When I drove in the mornings after an operation and people passed me on their way to work, I thought: I did it for you and for you...you could sleep safe and sound, because I was doing my job. This country would not have lasted a week if it weren't for the security forces...For myself I didn't do it, also not for my pocket. I did it for my country. (Krog 93)

While committing these crimes against humanity the likes of Cronje and De Kock believed they were acting for the greater good of their country. They had to protect what was theirs at all costs. The black man was a threat and had to be contained by all means. They were driven by a skewed belief and could thus justify what they were doing. To top it all, they were thanked and applauded by their superiors for doing an excellent job. Their efforts were thus validated and were not in vain. By believing non-whites were non-human they were able to kill and torture to their heart's content. Like hunters, they stalked and studied their prey, its every move was analysed and documented until the time was right to move in for the kill. They had no moral compass. They were fighting a war and as soldiers in this war they had to be strong and persevere.

The first chapter in *Country of My Skull* is called “They Never Wept, the Men of my Race” (Krog 1). Here she describes the men of her race as they descend on a meeting where the draft legislation of the TRC is being established: “Heavy ham-like forearms bulge through the open windows – honking waving old Freestate and Transvaal flags. Hairy fists in the air” (Krog 1). These very muscular, hairy men as described by Krog are a trademark of her race. Krog however describes these features as if she wants to distance herself from what they represent. She did not believe that they deserved to be pardoned for the crimes they committed. What they are she does not want to be a part of, yet she cannot deny that she and the men of her race are cut from the same cloth.

There are however distinct differences in the way Krog and Gobodo-Madikizela approached the subject of the TRC perpetrator. Where Krog wanted to distance herself from these men, Gobodo-Madikizela wanted to find out how these men became “crusaders” for apartheid (53). Gobodo-Madikizela wanted to know to what extent De Kock, specifically, was a normal man corrupted by the system, and to what extent was his mind already corrupted by his upbringing. This poses a complicated question which she frequently returns to. As a young boy De Kock and his mother suffered repeated “verbal” and “emotional” abuse from his father (55). This coupled with a severe “stuttering problem” and “social shame” from his schoolmates had a significant impact on the adult he became (55).

Eugene de Kock and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela grew up on opposite sides of the apartheid system in South Africa. They had completely different cultures and beliefs. The demise of apartheid and the subsequent TRC processes allowed their respective paths to cross. Gobodo-Madikizela’s book refers to their encounters as an “artifice of history” (viii) and goes further to explain that

[h]e [De Kock] had belonged to a world that created violence, I to a world that was the object of this violence; he belonged to a world where morality meant the same thing as

hate, and I to a world that knew the difference. Our worlds were the black and white of lies and truth, and yet as De Kock spoke, the boundaries of our worlds did not always seem so clear. (19)

The abolition of apartheid in South Africa brought about many changes in social status across all racial lines. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela went from a second class citizen to a status where she was allowed voting rights and where she could have a valid identity document. She could now go to places that had previously been reserved for “Whites Only”. She was no longer classified as a “the other” in the country of her birth. The abolition of apartheid also changed Eugene de Kock’s life on many levels. His status in post-apartheid South Africa went from commander of the apartheid death squads to being a maximum security inmate at the Pretoria Central Prison. He was a man stripped of his power, a man disarmed by the new dispensation. He was reduced to the status of a prisoner serving hundreds of years behind bars. De Kock, the man once called “Prime Evil”, is now called “Dikoko” by the prison guards (4).

De Kock’s court hearings and appearances before the TRC enlightened the public as to the raw brutality of apartheid. The extent to which de Kock had free reign to torture and kill was mind-boggling. Those who knew him slowly distanced themselves from him. They didn’t want to be associated with a monster like De Kock. Eugene de Kock was cast out by all the relevant roleplayers in his life. He became lost to society – until Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela sought to find out more about him. The human being inside her sympathetically connected with him while he was delivering his testimony before the TRC. The psychologist in her wanted to gain access to his psyche and find out where his moral compass had deserted him. Like Krog, Gobodo-Madikizela finds it challenging to navigate between the different roles she occupied during the TRC process. Her feelings as second-class citizen are blurred with her knowledge as psychologist and her additional role of author.



Gobodo-Madikizela's empathetic way of interacting with De Kock ties in to the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* which translates as "a person is a person through other persons". Gobodo-Madikizela was humanised by the new dispensation in South Africa and through her Eugene de Kock was given the chance to prove that there was some humanity left in his being. She humanises De Kock in her book in a series of events that she describes in much detail. She lays bare her own anxieties and apprehensions before and during her meetings with De Kock. She does not pretend to be of higher moral standing when she talks to him during the interviews. She tries not to hold any grudges or resentment towards him, even though she was one of many who had endured decades of disadvantage under apartheid rule. Whilst interviewing De Kock she tries to remain objective and unbiased, but when she returns to her home her mind ran in a thousand different directions as she tries to make sense of what had occurred in her encounters with de Kock.

## **2.2 Humanising De Kock by means of literary techniques**

Gobodo-Madikizela describes the city of Pretoria, the prison and the interview room in considerable detail in her text and this act on her part engages the reader on a higher level than simply recalling the events. She takes the reader on the emotional journey with her. While engaging with the events from Gobodo-Madikizela's perspective, the book captures the imagination of the reader on many levels. It is raw and packed with real emotions. The local reading audience is familiar with the city, the prison, and the perpetrator and this lends a very "real" edge to the book. The readers are asked to listen to her, to De Kock and to the victims of his crimes.

Gobodo-Madikizela's dislike for the city where De Kock was imprisoned is very apparent when she says:

Pretoria was a city filled with too many of Apartheid's symbols – the Union Buildings [...], the statues of Afrikaner heroes, prison cells, buildings of torture where many opponents of Apartheid, black and white had died or disappeared or mysteriously committed suicide. Pretoria was the heart and soul of Apartheid and I had no desire to set foot there. (2)

When Gobodo-Madikizela describes Pretoria in her text she is not interrogating Pretoria as a city. She is trying to communicate something else using Pretoria. Pretoria ultimately becomes a symbol. To Gobodo-Madikizela Pretoria still represented the 'heart and soul' of apartheid. She thus describes it in such a way as to convey her dislike for the city. She chooses to describe it as a city with countless apartheid symbols instead of mentioning, for example, the beautiful Jacaranda trees that line many a street in bright purple blossoms. By choosing to mention the apartheid symbols instead of the Jacaranda trees she draws a comparison between the city and her anxiety about meeting with De Kock. Gobodo-Madikizela's 'pattern' in her writing is thus becoming clearer to the reader. She manipulates the image of Pretoria to convey her reality and perspective to the reader.

Her description of the city is closely followed by a description of Pretoria Central Prison with its "massive metal gates", "stuffy passages" and "blank concrete walls" (3). She mentions when she walked into the C-Max section where De Kock was housed she was "walking into a world of even more greys – grey walls, grey ceiling and a grey floor" (5). The intense greyness was interrupted by Eugene de Kock's shocking "bright orange prison overalls" (5). The room where she was to conduct the interview with de Kock has a "disproportionately long table, an old leather chair with wheels" and De Kock's metal stool which was "bolted to the floor" (5).

