SOUTH AFRICAN LIFE STORIES UNDER APARTHEID: IMPRISONMENT, EXILE, AND HOMECOMING

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Abstract

Apartheid South Africa was variously imprisoned, exiled, and engaged in the task of homecoming. This troika permeated society as reality, symbol and creative capital; as a political reality each of the experiences distilled the diverse human possibilities and potentials of apartheid. This is a study of the linked political encounters of detention/imprisonment, exile and homecoming, as well as the more general dynamics of oppression and resistance and the culture of violence, through the life story genre. Within the dynamics of struggle the focus of the thesis is on the transformative nature of resistance, in particular auto/biographical counter-discourses, as a means through which opponents of apartheid retained/regained agency and power.

The main aim of the thesis is to articulate and apply a theory of life story praxis in the context of political contestation. The theory has five main components. Firstly, the life story in such contexts is marked by the imperative for narratives to be provisional, partial, tactical, to be managed in accordance with an evolving political purpose. The second component relates to the violent collaboration of state and opponent in identity construction and interpretation. This argument facilitates, as the third theoretical premise, a broad definition of texts that either are auto/biographical or impact upon the context and process of narration. Fourthly, lives are told many times over, identities are repeatedly un/remade, within an arena that is dense with prior versions and/or a discursive void. Finally, I argue that the ownership and meaning of life story narratives are provisional and contested while retaining a dominant narrative and political truth. In the main body of the thesis this theory is applied to the life stories of incarceration, exile, and homecoming.

Contents

ii

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This thesis is dedicated to my father and to Meg: it is for them, in many ways it is about them, and it could not have been done without them.

Introduction

Imprisonment, exile and homecoming were definitive societal experiences in apartheid South Africa. While they operated on numerous levels - as metaphor and symbol, in space and time, both socially and psychologically - the figure of the conventional political prisoner, exile, and returnee, banished behind bars, beyond South Africa's borders, circumventing such bars and borders, provided the source for the various meanings attached to their respective conditions. They were first and foremost concrete, material, political experiences. In the three decades from 1960 to 1990 in the region of 78,000 people were detained without trial; thousands became political prisoners; and perhaps 60,000 went into exile.[1] Nevertheless, beyond this core meaning it is also necessary to consider the metaphorical and symbolic capital attached to such experiences in a society variously imprisoned and in exile.[2]

Central to apartheid's design were the layered spaces of confinement and exclusion, mutually enforcing insides and outsides: lives were lived within an evolving cross-hatch of enclosure/delimitation and estrangement/alienation. The prison extended from pervasive state interference and control in everyday life, to house-arrest, banning, detention and jail, through the occupied and terrorised townships to the bantustans, the borders of South Africa, and beyond: "we take our gaols / On our backs like pilgrims"

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[1] The stature of those affected and the nature of the confrontations and human suffering endured, meant that the significance of these modes of oppression exceeded narrow, stark statistical approximations. On detention see Human Rights Commission 1990a:2, also 1990:410-13. I know of no source which calculates an overall figure for the number of political prisoners incarcerated under apartheid. On exile see Bernstein 1993:10, also 1994:xii. The total number of exiles is hard to gauge. It appears that fewer than 60,000 returned to South Africa in the early 1990s, but some may have returned unrecorded while others who left as exiles have settled abroad.

[2] Many experienced a lifetime of harassment much of which can be framed in terms of confinements and exclusions, imprisonment and exile. Christopher Merrett writes: "In terms of variety of experience, Helen Joseph stands out. By the mid-1980s she had been banned four times [a measure which variously restricted freedom of movement, association and expression], listed , house arrested, jailed four times (detained and convicted), and involved in a Treason Trial lasting five years" (1994:76, [] bracketed comment my own). She was also subjected to raids, hoaxes, obscene, abusive and threatening phone-calls including death threats, and phone tapping; as well as various attacks on her home and attempts on her life (Joseph 1986, especially 237). Numerous others lived similarly persecuted lives (see, for example, W. Mandela 1985, especially 97-111, also 13. Mandela articulated her banishment to Brandfort in the Orange Free State in terms of both imprisonment and exile).

(C. J. Driver, "Letter to Breyten Breytenbach from Hong Kong", 1984:273). Political opponents moved between various 'jails', became their own jailers, had their homes turned into prisons. The contours of exile mapped out a similarly layered, if inverted, terrain. Exile was the prison turned inside out. External, political exile was augmented by various forms of internal exile and displacement including imprisonment and banishment, forced removals and the numerous spatial levels of segregation - from the micro-places of everyday life to the bantustans - political exclusion and psychological alienation. "To live in South Africa", wrote Lewis Nkosi, "is to live in permanent exile from oneself" (1965:123). The exfoliative layering and images of both imprisonment and exile created the pathways, horizons and imaginative capital of everyday life; they were also profoundly embedded in the culture of violence.

> In South Africa, there are prisons and prisons. Prisons for whites, prisons for blacks, prisons for... males... prisons for... females... prisons for common-law offenders, prisons for political prisoners, medium prisons, maximum prisons, ultra-maximum prisons. South Africa has many prisons. The whole of South Africa is a prison... compartmentalised into sub-prisons. Sometimes these prisons exist side by side, fence to fence or wall to wall... [many other prisons are] intangible and invisible... They imprison the whole population. The whites in South Africa live in a variety of prisons... the Maximum Prison of Fear... the Ultra-Maximum Prison of Prejudice... Some whites are prisoners of their conflicting consciences... Others live in the Central Prison of Greed... Blacks are familiar with all prisons in South Africa. The physical and the psychological... [t]hey cannot escape imprisonment for one moment. (Dingake 1987:122-3, also Cook 1974:6-13)