These descriptions of Eugene de Kock's physical surroundings remind the reader why he is incarcerated. It invokes the crimes he has committed and emphasizes how De Kock has been

dehumanised. She includes these descriptive images in the opening pages of the book when she is on the verge of her first meeting with De Kock. At this point of the book she then takes the storyline in another direction by reflecting for three pages on how her life has been “shaped by the violence and memories of Apartheid” (6). She lets De Kock’s story and her own story run parallel so that the reader can have a holistic view of the complexity of the two worlds that are about to interact.

### **3.3 An Ethical Quandary**

Writers like Gobodo-Madikizela and Antjie Krog who deal with a documentary subject matter in their literary offerings have to take care when considering their ethical responsibilities to the various stakeholders implicated in their texts. They have a responsibility to the readers as well as an obligation to the people about whom the story is told. There is always an ethical concern that the writing process has not taken into account the potential harm the story might cause to the real people about whom it was written. Is it thus acceptable to include speculation in creative nonfiction, in order to fulfil a responsibility to the subjective truth of the story? The easy way out for these writers seems to be to instead work on the story as fiction. But there are also ethical concerns when fiction is based on real-life people and events, and simply labelling a story as fiction does not relieve the writer of the necessity to grapple with ethical responsibilities.

How does the non-fictional writer then deal with an ethical quandary such as the one posed above? One part to the solution could be for the author to include him- or herself as part of the story. The author thus has a narrative presence and in so doing the reader will be able to distinguish between known facts and speculation. Lee Gutkind explains that in such a case the “narrator/protagonist” will be able to “speak directly to the reader, comment on action and

characters, interrupt the narrative flow with detailed descriptions or asides, and engage in philosophical reflection” (143).

Another important fact to consider is the writer’s intent when embarking on writing a non-fictional text. In the case of Gobodo-Madikizela, she served as a coordinator of victims’ public hearings in the Western Cape for the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). In that role, she participated in, and facilitated encounters between family members of victims of gross human rights and the perpetrators responsible for these human rights abuses. She is a psychologist by profession and was naturally drawn to help find solutions to the social problems stemming from the apartheid system. Her intent was thus to assist the country to move to a place of stability and to provide the TRC Commission with insight into the psyches of perpetrators, like Eugene de Kock, who were applying for amnesty from the TRC.

The theme of Gobodo-Madikizela’s second interview with Eugene de Kock was “conscience” (50). She wanted to know where his conscience let him down when he committed the countless killings for the State. She asked De Kock, “What is your worst memory of the cross-border raids you conducted?” (50). De Kock explained how he was on a killing mission against the ANC’s armed wing and when he returned after the operation he became increasingly uncomfortable with a certain stench on his body, “It was like the taste of metal in my mouth – the smell of blood all over my body” (51).

De Kock describes how he had to take several long showers, each time using a new towel to dry himself. He mentions how the “odour of death” would not leave his body and how he had to gather the “killing clothes” and throw them into the garbage bin in an attempt to rid himself of the smell (51). Gobodo-Madikizela witnesses during the interview how “his facial muscles

contorted” and as he spoke his “gestures became extreme”, “exaggerated”, “as if he was struggling to remove something attacking his skin” (51).

This specific interview with De Kock was intended to ascertain how and why his conscience had let him down when he worked for the State. De Kock delivers his version of the events that occurred that day. It was a very haunting account indeed. Gobodo-Madikizela is mesmerised by De Kock’s rendition of how the raid affected him. She concludes the story with this comment: “In my mind it painted a clear picture of someone struggling with guilt” (51). This story about De Kock’s worst memory during his work for the apartheid state lacks one critical ingredient. No mention is made by De Kock or Gobodo-Madikizela of the victims of the raids. The people who lost their lives or loved ones are not given any mention when she tells the story. Gobodo-Madikizela is concerned with the debt De Kock owes his conscience but can he even consider that debt without acknowledging the debt he owes his victims?

This event in Gobodo-Madikizela’s text is an example of an occasion where the impact of an event is minimized to emphasize another point of interest. It was part of her “pattern”, as Antjie Krog suggests (Brown 16). Gobodo-Madikizela might have deliberately decided to omit giving faces and names to the victims of that specific event because she wants to tell De Kock’s story. She wants to show how the raid affected him as a person. If she had given the victims names and faces it would have detracted from De Kock’s story. He would have faded into the background while the victim’s story gained the attention of the reader. The victims are thus kept nameless and faceless so that De Kock’s humanity could be emphasized. He probably did mention the names of the victims during the interview, but Gobodo-Madikizela decided what information she wanted to share in order to take the story in the direction of her choice.

The event under scrutiny here is also an example of how the author uses her narrative presence to represent a subjective truth of the story. The reader can only speculate about whether De Kock mentioned the names of his victims. The reader is left wondering whether he perhaps wanted to have the victim's story told to show his capacity for remorse. Is Gobodo-Madikizela betraying the reader's trust by omitting the names of the victims? Should the victims at least have been given a slight mention in order to maintain the integrity of the story? This is debatable, but what is clear is that this part of the narrative creates some ambiguity in the reader's mind.

### **3.4 A Human Being Died That Night**

The title of Gobodo-Madikizela's text is also ambiguous. While glancing at the title for the first time the reader might assume that it refers to a victim who had died at De Kock's hand. Many victims died at his hand, so why would Gobodo-Madikizela give her text a title that is in the singular form? Could it perhaps refer to the notion that with every victim who lost their life, De Kock lost part of his humanity as well? The singular form could imply that De Kock suffered a loss as well, even if unknowingly at the time. The more victims he accumulated the less humanity he had left. De Kock's humanity died because the very nature of his work required him to be cold, emotionless and non-human. He was stripped bare of all aspects of humanity, and above all of a human conscience.

*A Human Being Died That Night* (2003) reads like a modern-day reality television series. The familiarity of the local reading audience with all the aspects of the Eugene de Kock story, even today, nine years after its first publication, makes for fascinating reading. Perhaps too fascinating in some respects? As is often the case with a reality television series, the events tend to be glamorised in order to maintain the attention of the audience. The early references to "Hannibal Hector" (vii) and "Silence of the Lambs" (5) make the reader liken Gobodo-

Madikizela's story to a thriller movie with all the elements of horror and suspense that come with it. The description of the prison and Pretoria encapsulates Gobodo-Madikizela's anticipation and fear as she prepares for her meetings with De Kock. De Kock, on the other hand, is the one who holds the power in the beginning. He is the centre of attention and can clearly sense Gobodo-Madikizela's apprehension. She is interviewing him about his covert operations for the apartheid state, but he is the one who decides which way to move the conversation and he is the one who decides how much (and what) he wants to reveal to her. He could manipulate the information he wants to give her to suit his needs. Did he have an agenda?