In a similar vein, Breytenbach writes with reference to exile: "One could nearly postulate that *South Africa is the homeland of exile*. There are many kinds of banishment: the physical... but also a spiritual or cultural one... and the political exile..." (1986:77). Notions of imprisonment and exile not only saturated apartheid society but were also irreparably intertwined, joined in the currency of oppression and resistance. Frequently, for the political activist a terrible choice had to be made between the two - "[t]hey exchange one form of living death for another" (Breytenbach, 1986:74) - while many were forced to endure both.[3] As these observations suggest, this thesis characterises imprisonment, exile, and homecoming as interlinked, implying one another as alternative fate or resolution, components within a never completed cycle, which opponents of apartheid inhabited, entered, left, often repeatedly, at the same or different junctures.[4]

The three main waves of opponents entering detention/prison and exile coincided with the major periods of repression/resistance. The first wave occurred after the Sharpeville shootings in 1960, following which a number of measures - a State of Emergency, the declaration of the ANC and PAC as unlawful organisations, a series of detention laws and other legislative initiatives - effectively crushed resistance. The second followed the unrest sparked off by events in Soweto in June 1976, which as a defining moment came to symbolise the resurgence in black political opposition during the 1970s. The third and final mass incarceration/exodus took place during the upsurge of resistance in the mid/late-1980s, a period characterised by a series of States of Emergency from 1985 until 1990. The outer limits of these three periods - 1960 to 1990 - provide the main

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[3] The choice, such as it was, between imprisonment and exile, was rarely an easy one to make. One reason for this was a perception that while imprisonment bestowed a certain honour, exile was a form of desertion and abandonment bordering on betrayal: see Benson 1990:206-15, Bernstein 1989:253,261,267-8,274,296,308, Jordan 1986:165-7, Thuso Mashaba in Bernstein 1994:70, Ntantala 1993:232-3, Resha 1991:181-3,190,237,243, Segal 1963:283,288,303.

[4] Within the South African literature this linkage is most powerfully captured in Hilda Bernstein's extraordinary book of testimonies, *The Rift: The Exile Experience of South Africans* (1994).

time frame for this study as they constitute the core decades of apartheid repression. The analysis also on occasion harks back to the decade after the National Party came to power in 1948 when the repressive apparatus underwent formative phases of construction, and, more frequently, forward beyond 1990. This latter period has been the era both of mass homecoming and of confronting the question of how, within a new dispensation, to deal with a violent and oppressive past. Apartheid's consequences, like its genesis, were not always apparent at the time of its most hegemonic reign.

Within this timeframe this thesis aims to investigate the nature of the phenomena under discussion - detention, interrogation and torture, imprisonment, exile, and homecoming, within the context of apartheid - while acknowledging that they varied over time, from place to place, and therefore, where appropriate, also colouring this nature with change and difference. Perhaps the main reason for this focus is that the nature and evolution of these traumatic experiences provide a gateway to the essence and evolution of the wider political dynamic of apartheid itself. These encounters between the state and its opponents distilled the values and power relations of apartheid, focusing and concentrating dimensions of repression and resistance (pain, fear, violence, courage, death, power) and competing human possibilities and extremes with unique clarity:

> ordering them into an encompassing structure, present[ing] them in such
> a way as to throw into relief a particular view of their essential nature.
> [They put] a construction on them, [make] them, to those historically
> positioned to appreciate the construction, meaningful - visible, tangible,
> graspable - 'real'... (Geertz 1973:443-4)

The study, therefore, addresses itself to encounters which unmasked the values, power relations, dimensions of struggle and diverse human potentialities within apartheid; encounters which were sifted through its essential, evolving, ideological prism.

Race under apartheid functioned as both motivation and explanation. To be black, for example, was to be inherently guilty, to have almost inevitably experienced, and to never be free from the fear of, some form of incarceration. Blacks were imprisoned for what they collectively were rather than for what they had individually done (Franklin 1989:xv). In the words of a young black woman: "' I break the law because I am alive'" (in Gordimer 1989:271). Normal life was criminalised and politicised. Under some security legislation the accused was presumed guilty until proven innocent. The result was a Kafkaesque world in which a person could be "accused of guilt", caught up in pervasive but impenetrable structures - an essential part of the judicial system being that "'you should be condemned not only in innocence but also in ignorance'" - designed to manufacture guilt and process the guilty (Kafka 1953:54,73-4,59). Sam Bhengu in Wessel Ebersohn's novel *Store Up The Anger*, is told by his captors, "'... *you are guilty. Only the guilty come here*'" (1984:145). Such a scenario gestures towards a form of 'objective' genetic guilt, the implications of which - racial guilt becoming inevitable, irretrievable, comprehensive, isolating - have been powerfully illustrated this century by both the Holocaust and apartheid (see Gutierrez 1984:301). It was this sense of primal guilt that constituted apartheid's "unconscious will to genocide" (Gordimer 1989:304).[5]

And to be guilty was inevitably to encounter state violence which was authorised as logical and necessary from within the ideology it served while appearing extreme and disproportionate from without (see Richards 1983:181-3). One method of repression anticipated and invited another. Legally sanctioned abuses led to others which are illegal and extra-legal; the extraordinary became ordinary; the temporary became

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[5] These arguments also applied to some extent to opponents more generally. This statement by Breytenbach is emblematic: "I am guilty... All that's still lacking is the crime to fit the guilt" (1985:38, also 214-15,343). In *The Schoolmaster*, a novel by Rose Moss, the protagonist, David Miller, on trial for bombing the Johannesburg railway station, is described as pre-judged, as already dead in the judgement. While conducting his own defence he states: "'I don't plead anything. I have been found guilty already. What I plead will make no difference'" (1981:203-4,231).

permanent. Society acclimatised itself to rising levels of brutality and brutalisation. Anything and everything became permissible. Ultimately this process enabled the simultaneous, evolving use of the hydra of violence as finely tuned instrument, sifted through the ideological premise of apartheid - for example: blacks were tortured before whites and were generally more likely to be subjected to torture; the vast majority of those who died in detention were young African men - and of violence as pervasive, indiscriminate weapon that eclipsed all thresholds, even those purportedly held sacred by apartheid itself. In a dynamic characteristic of the operation of violent oppression the boundary between the two forms of violence became blurred. The message was clear: if/when circumstances required, no outcome was unthinkable, no-one was immune, there were no sacred spaces or places of sanctuary and refuge (see Franco 1985).

Beneath the veneer of order maintained through violence and absolute power lay another related reality: a country living in perpetual emergency. "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight..." (Benjamin 1973:259). Due to apartheid's legislative iron fist the declaration of a State of Emergency became unnecessary, for example following the Soweto uprisings in 1976, or a natural extension of the norm, as from 1985 to 1990. In perpetual crisis, control and order became locked in a violent embrace with chaos, fed both from and into the fires of rebellion, while communication was reduced to the reciprocal exchange of a seemingly infinite reserve of violence and fear.[6]

In outlining the mechanisms and essence of apartheid oppression this study draws widely on the work of Michel Foucault in relation to incarceration, power/knowledge,

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[6] These remarks by Raymond Williams are pertinent: "The essential point is that violence and disorder are institutions as well as acts... while such institutions are still effective, they can seem, to an extraordinary extent, both settled and innocent. Indeed they constitute, commonly, an order, against which the very protest, of the injured and oppressed, seems the source of disturbance and violence" (1992:66).

truth, discourse/writing, the body and space. Beyond and within these considerations, my analysis of identity politics - specifically the un/remaking of identity in situations of extreme violence - applies aspects of Elaine Scarry's argument, set out in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985). Foucault and Scarry, however, can be criticised for allowing inadequate space for resistance. Both targeted and random violence were as likely to politicise and mobilise as to destroy and deter. A central objective of this thesis is to write, not only the specificities of apartheid oppression, but also the dynamics of struggle, into these theoretical articulations, to extend their range and application, and to explore ways in which opponents of the state defied the imposition of passive victimhood. Allen Feldman's *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (1991) has been of considerable assistance in this task, particularly in relation to incarceration and my discussion of the narration of life stories in the context of political contestation. The ebb and flow of resistance and repression, and their respective cultures, were locked together in a relationship characterised by dependency, a paradoxical complicity, and an unambiguous animosity. While acknowledging the imbalances of power characteristic of these interactions, this study seeks to explore a series of subversive potentials and processes, specifically the mechanisms, techniques, strategies and discourses of resistance.

The core of my argument in relation to the interaction between oppression and resistance is that the architecture of the former contained within it the building blocks of the latter. Weapons in the conflict were double-edged, subject to duplication/ mimicry, distortion, management, contestation, and reversal. The oppressed found innumerable ways to retain/regain agency and power; the meaning of the text of repression was continually rewritten by the subversive punctuation of resistance. That there was resistance in detention, prison and exile is well known, its form, diversity, and inventiveness, less so. I hope to begin to address this lacunae, particularly with regard to

a range of written and discursive strategies of resistance. The potentially transformative nature of resistance in the face of a repressive machinery is forcefully captured by Michael Taussig's notion of the passage through the "space of death". Detention, imprisonment, exile, even homecoming, were such 'spaces'. The 'space of death' is a threshold "that allows for illumination as well as extinction", a space of transformation: "through the experience of coming close to death there may well be a more vivid sense of life". Some pass through and return to tell the tale, thereby providing a "powerful counter-discourse because, like torture itself, it moves us through that space of death where reality is up for grabs" (Taussig 1987:4,7,9). It is with such counter-discourses that this study is chiefly concerned.

The South African literature on detention, political imprisonment and exile is voluminous. The documentary profile includes monitoring and reports from civil liberties organisations, official archives and pronouncements, trial records, literature from the liberation movements, academic studies, auto/biographical accounts, and fiction. This thesis is motivated by the coexistence of the political and creative centrality of these experiences to apartheid and the large, contested, both expanding and contracting resource base of documentation, with the absence of sustained analytical or theoretical treatment of the subject matter.[7] It seeks to provide a corrective to this absence which, while drawing on a range of experience within oppression/resistance and various relevant disciplines, focuses on articulating an analysis of the triptych of incarceration, exile, and homecoming under apartheid through the lens of literature, and

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[7] Analytical/theoretical treatments have come in their most sustained form, in relation to detention/imprisonment, from psychology (Foster et al. 1987, Chabani Manganyi and du Toit eds. 1990) and law, where the work of scholars such as Dennis Davis, John Dugard, and A. S. Mathews has spearheaded oppositional legal critiques. With the exception of J. U. Jacobs - whose work represents a patchwork of interesting critical interventions rather than an attempt to construct a sustained theoretical response - most literary/ cultural criticism has taken the form of isolated articles about individual writers and/or texts. The paucity of analytical response, both generally and specifically in relation to literary/cultural studies, is equally if not more pronounced in relation to exile and predictably reaches it zenith with regard to the recent phenomenon of mass homecoming. A range of studies of a more general nature or about countries other than South Africa have been used in formulating my arguments in relation to both torture, detention and imprisonment (du Bois 1991, Davies 1990, Feldman 1991, Franklin 1989, Harlow 1987, Millett 1995, Peters 1985, Weschler 1990) and exile (Heilbut 1983, Jay 1986, Rieff 1994, Seidel 1986, Ugarte 1989, and various works by Edward Said).

more specifically through the life story. One way into an analysis of the life story is

through autobiography.[8]