Whether he had an agenda or not, one gets the feeling that that there was a part of De Kock that yearned to be recognised as a human being again. His years in service of the apartheid government had dehumanised him. Gobodo-Madikizela's visits gave him something to look forward to. All who were near and dear to him had deserted him and during the interviews it is obvious that he feels a certain kinship with Gobodo-Madikizela because she wanted to know him as a person. She explains:

Here I was, reaching out with my human hand to touch the physical body that had made evil happen. I had seen his other side, where I had shared a common idiom of humanity with him, and I needed to find out how and why it had been silenced. By the time I met de Kock again, I was ready to see reality as it had been revealed to me: two sides of de Kock, one evil and the other – the one I was more afraid of confronting – a human being capable of feeling, crying and knowing pain. (38)

While she wanted to get to know his human side, De Kock thought it necessary to remind her that he had been in control all along. He informs her that in their previous meeting where he broke down in tears and where she touched his hand, she actually touched his "trigger hand" (39). Despite all her good intentions to connect with De Kock's human side, this comment

catches Gobodo-Madikizela totally off guard. She is instantly reminded not to get too comfortable with this man:

He had penetrated my defences. I felt invaded, naked, angry. It was hard to believe that in the days following my prison visit, while I had been struggling with emotions of sympathy and empathy, he had been thinking about – no plotting – ways to spook me, to gain the upper hand by stemming the momentum of my moral crusade. (40)

De Kock exposes Gobodo-Madikizela's naivety. He was an intelligent man, able to read her every move. He sees through her questions and felt it necessary to remind her who she was dealing with. While she saw a glimpse of what he could have been in their previous encounter, he was now showing her more than a glimpse of what he still was in reality. Even through this very traumatic episode Gobodo-Madikizela manages to diagnose De Kock's actions as follows: "He wanted his evil to be real to me, because it was still real to him" (40), "He was not able to disown his past" (41) and "in my mind I had managed to separate the evil deeds from the doer, and could embrace the side of De Kock that showed some of the positive elements of being human" (42).

Gobodo-Madikizela seems intent on re-establishing De Kock's humanity, especially if one takes into account her diagnosis as quoted in the previous paragraph. The incident where Gobodo-Madikizela touches De Kock's "trigger hand" is the climax of the text (39). Everything else builds up to this point or is a consequence of this event. This is also an example of where an event in the text is dramatised or elevated to stress the importance of that event within the bigger story. De Kock broke down in tears when asked by Gobodo-Madikizela about the 'Motherwell Bombing'. She reached out and touched his hand to console him. Afterwards she felt guilty for having touched his trigger hand. Would the incident have carried the same weight if she had touched his other hand? Probably not, but then she would have needed another 'climax' to make her story work. She makes the incident



of touching De Kock's hand seems almost poetic in nature, elevated to the level of an out-of-body experience.

She highlights her reaction to his revelation about her touching his 'trigger hand' because it is a significant event for her. At this point in the text she wants to make the reader understand that humanising De Kock had just as big an impact on her life. She did not expect to get involved on such an emotional level. The trigger hand episode caught her off guard but it also exposed her to the degree of dehumanisation that was still present within Eugene de Kock.

De Kock's dehumanisation while working for the apartheid state was not only instilled by outside parties; he also had a hand in dehumanising himself. He had to dehumanise himself in order to maintain his sanity. It was a survival mechanism. In order to function as a 'human being' outside of his covert operations he had to dehumanise himself while operating inside the covert sphere. Now that his covert activities had come to an end he no longer needed to switch between the two sides of his psyche anymore, but with the "trigger hand" comment he shows Gobodo-Madikizela that he can still do this. In their previous encounter he had broken down and sobbed, so right at the start of their next encounter he needed to affirm his power again. However Gobodo-Madikizela still managed to discern some 'good intentions' on de Kock's part. Her diagnosis of de Kock thus proves to be problematic because as much as she wanted to humanise De Kock he needed to acknowledge and be sincere about the fact that he wanted to be humanised.

Gobodo-Madikizela attempts to humanise Eugene de Kock in her text, *A Human Being Died That Night*. In telling the world his story and showing how he has been dehumanised by others as well as himself, she in turn also faces her own issues regarding apartheid and its legacy. By showcasing her own vulnerabilities to De Kock and to her reading audience she

affirms the effectiveness of literary non-fiction in telling the real in a manner that reads like literary prose without sacrificing credibility.

## Chapter 4

### Magona's *Mother to Mother*: Blurring the Boundaries

#### 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapters of this study have dealt with the characteristics and elements of literary non-fiction and with the assumption that it creates its meanings and effects at the unstable fault line between the imaginative and the reportorial. Whereas the previous chapters investigated the impact of the authorial narrator on documentary subject matter, the primary text in this chapter separates the reportorial and the imaginative. With the absence of an authorial narrator, there are no patches of personal narration reflecting the author's perspective. What we do encounter in this case is a text that explores the imaginative. However, like the other two texts examined previously, it is also based on documentary subject matter relating to the theme of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee and the psyche of the perpetrator. *Mother to Mother* is fiction that is also strongly reportorial, using real events and characters as referents that then become fictionalised. It is a text on the border between fiction and literary-non-fiction.

Sindiwe Magona's, *Mother to Mother* (1998) is based on the killing of a white American graduate of Stanford University named Amy Elizabeth Biehl (April 26, 1967 – August 25, 1993). She was an anti-apartheid activist in South Africa and studied at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town as a scholar in the Fulbright Program. On the day of her death the 26-year-old Biehl drove a couple of fellow students home to the township of Gugulethu, outside Cape Town. On the same day a number of political protests were happening in the vicinity and after dropping her friends off Amy found herself in the midst of a mob that pelted her car with stones and smashed its windows while shouting racial epithets. Biehl was stoned and stabbed to death while she begged for her life. Four young men from Gugulethu in the

Cape were arrested and charged with her death. They were sentenced in a court of law and later applied for amnesty through the TRC. Amnesty was granted to all four applicants.

Whereas the historical account focuses primarily on the brutality of the murder itself, Sindiwe Magona's, *Mother to Mother* is a narrative that provides a fictional account of the murder, but more importantly it tells the lesser known story of Amy Biehl's killer. In the preface to her novel, Magona describes the murder of Amy Biehl as follows:

Fullbright scholar Amy Elizabeth Biehl was set upon and killed by a mob of black youth in Gugulethu, South Africa, in August 1993. The outpouring of grief, outrage, and support for the Biehl family was unprecedented in the history of the country. Amy, a white American, had gone to South Africa to help black people prepare for the country's first truly democratic elections. Ironically, therefore, those who killed her were precisely the people for whom, by all subsequent accounts, she held a huge compassion, understanding the deprivations they had suffered. (1)

In the novel we are introduced to the fictional mother and son, Mandisa and Mxolisi (based on the historical mother and son, Evelyn and Mongezi Manqina). Magona explains their circumstances and the social and political factors that moulded their lives within the apartheid context. She explains how the American girl found herself to be the unfortunate victim of such a brutal attack. Magona's novel conveys the message that it was inevitable that such an event would occur if we consider all the relevant factors. These factors will be explored later in this study.