Autobiography

> If I'm not for myself, who will be for me?
> If not this way, how? And if not now, when? (Levi 1987a:127)

Autobiography is a notoriously slippery genre; a literary form of revelation and

obfuscation, truth and narrative manipulation, at once transparent and opaque. These

characteristics are made manifest in a tendency to evade attempts to categorise, pigeon-

hole and define, in a 'not quite-ness' - autobiography manages to combine being "not

quite history" and "not quite fiction" (Starfield 1988, Coullie 1991) - which represents a

point of entry into the uniqueness of its insight. J. M. Coetzee has stated: "All the facts

are too many facts. You choose the facts insofar as they fall in with your evolving

purpose"; and furthermore that a distinction should be made between "truth to fact" and

what he calls "the more vexing question of a 'higher' truth" (1991b:117-18: also Kohli

1981:69-72). To gain access to a 'higher' truth, the truth behind the facts, I will argue,

autobiographical accounts need to be read not as exact evidence but according to a

different register of authenticity, within a different economy of validity and legitimacy:

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[8] Although the main focus of my analysis is written autobiographical texts, the genre of the life story is understood to span the written and oral, autobiography and biography, state and subject. There is a greater corpus of critical work on the South African life story and auto/biography, but similar observations apply to those outlined above in relation to the scholarship about incarceration, exile, and homecoming. Perhaps the most notable interventions have taken place with reference to autobiography and confession (J. M. Coetzee) and women's autobiography (Margaret Daymond, Dorothy Driver, among others). For a range of articles on autobiography in southern Africa, see the special issue of *Current Writing* 3(1):1991; for an overview and critique of the use of oral sources/testimony in southern African Studies, see Hofmeyr 1995. More generally, the available literary, theoretical work on auto/biography is immense. Work on identity politics in the context of violence, of an inter-disciplinary nature and from a range of social sciences, has been most useful in constructing my theoretical framework. Scarry 1985 and Feldman 1991 have already been mentioned. Young (1987,1990) has influenced many of the arguments outlined in this introduction relating to the interpretation of autobiographical texts, while ideas articulated by Felman in Felman and Laub (1992) provide an important input to the theoretical development detailed in the last chapter. Also see the reworking of certain of Barthes' more narrowly literary notions, below.

I think... that the testament sort of holds up the body almost. This line,

this body, with its wounds... saying there's something true about what I'm

saying, the evidence of it is my life. So... sitting here, I keep getting these

[...] a comrade brings it to me and says, 'I've just found these things

again, I haven't read them again' - he probably has and is shy about it...

about to be deployed in... he wrote these things down. Now the

truthfulness of them, probably very trite stuff about stars and democracy

decrees and so on... But... what makes this real, is that this is someone

who thinks he may well be about to die, it's the context out of which it's

emerging... authenticity isn't the profundity of thought or whatever... but

it was written in blood so to speak... he's saying: this is it, I was there

once, this is what I wrote. I'm happy to have survived these things, but, I

didn't necessarily expect to. And there's a lot of that... And it's always

like this, usually in ink on school exercise books, and its the same

thoughts... an amazing number of people wrote... born of this kind of

existential type of, maybe this is, I want to say something, I want to leave

a record for, family, movement, whatever. (Cronin interview)

The autobiographer is not a neutral medium through which events write themselves, but

is rather, as both the raw material and the source of its interpretation, an active agent

shaping a narrative in which events are selected, ordered, dramatised, simplified and

passed over in silence. Given such an understanding, the focus shifts away from

autobiographical accounts as documentary realism and towards locating the foundation

of literary testimony's privilege as a source elsewhere: in the insider's intimacy with

events portrayed, the manner in which experience is grasped, interpreted, related,

claimed as one's own, in the truth and power of lived experience. Herein, I argue,

resides the genre's 'higher' truth. Autobiographical truth as a process of self-reclamation,

-discovery and -creation, is *a* truth, a personal statement of felt truth, '*my*' truth, rather

than *the* truth. The protagonist in Coetzee's *Age of Iron*, Elizabeth Curren, writes of: "my truth: how I lived in these times, in this place" (1991a:119, also Moss 1981:225). Truth is constituted by diverse motives and engenders its own effects; it is a choice, a profoundly political choice and self-positioning.[9] Over this somewhat one-dimensional autobiographical landscape, however, lies the shadow of the state.

The Life Story and the State

The vexed relationship between experience and its representation is further complicated in a politically fraught environment. In addition to the literary obstacles to the representation of truth/reality - the absence of an unequivocal empirical connection or verifiable referentiality between text, writer and experience, what Young calls the "displacement of testimony" (1987:411-14) - opponents were caught in a world that was systematically calculated to deceive. Within the official world of apartheid, violence was done to, and through, language and the word. The definition of terms, such as communism and terrorism, were rewritten to the extent that they became a nonsense. The government denied that they sanctioned detention without trial, that torture or custodial deaths due to torture took place, that there were any political trials or political prisoners. Meaning itself was rewritten, enabling what Taussig calls the magical realism of state discourse (1987:4). In a similar vein, Scarry coins the phrase "false motive syndrome" to describe repressive acts which are accompanied by explanations of motive so arbitrary that they seem intended as demonstrations of contempt (1985:57-8). Meaning itself was rewritten. But the promiscuous and fictional truths of the state had a murderous reality: "the line between reality and illusion is effaced. For, to the extent that they believe something to be real and act accordingly, that thing does become real" (Breytenbach 1985:49, also 51).

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[9] On the distinction between textual authenticity and authority as fact see Young 1987:411,416,419-21, also 1990:49-50. On truth, authenticity and authority also see J. M. Coetzee's "Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky" (1992:251-93; and see the interviews with Coetzee contained in the same volume).