Magona's novel takes the form of an address from the mother of the killer to the mother of the victim. This first-person narration from the mother of the killer affords the reader a perspective into the world of the wrongdoer and those close to him. Just as Gobodo-Madikizela humanises Eugene de Kock, so Magona humanises the fictional stand-in for Mongezi Manqina. This perspective into Mxolisi's world was not accessible to the reader

from accounts of the historical events. At the amnesty hearings, where the real-life perpetrators had a chance to state their case to the world, their testimony appeared rehearsed, scripted and carefully written, “I deeply regret what I did [...] I wish to apologise to my legal representatives and to the Court which found me guilty [...] I apologise sincerely to Amy Biehl’s parents, family and friends and I ask their forgiveness” (TRC transcripts, 8 July 1997). At the time of the hearings the four young men accused of the killing were not familiar with the English language. Their affidavits were read by their legal representatives in English and interpreted back to them. When they were asked questions by the opposing council they also had to work via the interpreters. This was very difficult, especially for Mongezi Manqina: on numerous occasions, he asked the opposing council to repeat or rephrase the questions. There was thus a significant language barrier which inhibited the articulation of Mongezi’s point of view. It is also understandable that they would have had rehearsed testimony because their freedom was on the line. What is lacking in the historical account of the killing is given greater emphasis in Magona’s novel, and thus the reader of the novel is given better access to Mongezi’s side of the story.

#### **4.2 The Role of Mandisa and of Orature**

The protagonist in *Mother to Mother* is Mandisa. This maternal voice speaks directly to the mother of Amy Biehl in an attempt to explain the circumstances at play during the time her daughter was murdered. The narrative only covers two days chronologically, but Magona cleverly makes use of flashbacks to illustrate the difficult life her characters had been leading up to the killing. The chapters in the novel are fragmented into specific times and together with the flashbacks this situates the action in the novel in terms of past and present. The reader is thus taken on a journey through the past and the present and he or she discovers how these two timeframes influence the storyline.

In addition to being the protagonist, Mandisa also assumes the role of narrator in the text. As such, she provides many of the flashbacks. She introduces us to the lives she and her children had led up to the day the killing of the American girl took place. Mandisa is a domestic worker by profession who uses the train to travel to her employer's house each day. Mxolisi is her eldest son and life in Gugulethu has not been kind to them. Her two boys live in a tin shack at the back of her house because there is not enough space in her house to accommodate herself and her three children.

Some readers might feel that the narrator in *Mother to Mother* is not adequately distanced from the story and that Mandisa's occupation of the roles of both narrator and protagonist in the story limits her objectivity. Further and deeper engagement with the novel does however lead one to conclude that Mandisa could not be distanced from the story of her son because his story is in large part her story. Her address to the victim's mother is a plea on her son's behalf. An objective perspective with regard to her son cannot be expected from Mandisa: her account of what happened and the circumstances surrounding the events will be different from all the other accounts. In the novel Mandisa tells her own story and we get to know about Mxolisi's life through his mother's eyes. His story is filtered to us via Mandisa's words. It is also through Mandisa's words that the reader has access to some of her most intimate and personal thoughts. She conveys these thoughts to the reader in an attempt to explain her situation as well as that of her son, Mxolisi. Because she is a character within her own story she makes judgments and expresses opinions about the events that occur in the novel. The remainder of this chapter will examine the impact of Mandisa's narration and perspective on the events described in the novel. I will also consider how Mandisa, as the protagonist, is influenced by Magona's cultural assumptions and what the consequences of these assumptions are.

Magona draws significantly on the oral traditions of her Xhosa culture even though much of her written work was produced while she was stationed in the United States (Attwell 283). In her autobiography, *To My Children's Children* (1990), Magona explains that “ours is an oral tradition” and further elaborates, “I fear I may not live long enough to do my duty to you, to let you know who you are and whence you are. So, I will keep, for you, my words in this manner” (1). In this way Magona is preserving the cultural traditions of her people by telling their stories in the form of the written word so they can be passed on to future generations. It is thus clear that the spoken word or the oral nature of her culture is very important to her. In this way Magona ensures that the Xhosa legacy will not be lost. It is interesting to note how she uses this narrative form (the written word) to preserve the oral traditions of her Xhosa heritage. This distinctive blend of the written word and the oral tradition is what makes Magona's narratives so dynamic: she manages to have the two forms co-exist in her narratives.

In her article, *Complementary Oral and Written Narrative Conventions* (2002), Margaret Daymond refers to the “sustained presence of orature” in Magona's autobiographies (331). This sustained presence of orature is, however, not limited to Magona's autobiographies, but extends to her novel *Mother to Mother* as well. In *Mother to Mother* Magona again employs the spoken word to bring Mandisa's story to life. In employing the same technique as in her previous literary offerings, she manages to sustain the drama and tension in the novel (as I will demonstrate later in this discussion). The fact that Mandisa assumes the roles of both protagonist and narrator gives her a great deal of power and authority in the text. Mandisa's narration makes the reader deeply empathetic to the way the text is narrated. The protagonist-narrator's perspective is thus imposed upon the reader because she is so forceful in her plea. In the case of the Magona text, the narrator is speaking directly to the mother of the murdered girl and the words of familiarity that are spoken from the very first line of the narrative draw the reader into further alignment with the narrator's point of view. Mandisa's address to the

victim's mother makes the reader feel almost privileged to have access to it. This is evident on the first page where Mandisa says:

My son killed your daughter.

People look at me as though I did it. The generous ones as though I made him do it [...] Let me say out plain, I was not surprised that my son killed your daughter. That is not to say I was pleased. It is not right to kill...But you have to understand my son. Then you'll understand why I am not surprised he killed your daughter. Nothing my son does surprises me anymore. (1)

Because the novel is in large part an address to the other mother; the reader is not the addressee, but we have access to it, as if we are part of a communal listenership. The text is given this exclusive feel because Mandisa uses expressions like, "My son killed your daughter" instead of, "My son killed her daughter". The directness of her speech gives her words more emotion and intensity. Words like 'my son' and 'your daughter' are conveyed through the text at a spoken level. In doing this the narrator gains the reader's sympathy for her version of the events that surrounded the killing.

The central characters in the text are Mandisa, Mxolisi and the mother of the slain girl. Magona gives us limited access to Mxolisi and the other mother because she wants to tell Mandisa's story. She wants the reader to know how Mandisa perceived events leading up to the killing. Mxolisi and the other mother are not given much narrative scope because Magona wants to tell the reader how Mandisa felt about the fact that her son murdered someone else's child. If Mxolisi and the other mother had been given narrative authority Mandisa's story would have had less impact. Mandisa's maternal plea is the reason Magona chose to make the story about her and not her son.



### 4.3 The Fictional, Empathy and the Ethical

The introduction to this study questions whether the rendition of a literary work in fiction, when it is based on a documented reality, absolves the author from the ethics of reportage and from legal complexities. I also question whether this move on the part of the author allows for more maneuverability with regard to representation. We have already established that Magona's placement of Mandisa in the roles of both protagonist and narrator gives her the opportunity to tell her side of the events that occurred. By fictionalising the characters in her text Magona is allowing herself the necessary space to give the perspective of the wrongdoer and those close to him. The frightening opening line (quoted earlier) sets the tone for the rest of the novel as Magona invites the reader into the world of Mxolisi, as seen through the eyes of his mother. The aim in this section is to show how the fictionalisation of characters, events and locations helps Magona to provide a higher level of insight into the world to which she introduces her reader. Even though she was aided by the use of fiction, I will investigate whether the author's residence in another country at the time of writing may have resulted in some discrepancies in the description of certain scenes and in the portrayal of certain characters. Would her rendition of events have been different if she had been present in the country to bear witness to the social and emotional experiences of the role-players involved in the historical incident?

*Mother to Mother* was published in 1998, only a couple of years after the conviction of the real-life murderers of Amy Biehl. Political tensions in the country were still high, so a fictional account of the incident may have seemed like the safest option. An account filled with patches of real-life description may have hindered the production of the text. It would also have been difficult for Magona to get permission from all the historical characters, and this added layer of complexity could have impacted negatively on Magona's creative process.

Mandisa, in her capacity as narrator, hopes to make the reader feel a sense of empathy for Mxolisi. She states that Mxolisi's world "failed to nurture them" and that he became one of "the lost creature[s] of malice and destruction" (v). Could she be trying to justify his actions by claiming that he was the product of a world where "senseless racial violence" and "crimes against humanity" were everyday occurrences? (vi). This is a possibility because her narrative is plagued with 'what if' questions that have very accusatory undertones, and almost transfer the blame for the killing to other parties, "And if he had killed one of the other women who were with your daughter, d'you think there would be all this hue and cry?" (2). On another occasion she asks:

Why is it that the government now pays for his food, his clothes, the roof over his head? Where was the government the day my son stole my neighbor's hen; rung its neck and cooked it – feathers and all, because there was no food in the house and I was away, minding the children of the white family I worked for? Asked to stay in for the weekend – they had their emergency... mine was not being able to tell my children beforehand that they would be alone for the weekend...not being able to tell them of the change of plans. Who was on the phone in Guguletu then? And why would the awarding of phones have started with a nobody such as I am? (3)

This is an example of Mandisa's blame-shifting in an attempt to clear Mxolisi's name. She blames the government and her employees, amongst others, for the situation in which Mxolisi found himself at the time of the killing. Mandisa is claiming that the apartheid system created the monster her child became and that if the slain girl wasn't killed by him she "might have gotten herself killed by another of these monsters our children have become" (2). In addition to shifting the blame for the killing to other parties, Mandisa also mentions the good deeds Mxolisi has done, so that the reader can believe her when she claims that her son is a good boy. An example of this is when she mentions the chicken-stealing incident, as quoted

above. Another incident she mentions is when he saved a young girl in the township from a “certain rape” just a few weeks before the killing (162).

Mandisa is a mother torn to pieces. She wants to explain what drove her son to do what he did. She also wants to blame the authorities for creating such a ‘monster’ (and many others like him). At one stage in the novel she condemns her son for what he has done. At other times she proudly remembers an innocent and untainted Mxolisi, her firstborn son. The different stances she exhibits in the text are indicative of the desperation of her plea. She wants to show how it was impossible to distance Mxolisi from his actions, and that his deed could have been committed by any one of the protesters on that day.

Meg Samuelson writes that the line “you have to understand my son” becomes “a broader appeal to the reading public”, meaning “you have to understand township violence” (Samuelson 2000: 235). In *Mother to Mother* Magona wants to make the reader and her addressee alert to the degree of violence and racism that were in play during the early 1990s in South Africa, more specifically in the South African townships. By introducing her addressee to Mxolisi’s world, Mandisa wants the victim’s mother to fully grasp how this world is constructed. She does this by dramatising the descriptions of the crowds who were participating in the marches on the day of the killing. The “forest of stomping feet” (15) and “mob of black youth in Gugulethu” (v) give the reader a picture of a suffocating, war-torn community that was spinning out of control.

Turning to fiction allows Magona more scope to describe the conditions of the townships through Mandisa’s voice. At the same time Mandisa is able to effectively convince the reader how her son turned out to be a murderer, how he found himself in an unavoidable situation. Mandisa’s views with regard to the government, youth movements, the education system, and their economic situation are articulated very clearly and the use of fiction allows her to make

these statements without fear of prosecution. Through these very defined utterances by Mandisa we are introduced to the innermost thoughts of many township women who endure these kind of conditions every day, not only because of a system of apartheid, but because of the legacy of patriarchy that still reigns supreme in many of their lives.

*Mother to Mother* is located primarily in a South African township, Gugulethu. Magona's location of the township emphasises the apartheid governments' policy of separate development. She does this by sketching a definitive picture of the Gugulethu township during the transition years (1990-1994). Her description of the township is carefully thought-out with the intention of helping the reader to imagine what the township with all its elements looked like at its core. She describes in intricate detail the state of the streets, the houses and the people. In her text, *Apartheid and Beyond* (2007), Rita Barnard also explores the cultural, political and literary significance of key places within the South African landscape. She examines the South African township and writes as follows:

Planned in the late 1940s and early 1950s these notorious places of deprivation had a surprisingly respectable aesthetic and scientific genealogy...The very design elements that the planners advocated for functional, scientific and aesthetic reasons – the broad streets, the “green areas” between the cities and the townships, and the bold graph-like patterns of the roads and houses – were simultaneously also strategic devices. The broad streets permitted access to armoured vehicles; buffer zones and limited road access allowed the townships to be sealed off from the cities in times of unrest; and the orderly repetition of identical houses on a geometric grid facilitated surveillance by police and informers. (Barnard 6)

Barnard also mentions the role of the train in the implementation of the governments' policy of separate development:

From the point of view of black South Africans, the train was clearly a tool of oppression, indispensable to the maintenance of residential segregation and to the exploitation of labor. It brought day laborers from distant townships, as well as migrants from even more distant rural areas, to work in the white cities...the train was transformed into much more than a functional vehicle in service of the apartheid economy. (Barnard 7)

Magona's description of Gugulethu provides a different impression. Her description gives a sense of what the inhabitants of Gugulethu felt like, of their emotional state of being, while Barnard's description explains the functionality of the state's design – in containing and controlling the people that lived in the townships. Magona gives the township emotions, feelings and character where Barnard's description leaves the reader with a one-dimensional picture of the township.

Barnard argues that Magona's writing is still caught up in the style of "protest writing" that prevailed during the apartheid era (143). She claims that Magona's writing lacks a fresh approach and that *Mother to Mother* was written in this style to suit the taste of an international audience. Barnard makes a valid observation, but we have to ask why Magona did not take a 'fresh approach', and whether a 'fresh approach' would have been effective; would it have suited the setting and topic of the novel? *Mother to Mother* is a novel about the brutal murder of a foreign white student in a South African township in 1993. Political tensions were high. Levels of violence and unrest were a great cause for concern and the townships were the places where most of the violence was taking place. Many members of the South African reading audience are also unfamiliar with the circumstances within the townships in South Africa. Barnard's 'international audience' argument is not convincing in this case. Many local readers would be familiar with the historical events surrounding the Biehl killing, but they might not have considered that there was another side to this story.

Magona provides the local and international reading audience with another perspective on the events that occurred that day.