The politics of truth raises questions, central to both repression and resistance, about the inter-relationship between the discourses of truth and power. Apartheid South Africa was the site of a disparate array of truths that were mutually dependent and seemingly irreconcilable, and of opposing discursive strategies which sought to establish the nature of apartheid itself. The production of truth was thoroughly imbued with fundamentally unequal relations of power, but nonetheless remained subject to continuous and violent contestation. Truths were revelatory because of tactics of power immanent in their very being. Implicit in truth were the methods for its production, articulation, and dissemination, as well as for the implementation of its effects. Implicit in these methods was a narrative of the past, a political positioning in the present, and a vision of the future. The relationship between power and truth was one of reciprocity.

> Now I believe that the problem... [consists] in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false... The important thing... is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power... Truth is a thing of this world... Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true... There is a battle 'for truth', or at least 'around truth'... [truth being] 'the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true'... (Foucault 1980:118,131-2, and 133)[10]

Power was the ability to determine the truth; that which gained currency as the truth fed

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[10] Also see Foucault 1978:58-73, 1991:27-30, and Shiner 1982.

constellations of power. While in no way denying the reality of oppression and/or resistance, this argument shifts attention in relation to apartheid life stories onto the social and political life of truth (Taussig 1987:xiii-xiv).

As one aspect of the political life of truth, from resistant lives and life stories have come, and will continue to come, the most punishing and far-reaching assaults on the apartheid state's official versions of events and history. Among the reasons for this are that the life story genre is a democratic open house that can be entered through the door of autobiography, with its accessible and flexible requirements in terms of form and content, through the aperture of oral testimony, or, as will be discussed in more detail below, through any number of other entrances. For both cultural and political reasons the elaboration of identity invariably links the individual to the collective, the private to the public, and the personal to the political. Winnie Mandela speaks of being married to the struggle (1985:65), and outlining a construction of identity apparently shared by self and state, claims:

> I have ceased a long time ago to exist as an individual. The ideals, the political
> goals that I stand for, those are the ideals and goals of the people in this
> country... My private self doesn't exist. Whatever they do to me, they do to the
> people in this country. I am and will always be only a political barometer... I am
> of no importance to them as an individual. What I stand for is what they want to
> banish. I couldn't think of a greater honour... Here I am, I am twenty-two
> million... (26,42, also 27,76,83-7,124,149)

The life story variously carves out an unsettled and unsettling space from which the voiceless can speak and be heard. It provides a thread of continuity that weaves meaning through the otherwise fragmented, disparate, chaotic. Yet the stories of detainees/prisoners, exiles, and returnees, constructed at vital thresholds of power,

privilege and pain, often maintain both a sense of fracture and coherence, of fracture within coherence, which is simultaneously a reflection of experience and of its narrative reworking. They are, as a result, an aid to survival and carrying on. Such narratives offer what Hofmeyr calls "transitory forms of power" (1988:4): they allow the narrator to control, relive, transform, (re-)imagine events, and to lay claim to and construct chosen identities, social interactions, and communities. The genre invariably performs an overtly political function because by laying claim to such forms of power, it enters into a conflictual relationship with the state. The aim of the life story, after all, is usually to proclaim a self in the face of its official destruction and denial, to reclaim an identity from that which is officially imposed and sanctioned. Apartheid can be so effectively critiqued by these narratives because they combine generality and commonality in relation to history and politics with particularity and specificity, by exploring the ways in which the components of apartheid were grounded, experienced, became real, and have been remembered in lived lives and communities. Thus, the autobiographical is transformed into a genre that can serve a radical agenda and play a role, through its strategic interventions, in emancipatory politics.

In many ways the kind of subject demanded and projected by the state and those ranged in opposition to it were the same, an example of mimicry and reversal: fixed, one-dimensional, unified selves confronted one another, in a landscape peopled by caricatured heroes and villains, across the abyss of ambiguous and compromised selfhood. But, for opponents of the state in particular, such formulations of identity were both embraced and rejected, complicated in their forced imposition by manipulation and distortion, continually reworked in their self-construction by an evolving political purpose and context. Alongside the censorship, obfuscation, distortion and demonisation of lives by the state, for example, was the necessary secrecy, evasion, and disguise of oppositional self-preservation. The result was events, situations, moral choices and lives

that were "half-told" and "half-known" (Gordimer 1995:35).[11] An inner tension, therefore, ran through the auto/biographical enterprise in which the central impulse towards a kind of identity fundamentalism or essentialism was continually undercut by the imperative for narratives to be provisional, partial, contingent, tactical; to be managed in accordance with an evolving political purpose, in order to take their appointed time and place on the narrative and political battlefield.

The political life of truth, therefore, was a contested arena. Weschler writes: "History... is a battle over who gets to say 'I' (or at the state level, who gets to say 'we' - 'we, the regime[...]' or 'we, the people')" (1990:237). Under apartheid, life stories were most revealingly constructed at the interface between the state and its subjects/opponents, during moments and encounters when both were seeking to inscribe and were contesting lives. In this context, life stories were a paradoxical and unharmonious chorus of state and subject, neither simplistically autobiography nor biography but uncooperatively and violently collaborative. Added to and laced through the more common forms and agents of collaborative self-structuring and -formation - family, society, culture, place - was the violence implied by the politics of apartheid. The lives of its opponents were overtly written by the state, and written in more subtle ways by the structures and institutions of an oppressive society that, consciously and unconsciously, externally framed and/or were internalised within the process of oppositional self-narration. A broad range of texts either were auto/biographical or impacted upon the context and process of narration. Components of this collaborative violence included the primary text of apartheid, its laws, confinements and exclusions, discourses and silencing. It was against and through these texts that counter-discourses were written. Again, while the balance of power was unequal, it was contested. The

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[11] With the decline of apartheid, life stories are being told in a different context of narration, the implications of which will be addressed in the conclusion.