The character of Mxolisi is based on Mongezi Manqina, who was one of the four young men convicted for Amy Biehl's murder. In his testimony before the TRC Mongezi claimed that the aim of the student protests in Gugulethu at time of the murder was to "make the townships ungovernable" and to "destroy state and company property" in order to intimidate the police and other non-blacks from entering their territory (*TRC transcripts*, 8 July 1997). In doing this they hoped that the government would listen to their grievances and give them their land back. They were prepared to continue doing this until the government gave in to their demands.

In his testimony to the TRC Mongezi Manqina confirmed that his attack on Amy Biehl followed a political rally where they adopted the slogan "One Settler One Bullet" (*TRC transcripts*, 8 July 1997). Mongezi interpreted the slogan as an instruction that they should 'take care' of all settlers (white people) who prevented them from getting their land back. On 25 August 1993 students returning from the political rally saw all white people as settlers and Amy Biehl was the unfortunate person who was at the wrong place at the wrong time.

Mongezi Manqina's TRC testimony conveys the physical condition the townships were in at the time of Amy Biehl's murder. Conditions were not at all favourable and people were living in a constant fear of the authorities because of the transitional state of the government. The physical state of the townships is further emphasized by Mandisa when she reminisces while travelling by bus from the city to the township. She renders a meticulous and comprehensive account of the township landscape, starting from their arrival in Gugulethu in 1968:

It was early morning when my family got here, early in 1968. How my eyes were assaulted by the pandemonium. People choking the morning streets...And then a forest

of houses. A grey unending mass of squatting structures. Ugly. Impersonal. Cold to the eye....Congested. As far as the eye can see. Hundreds and hundreds of houses. Rows and rows, ceaselessly breathing on each other...Leaning against each other, pushing at each other. Sad small houses crowned with grey and flat unsmiling roofs. Low as though trained never to dream high dreams. The streets are narrow, debris-filled, full of gullies, alive with flies, mosquitoes and sundry vermin thriving in the pools of stagnant water that are about the only thing that never dries up and never vanishes in Gugulethu.

(27)

The spatial representation of the township in *Mother to Mother* is similar to that in other texts that represent images of the struggle against apartheid. Through the voice of Mandisa, Magona illustrates and emphasizes the claustrophobia that was their daily plight. Magona makes use of personification to humanise the township and to make the reader sympathise with the people who have to deal with life in the townships every day. The township thus embodies qualities/emotions like “sadness”, “breathing”, being “ugly”, “being able to “dream” and having “unsmiling roofs”. Magona does this to convey the mood of people in the township. She wants the reader to connect with the township that is personified. This literary device (personification) is used to make her text more dramatic and interesting. This non-human entity (the township) that is “sad”, “unsmiling” and “congested” evokes a more intense reaction from the reader. (She could have simply said that “conditions in the townships were not favourable to live in”.) The reader gets to understand the emotional state of many people in Gugulethu. Besides describing the physical state of the township, Magona also wants to convey people’s emotional state of being: people that felt as if they lived on top of each other, they were unsmiling, and living conditions were not good. Her description of the township mirrors the emotional state of the people who lived there.

Magona also makes use of one-word sentences to make a dramatic impact on the reader. These one-word sentences, like “Ugly”, “Impersonal” and “Congested”, are crafted effectively and placed at strategic points within the paragraph to make a dramatic statement. Magona wanted to convey the claustrophobia of the township by means of her one-word sentences and her use of imagery. These sentences are placed between longer sentences and build-up to a climax in the paragraph. The reader is then also impressed by the endless rows of houses, the police-patrolled streets and the masses of people going to and from work.

In sharp contrast to the portrayal of Mxolisi’s world, we are then briefly introduced to Amy’s world in Chapter Two of the novel: “A clear autumn morning. The room window facing east, awash with the thin August light. The window is open. Your daughter slept with it like that all night through... her voice; a swan’s at break of day... her face is bathed in radiant smile” (5). The victim’s world as portrayed by Mandisa is a carefree world of happiness and comfort. She is young and therefore naively looks forward to each new day. The passage quoted above describes an almost idyllic scene as Amy awakes from her night’s rest. On the other side of Cape Town, not too far away from the suburb of Mowbray, where the young girl is waking up, Mandisa is hurriedly trying to get her children to wake up for school before she departs to her madam’s residence where she works as a domestic worker. She vividly describes “Standing at the back door, the kitchen door facing the backyard, where the boys sleep in a tin shack, the “hokkie” (you know these one-size-fits-all houses of Gugulethu don’t expand as the children come)” (6). By having Mandisa narrate the intricate details of Amy’s home, in comparison with Mxolisi’s home, Magona is poignantly pointing to the differences in lifestyle and social context between the two characters. She wants the reading audience to clearly see it in their mind’s eye before deciding whether Mxolisi is guilty or whether he was just as much a victim as Amy.



By highlighting what the characters have for breakfast on that dreadful August morning, Magona is showing the divide in class and race between the privileged and the less privileged. While walking in her “big fluffy towel” Amy has “cold milk cereal”, “black coffee” and “whole-wheat bread” (5) with a “thick slice of cheese” (6). In Gugulethu Mxolisi has to beg his mom for money to buy eggs in order to avoid the “bread and jam” his sister, Siziwe, is having for breakfast (7). Mandisa’s children’s complaint that she doesn’t make them porridge any more clouds her with guilt when she reminds herself that if she doesn’t work they won’t even have “bread and jam” to eat. This portrayal of the characters’ morning rituals shows how different the contexts of their lives are and this adds weight to Mandisa’s plea for her child. She is asking: Who can blame my child and his friends for rioting against this type of injustice? Instead of saying it outright, however, she creates a visual image for the reader.

This section shows how the fictionalisation of real characters, events and locations helped Magona to add verisimilitude to the world of Mandisa and her family. Magona’s personal experience of living in Gugulethu helped her shape the narrative in a convincing and vivid fashion. It is however my opinion that she achieved only partial success in her portrayal of Mandisa. The character delineation, admittedly a more difficult task than the description of the township, leaves one with some questions as to the credibility of the character’s level of intellect.

#### **4.4 Borrowed Cultural Assumptions**

In order to sustain this claim it is necessary to take a look at the author’s background and how it compares to that of the protagonist in this story. In the quote below Magona explains how she created the character of Mandisa and the novel *Mother to Mother*:

*Mother to Mother* is a book I did not plan [...]. Amy Biehl was killed on 25 August 1993. I was in New York where I live now. I was shocked. I was saddened [...]. My

sadness, I must confess was kind a distant and impersonal. Six months later, I went home for the elections; I discovered that one of the four young men implicated in her murder [...] is the son of a childhood friend of mine. Well, that changed things a bit, because I was catapulted into a situation where I had empathy for the mother of the perpetrator of such a crime. I thought of the little Mandisa – How is she handling this?  
(Attwell 283-284)

Mandisa's story is to a large extent also Magona's story. Magona gives Mandisa fragments of her life experience but not all of it. Mandisa is, for instance, very critical of the resistance movement that the township children are getting involved in. Magona on the other hand is in favour of the resistance movement and was involved in it before she emigrated to the USA. Despite this obvious difference in their ideologies, a number of parallels can be drawn between the biographical backgrounds of Magona and the fictional Mandisa. They are both black South African women who grew up when political tensions were very high in South Africa. They both had children before they were ready to raise children, and as single mothers they had both resorted to employment as domestic workers in order to provide for their families.