individual both wrote and was variously written, wrote whilst simultaneously being written.[12]

Given the argument that lives were contested through a range of texts, it becomes imperative to define textuality broadly and the life story in particular as taking on various, even innumerable, textual forms: oral and written, those articulated in the spoken/written word and those inscribed in other mediums and practices, public and hidden transcripts (Scott 1990), the purportedly truthful and the manifestly fictional.[13] Part of my theoretical endeavour in this thesis is to expand the textual range of life story representations. For prisoners and exiles, life story texts ranged through the confession/ statement and court record, the tortured body, the walls of confinement, the various blank spaces of exile/exclusion, and the conventional written or oral life story. "Power is based", therefore, "on this proliferation of texts, textual doubles, textual substitutes, and transcriptions" (Feldman 1991:136). In this context of multiple texts and authors, identities were repeatedly un/remade; life stories were told/narrated many times over into a void characterised by the prohibition/illegality of writing, by silence and censorship, and/or juxtaposed with and superimposed on one another, told/narrated many times over into an arena dense with prior contested versions:

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[12] Such process of writing/being written also applied, if to a lesser degree, to the state. On the active, middle, and passive forms of the verb 'to write', see Barthes 1970, and Coetzee 1984.

[13] If, as Young argues, facts/events and the way they are understood, interpreted, represented, recovered, reconstructed, and invented in narrative, are fundamentally interdependent, then the difference between fiction, particularly realist fiction, and autobiographical testimony - and indeed oral and written testimony - becomes both complex and subtle. As constructed narrative forms they raise many of the same questions: What kinds of understanding - explaining presuppositions, interpretative matrices, paradigms - are brought to experiences/events and, therefore, shape representations and memory? What consequences and actions are predicated on these understandings? How is a sense of authenticity and authority generated within the narrative? A variety of narrative/textual forms are used in this study on the understanding that they represent forms, not so much of evidence, as of partial and complementary knowledge in relation to lived lives. These forms are interrogated as much for the manner and context of their construction as for the resonance of their knowledges (see Young 1987,1990: especially 1987:420. On the relationship between fiction/the imagination and reality, characterisation and self/writer/real lives, see Gordimer's essay, "Adam's Rib: Fictions and Realities" (1995:1-19)). Important contributions to the debates briefly outlined above also include Samuel and Thompson eds. 1990, and the work of Hayden White: see 1973,1978.

The self is always the artefact of prior received and newly constructed

narratives... In a political culture the self that narrates speaks from a

position of having been narrated and edited by others - by political

institutions, by concepts of historical causality, and possibly by

violence... as a political subject. The narrator writes himself into [a]...

history because the narrator has already been written and subjected to

powerful inscriptions. (Feldman 1991:13)

Such life stories took their place within an intertextual network in which the text was

underwritten and permeated by other texts, with which it circulated, interacted and

resonated in the construction of meaning. In such a network, the life story could be

liberated from its author, made the subject of contestation in the space between the state

and its subjects. Texts, including auto/biographical texts, were torn from their original

referent, 'owned' and controlled by no single author(ity) and, therefore, became double-

edged weapons which could be turned against their author or original intention/

meaning, un/remade in the service of a variety of political purposes. While such

relational meaning and identity is not fixed but rather unstable and multiple, neither is it

completely fluid and arbitrary. The complete erasure of the author as a source of textual

authority, intentionality, and meaning duplicates and repeats the denial and destruction

of the self inherent in oppression. The resistant and resisting self narrates against the

grain of imposed anonymity and voicelessness. Depending on the context, author, text

and meaning can be firmly anchored together or cast/wrenched adrift from one another;

while texts have no single or correct meaning or interpretation, they retain a dominant

intention, purpose and truth.[14] Meaning, the axis of truth and power, within any text, in

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[14] In a construction useful to this analysis Roman Jakobson writes in his essay entitled "The Dominant": "The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components... guarantees the integrity of the structure", and of "a point of view which combines an awareness of the multiple functions of a poetic work with a comprehension of its integrity, that is to say, that function which unites and determines the poetic work" (1987:41,43).

short, can be strategically appropriated, manipulated, assigned and contested by particular parties in various contexts, but retain a dominant trajectory.[15]

In summary, what follows attempts to provide a study of the culture of violence, of oppression and resistance, in apartheid South Africa through the medium of the life story and, more precisely, an assessment of the nature of auto/biographical counter-discourses from within the linked encounters of incarceration, exile and homecoming. A related endeavour is that which seeks to articulate a theory of life story praxis, its construction, form, content and role, in the context of violent political contestation, the main components of which are the intrinsic politicisation of the life story enterprise, the violently collaborative nature of identity construction and interpretation, a broad definition of auto/biographical textuality, the repetitive nature of narration into an arena at once discursively full and empty, and the ownership/meaning of the text/self as provisional and contested while retaining a dominant narrative and political truth. Finally, through the analysis of oppression/resistance and auto/biography under apartheid I hope the thesis and its theoretical undertakings will have wider applications and resonances with regard, respectively, to the political condition and literary form.