Magona thus knew Evelyn Manqina, the woman who inspired the character of Mandisa. She knew her as a child, and when Evelyn's son was implicated in the Biehl murder Magona felt a sense of empathy for her. However, she never physically communicated with her with regard to her sons' involvement in the murder. She was thus drawing on her own experiences to give Mandisa a history of her own. In doing this she gave Mandisa aspects of her history and her cultural assumptions. Mandisa's anger was also partly Magona's anger. She felt such a sense of empathy for Mandisa because what had happened to Mandisa could easily have happened to her. Magona had her education to help her to get out of the townships and poverty, but

Mandisa didn't have this advantage, so Magona felt a sense of responsibility to tell Mandisa's story – because in doing so she was partly telling her own story.

Magona's level of education is, however, a negative influence on her portrayal of Mandisa and the way Mandisa delivers her narration in the novel. Magona would be considered a well-educated individual, while Mandisa had to leave school at Grade Six because she fell pregnant with Mxolisi (106). Mandisa would thus have a much less developed vocabulary than Magona, but her narration is not delivered at the level or in the register of a woman who has only acquired a primary education. Her advanced language usage leads one to question why Magona chose to make Mandisa so articulate, rather than allowing her to narrate her story in terms more appropriate to her social standing. When Mandisa uses words like "millipede" (11), "acquiesces" (13) and "lichenous roofs" (15) it baffles and creates confusion as to her intention in creating the character of Mandisa. Earlier I argued that Magona continues the oral nature of her autobiographies in *Mother to Mother*. By having Mandisa narrate the novel in such an educated register Magona detracts from the creation of a fully credible narrator in the novel.

In her text called *Reconciliation Discourse* (2008), Annalies Verdoolaege illustrates the connection between language and ideology. She quotes Hodge, Kress & Jones (1979: 81) who asserted that "we establish, maintain, confirm and often challenge the categorisations of language" and that "[t]he analysis of language is in fact a necessary part of any attempt to study ideological processes: through language ideologies become observable" (Verdoolaege 56). It is thus clear to the reading audience that Magona's ideology is partially expressed through Mandisa's narration. The reader is in effect not getting further insight into Mandisa's character, but becoming informed about Magona's ideologies. In short, Mandisa's linguistic expression begins to feel didactic.

#### 4.5 A Mother's Space of Anguish

Mandisa is a deeply conflicted where Mxolisi is concerned. In her mind she knows that what Mxolisi did was wrong, but in her heart she is overwhelmed by motherly love for her son. She wants to defend him at all costs, but subconsciously she knows that when the time comes she will have to do the right thing. She thus faces the same challenge as the reader with regard to whether to defend him or to justify his actions. Njabulo Ndebele writes about “spaces of anguish” and claims that a person who inhabits a space of anguish “enter[s] and live[s] in a world of pretence” (Ndebele n.p.). Ndebele elaborates further:

Pretence could be a coping mechanism in which one owns up to the fact that one is unable to respond confidently and appropriately to human relations conundrums of the kind that race, gender and class tensions can throw up from time to time. Resorting to pretence may not necessarily be an indication of hypocrisy, but rather a desire to buy time or a muted cry for help. (Ndebele n.p.)

Ndebele's “spaces-of-anguish” theory can be applied to Mandisa's situation. She is buying time to try and convince the reader of Mxolisi's innocence. She could also be buying time to allow the reality of the situation settle in her mind – and that reality is that her son has killed another human being. Despite the intention behind Mandisa's time-buying, the fact that she is prevaricating places her in a space where she is conflicted by two sets of emotions. Her coping mechanism is to tell her story so the reading audience can understand the position she finds herself in. Ndebele's overriding sentiment is that the occupation of a space of anguish is not necessarily a negative thing. He argues that such “a space of anguish may have to be recognized and acknowledged as the one feature in our public and private lives that has the potential to bind us” (Ndebele n.p.).

Whilst Mandisa's narration helps her to cope with her situation, she is also gaining the support of the reader. Readers identify with Mandisa because she is in a tough situation. Even

though they might not be sure whether Mxolisi deserves their sympathy, they can sympathise with Mandisa because they understand the space of anguish she finds herself in. Mandisa's situation leads us to ask why Mxolisi's situation should be any different. He has been accused of committing a heinous crime and because of this the reader faces the difficult task of deciding whether he deserves to be forgiven or whether he is a victim of his social circumstances.

Mandisa inhabits a space of anguish because she is unable to make a decision with regard to Mxolisi's "victim-perpetrator identity" (Verdoolaege 117). Her narration reveals a shifting between his identity as a victim and as a perpetrator. Annelies Verdoolaege places emphasis on this phenomenon of a double identity:

The people who appeared before the Human Rights Violations Committee were identified first and foremost victims of gross human rights violations that had taken place under apartheid. They had all suffered from maltreatment, detention, torture or abduction or a loved one had been killed or abused. All of them told horrifying stories, arousing compassion from both audience and the commissioners. However a number of victims had also committed human rights violations themselves. Some of them had done so as a member of the liberation forces, which meant that the violation was politically motivated. Some of the victims had also committed crimes that were not politically motivated, but that were the result of social strife or historical circumstances [...] Sometimes victims accepted this double identity and they were prepared to give more information about the committed violation. In other cases victims tried to get round this particular identification: they either ignored the reference to the perpetrator identity or they tried to justify their criminal behaviour. (Verdoolaege 117-118)

Mxolisi could easily assume a victim-identity because his life was negatively impacted by his historical circumstances. This fact is clearly illustrated by Mandisa's narration throughout the

text. Her narration in parts resembles testimony before a TRC, and her TRC consists of the reading audience. She is pleading his case throughout the text, even though in parts she doubts in his innocence, and it is in these parts that Mxolisi's perpetrator-identity comes to the fore. She could only justify his criminal intent up to a certain point, from where it became apparent he would have to pay for his crime. In the case of Mxolisi, the victim-identity dominates the perpetrator-identity because Mandisa only allows the reading audience access to information that she deems appropriate. The reader thus cannot make an objective judgment call because his or her access to important information is limited and filtered by Mandisa.

The penultimate chapter opens with three questions that illustrate Mandisa's anguish with regard to Mxolisi's two identities: "*But now, my Sister-Mother, do I help him hide? Deliver him to the police? Get him a lawyer?*" (198). When she reunited with Mxolisi, however, she insists that he tell her the truth about what had occurred. Even whilst in tears and emotionally shaken, Mxolisi refuses to acknowledge his perpetrator identity, and it is at this point in the text that Mandisa finally has a chance to get answers to all her questions. However, Mxolisi refuses to admit to having committed any crime: "They say I did it, Mama! [...] Mama, believe me, I was just one of a hundred people who threw stones at her car" (195) and then later on "I didn't do it Mama. I swear, I didn't do it!" (196). Mxolisi's absolute refusal to admit to the crime shows a refusal to acknowledge his perpetrator-identity.

Mandisa knows in her heart that she will have to acknowledge her son's perpetrator-identity if she is to have peace in her soul. Towards the end of the novel she accepts Mxolisi's perpetrator-identity, but it is a conditional acceptance:

My son was only an agent, executing the long-simmering dark desires of his race.

Burning hatred for the oppressor possessed his being. It saw through his eyes; walked

with his feet and wielded the knife that tore mercilessly into her flesh. The resentment of three hundred years plugged his ears; deaf to her pitiful entreaties. (210)

The above-quoted passage is amongst Mandisa's final thoughts in the text. Her acceptance of Mxolisi's perpetrator-identity is conditional because she still believes that that he was influenced by political factors and that it was under these circumstances that the crime was committed. The Mxolisi she knows is not the Mxolisi who committed the murder. As a mother she cannot display the objectivity of a court of law in determining his innocence or guilt. In her struggle to find a compromise between the two conflicting identities of her son she begins to accept that her son inhabits the grey area between victim and perpetrator. She comes to the realisation that she will have to let the two identities co-exist if she wants to have any kind of normality in the future.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

Sindiwe Magona's text renders a fictional account of the murder of American Fulbright student, Amy Biehl. *Mother to Mother* bears witness to a time gone by in South Africa's history. It ensures that future generations have a clear picture of the sacrifices previous generations had to endure for a democratic system of governance in South Africa. The rendition of this story as fiction partially absolves Magona from ethical and legal responsibilities that might have hindered the publication of this text. While she might not have been able to write the text from Mandisa's point of view as a documentary account, fiction allows her to represent Mandisa in complex ways through the imagined dilemmas that accompany fictional representation.

The fictionalisation of stories based on reality unfortunately also allows room for some discrepancies in representation to slip in because the author is not forced to adhere to the same code of ethics as non-fictional writers. Magona's geographical location at the time of writing

*Mother to Mother* (New York) removes her from the intellect level of her protagonist, Mandisa. Her physical distance from her childhood friend, the historical mother of the Amy Biehl killer, leaves Magona with little choice but to substitute parts of Mandisa's background with elements of her own history and register, but this move on Magona's part is not entirely credible. The result is a somewhat unconvincing Mandisa, a Mandisa who uses a discourse that is out of character and didactic. But this is a minor flaw in an otherwise convincing narrative.



## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

Literary non-fiction, because of its documentary yet subjective impulses, provides an ideal platform for the discussion of the rising social challenges that are present in post-apartheid South Africa. Because literary non-fiction is a genre without formally established conventions, it borrows from other genres, is influenced by other genres and uses elements defined by other genres. Authors within the South African context have reworked and reinvented the global definition of the genre to suit the needs of the local literary community. This has been done with much skill and craft by the authors investigated in this study, as well as others like Ivan Vladislavić, Johnny Steinberg and Jacob Dlamini.

The authors interrogated in this study write about the TRC and the human interest stories that weren't told by the TRC proceedings. Literary non-fiction allows Krog, Gobodo-Madikizela and Magona to tell the stories of these people to the world. They provide a version of events in a way not covered by the media and the historians. This will provide future generations with another side of the events that were testified to before the TRC. This might not always be the "true" version of events, but it opens up a space for dialogue and for thinking beyond the obvious. Njabulo Ndebele sums it up eloquently when he comments on the nature of Krog's work in literary non-fiction:

Antjie Krog's response is courageous and nuanced in engaging complexity. I was intrigued by her ability to understand both sides of a complex problem, and produce an analysis that is not a feeble compromise, but instead offers a heightened understanding of how one can live with the difficulties and contradictions. Her writing offers us a methodology for engaging with complex issues of race and class without avoiding their deepest implications [...] I find her work to constitute a profound and insightful refusal to paper over the complexities. (qtd. in West 116)

Ndebele's sentiments sum up what the genre of literary non-fiction represents at its core. It tells stories that are set in the past, yet that setting is usually real and drawn from historical events. What Krog and Gobodo-Madikizela did was to thread their narratives with passages of personal reflection that allowed them to make the vital link between the personal and the national in a way that makes the reader identify with their sense of dispossession and displacement.

Krog makes the reader identify with her sense of displacement by using the pronoun 'I' in her narratives. Gobodo-Madikizela also makes use of this technique. They employ it very successfully and this shows the lengths they were willing to go to in order to produce their literary offerings. Magona followed the fictional route to bring her text to life. In turning to the imaginative she was able to skirt the ethical responsibilities that accompany a text with a documentary subject matter. Although this might seem an easier route than that taken by Krog and Gobodo-Madikizela, it allowed her to focus on the more important matter of telling the untold story of Mandisa. In rendering her story as fiction she attempted to capture the perspective of the mother of the perpetrator in a way that revealed the daily struggles of township women. She avoided the legal complexities of telling her story in the manner of Krog and Gobodo-Madikizela, but in turn she gained the opportunity to make readers aware of the dire circumstances of township life.

A concern that emerges with the Magona narrative is the depiction of the protagonist, Mandisa. Even when characters are fictional, they need to be credible and realistic. Magona achieves this to a large extent, but because she transfers some of her cultural assumptions to Mandisa, she fails to capture the essence of Mandisa. What we then end up with is a westernised Mandisa, one with a very high level of vocabulary, uncommon for township women with only an elementary school education level.

With the Gobodo-Madikizela text the aim was to delve more deeply into the elements that literary non-fiction has borrowed from other genres. This refers in particular to the facts that

Gobodo-Madikizela chose to emphasize (and to those that she didn't) and to the impact of these literary techniques have on her text. The use of these elements highlights Gobodo-Madikizela's craft in employing such literary techniques to convey Eugene de Kock's story to the reading public. She manages to engage the reader on a deeper and more intimate level than the other two texts because of her use of these literary elements; in this way Eugene de Kock's story is conveyed in a sincere and credible manner.

The lack of established conventions in the genre of literary non-fiction functions as a double-edged sword in literary terms. It allows authors to adapt techniques from other genres but at the same time it raises questions about the amount of freedom that can be allowed in works of fiction and about the ethical responsibilities that accompany such freedom. Hedley Twidle talks about a "shallow linguistic transfer" that often "defamiliarises" and about "patronising rendition[s]" when speakers of the other official languages in South Africa deliver their narratives in English (Twidle 21). He comments as follows: "The books are constituted by other people's words, but these spoken life stories are absorbed into a larger, even-handed narrative voice (one which does not trade on their idiolects or linguistic idiosyncrasies)" (Twidle 22). This rings true, particularly in the case of the Magona text and more specifically with regard to the English linguistic capabilities of her protagonist, Mandisa, but it also speaks to a broader concern within the non-fictional genre in South Africa regarding the responsibility that literature has when capturing the past.

The interdisciplinary nature of literary non-fiction and its lack of established conventions emphasises the fact that there is a permeable fault line between the imaginative and reportorial. What is undeniable however is the prominence of the genre within the South African literary context and its ability to convey the emotional state of the country to its audience in a way that exceeds what fiction or history is capable of.

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