The chapters in Section 1 examine two inter-related narratives of detention and imprisonment, the written and the somatic. Chapter 1 explores the ways in which detainees/prisoners lives were variously written, by the state (in interrogation, political trials, and so on) and by the incarcerated themselves (most comprehensively in autobiographical accounts), as competing powers of writing contested a given life. Although writing towards divergent archives of the self, life story texts were scarred by the violence of their collaborative construction. The second part of the chapter examines the implications of oppositional autobiographical narratives for relations of

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[15] The above paragraph reworks the writings of Roland Barthes on the death of the author and inter-textuality. See, for example, Barthes 1980,1981,1988.

truth and power. Parallel to the un/remaking of the self by oppression and resistance through the written word, was the un/remaking taking place on the surfaces and depths of the body. The written word and the body were weapons in the incarcerative encounter, the primary textual representations/interpretations of interrogation, torture and incarceration more generally. Chapter 2 traces the passage of the body as self/world through the incarcerative 'space of death' , and the manner in which it becomes a violently collaborative text at the interface between opposing powers of writing, a textual representation of the process of torture and custodial death. The resistant capacity of the body is related to its collaboration with the senses and the layered spaces of incarceration. The chapter continues by plotting the passage of the dead body as it links the torture chamber and the court room at the inquest, and through its inscription and interpretation establishes their essential similarity and difference, before moving on to a discussion of the different ways in which the body in pain/death is represented and interpreted within fictional, as opposed to legal, discourses. It concludes by stressing the importance of the body as a sanctuary of memory.

Section 2 focuses on exile and homecoming. Chapter 3 picks up the theme of the 'space of death' from the previous chapter to examine exile as a similar 'space' in which death was physical, social, spiritual, creative. As with imprisonment, this space harboured the potential for a transformative, resurrective counter-discourse. This leads into a theoretical discussion of exile in relation to postcolonialism, globalisation, and nationalism. Two case studies then contextualise these various themes: the first in relation to the place of Sophiatown and in the person of Bloke Modisane, and, the second, in a move from an individual to an organisational experience of exile, examining the ANC in the Frontline States.

Chapter 4 outlines the potentials and ambiguities of the creative process, and writing in particular, as an ongoing agent of survival and transformation in exile. Exile, with its

precariously balanced potential for creative life and death, in which violent collaboration again marked lives and their telling, can encompass the unfolding of a repetitive, autobiographical creative process. The two writers discussed, Breyten Breytenbach and Es'kia Mphahlele, have been both inspired and maimed by the condition. The (non-)resolution of return, when the sentence of exile was effectively over, crystallised the permanence of their exile as complete, natural, a universal condition, but also effected its transformation, in a way that recast the past and present, into the fold of retrospective migrancy. This simultaneous and paradoxical metamorphosis represents an un/remaking of identity, imagination and creative portfolio. The blurring of definition, direction and purpose inherent in long-term exile moves those affected, often very reluctantly, into the domain of positions associated with the migrant. As the implications of this blurring are the result of an impositional attrition they fail to have the more positive repurcussions that migrants, émigrés, and expatriates enjoy, having embraced these positions from the start of their journey.

Chapter 5 looks at some of these more positive repercussions in the life and work of one such expatriate writer, Dan Jacobson. Less committed to and bound by politics and place, the expatriate is caught between worlds, confronted with crossing over between them, within a multiple exposure that implies a state of perpetual negotiation and translation. While the exile projects the insights of exile back onto a South African context, the reverse is also possible: South Africa and the understanding and perceptions gained there projected onto a variously defined elsewhere. Jacobson has in a sense been two writers, a South African writer and then a writer living and writing about elsewhere. But he remains a writer who speaks to and of South Africa; it being the place through which the world makes itself known and that continues to influence the worlds made available to him. For such a writer the agents of collaboration are both violent and non-violent, of the state and society. The chapter concludes with Jacobson's

return to South Africa as a 'territory of time' through autobiography and as a travel writer.

The chapters on exile and expatriation resonate with the many homes and homecomings associated with the South African diaspora. Chapter 6 discusses the complexities and ambiguities of home/coming, the rupture of return as a culminating act of state-induced collaborative violence, and the ongoing dialogue between home and exile.

Section 3 consists of a single chapter, chapter 7, which examines the role of the witness within the life story genre and the symbolic importance of imprisonment and exile. Apartheid established and depended upon the absence of a community of witnessing, and remains as a result a contested event, beyond unanimous collaboration. As a result, to (bear) witness became a potentially violently collaborative contest over identity and meaning, and one that extended beyond state and opponent to condition interactions between subjects and within society. Testimony in such a context needs to be both seen and seen through. This chapter analyses Rian Malan's *My Traitor's Heart* and the collaborative narrative *Poppie* by Elsa Joubert and Poppie Nongena as lives lived and told on different sides of the apartheid crime, within history as crime, as the space of the annihilation of, respectively, the 'other' and the self. While they were neither prisoners nor exiles in the conventional sense, they were so at a symbolic level in that confinement/proximity and estrangement/distance structured ways of seeing and being. When superimposed, one on the other, such lives generate the power of 'communities of testimonial incommensurates' and perhaps provide one answer to the question of how to reclaim and preserve a past for the future.

The conclusion summarises and concludes the key arguments of the thesis and culminates in an analysis of the role of life stories in the context of South Africa's political transition.

SECTION 1 - INCARCERATION

Chapter 1: Detention, Imprisonment and the Power of Writing

i) The Worlds of Detention and Imprisonment

> "*I* am the regulations'" (First 1965:84)

Indefinite detention without trial is a starkly expressive encounter in the lexicon of oppression.[1] As a repressive mechanism it evolved in South Africa - through the familiar mantra of emergency legislation, the 90-day law of 1963, the 180-day law of 1965, the Terrorism Act of 1967, and the Internal Security Act of 1982 - to create a particular kind of world. The co-ordinates of this world included interrogation, torture and, perhaps the most destructive component of all, solitary confinement. During a period which spanned three decades, a person could be abstracted into a closed lawless world - devoid of judicial control, independent access or social contact - within which the state could do what it liked, in the manner in which it liked, for as long as it liked. "I believed they might keep me forever" (Serote in Bernstein 1994:331). In 1964, a member of the Security Branch told Ruth First, quite simply: "*I* am the regulations'". Over a decade later, as this exchange from the Stephen Biko inquest illustrates, nothing had changed:

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[1] In the following argument the discussion of detention without trial relates primarily to detention for the purpose of interrogation (detainees were also held as a preventive measure, as potential witnesses, and due to a variety of other, unofficial, reasons) and to detainees held by the state. Clearly both the circumstances of detention and the manner in which it was used varied, over time, in relation to specific legislation, and so on. It remains possible, however, to distil the essence of the experience, particularly through its most brutal manifestation. While it was the South African state which was responsible for the vast majority of human rights violations in this and all other arenas during the apartheid era, abuses were also committed by the liberation movements. Most of the ANC's abuses took place within its camps in southern Africa. Allegations made in this regard, and responses to them, can be traced in the following sources: Amnesty International 1992, Ellis 1994, Ellis and Sechaba 1992:124-40, and a number of articles since 1990 in the journal *Searchlight South Africa*. The ANC itself established four commissions of inquiry - the Stuart, Jobodwana, Skweyiya and Motsuenyane Commissions - to investigate allegations of human rights abuses made against the organisation.

Mr. Kentridge [lead counsel for the Biko family]: Where do you get your authority from? Show me a piece of paper that gives you the right to keep a man in chains - or are you people above the law?

Colonel Goosen [Chief of the Security Police in the Eastern Cape]: We have full authority. It is left to my sound discretion.

Mr Kentridge: Under what statutory authority?

Colonel Goosen: We don't work under statutory authority.

Mr Kentridge: You don't work under statutory authority? Thanks very much, Colonel, that's what we have always suspected. (Woods 1979:281)

The detainee was totally at the mercy of those whose job it was to have no mercy (Amnesty International 1984:18). Some languished in detention for years. Torture was widespread, systematic and institutionalised. At least 73 political detainees died in custody.[2] Agents of the state could exercise absolute power with impunity and the shared knowledge of this fact was their most powerful weapon.

Once/If brought to trial and convicted, detainees became political prisoners, and experienced a related, but different, kind of violence in a related, but different, kind of world. Political prisoners were denied privileges for all or part of the apartheid era that were granted to other prisoners as a matter of course: for example, suffering from poor

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[2] Human Rights Commission 1990a:2. The pervasiveness of torture became clear due to allegations from a variety of sources: former detainees, defendants and state witnesses in political trials, and so on. On this pervasiveness, see Amnesty International 1978, Bernstein 1972, Detainees' Parents Support Committee 1982, Foster et al. 1987, United Nations 1973; also see Foster and Skinner 1990:218-23.

classification and slow advancement - prisoners were classified in one of four groups, D

to A, generally moving towards A over time, thereby gaining additional privileges -

enjoying no remission of sentence or parole, and being denied access to news.[3] For

black prisoners these conditions were made even worse by institutionalised racial

discrimination. Makhoere states: "If you want to find out what racial discrimination is,

just go to any South African prison" (1988:23). As for the regulations governing the

administration of prison life, prisoners were denied access to, knowledge of, and

security within such regulations, which were interpreted and applied in as stringent and

arbitrary a manner as possible:

> After we applied for and secured a copy of the prison regulations to see
>
> what we were entitled to know and have, he [Colonel Gericke] said 'I can
>
> break you by applying the regulations if I want to'. It was a declaration of
>
> intent (if not war) and in response we were determined to use those
>
> regulations to break as much of the system as possible. (Hirson
>
> 1995:327, also 340)

> Any rule can become an instrument that can be turned against you. And that was
>
> a constant fight in prison. Firstly, to get to know what the rules are. Secondly, to
>
> get some consistent application of the rules, and thirdly to get the application of

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[3]
    The classification system was used as a weapon: upgrading and downgrading, and the granting, withholding and withdrawal of privileges more generally, were used to reward and punish behaviour, as threat and sanction. Privileges were double edged (Alexander in Alexander et al. 1992:301-2); there was no privilege without pain (N. Mandela 1995:593). Classification determined whether a prisoner could study, the number of letters sent and received, the number and length of visits, and, in later years, whether these could be contact visits or not, and the ability to buy food and newspapers. Political prisoners challenged/rejected the classification system arguing that it was manipulative and insulting, and that they should all enjoy the same privileges. Classification was systematically used to demoralise and penalise; it was divisive, fostered tension, and through both general and selective liberalisation created problems for group/organisational unity thereby undermining resistance; and, it created a form of dependence that could be turned against the prisoners. On occasion there was conflict between generations and organisations over approaches to classification. Long terms prisoners, whose struggles to improve conditions provided the material benefits that helped people survive imprisonment, and who creatively/imaginatively used improvements/privileges to continue resistance, had the most to lose by jeopardising these hard won advances and by the prospect of having to start again from scratch within a prison term that was lengthy or had no foreseeable end (see Buntman 1996:153-7).

the rules with people using their discretion... They can use so many petty little things to get at you. You see, the rules and regulations... cover every aspect of your life, and then they get interpreted viciously. (Hogan in Schreiner ed. 1992:34-5)

The outcome was entirely predictable. The prison official became "a petty tyrant... [whose] tyranny was absolute and inescapable" (Lewin 1976:82, also 80,84), while the implication of giving the prison authorities "untrammelled discretion" was administration by institutionalised "bureaucratic tyranny" (van Zyl Smit 1987,1988). The severity of conditions was compounded by the arbitrary and vindictive manner of their enforcement.[4]

In important respects, therefore, detention and imprisonment were inter-connected worlds, characterised by absolute state power and lawlessness. And yet strategies of resistance were an integral component of this scenario. The detainee, for example, struggled for footholds of resistance from within an environment characterised by their calculated absence: by a "permanent impermanence" (Ntuli 1980:34), by isolation, vulnerability and a lack of control/knowledge, by uncertainty, disorientation, dependency and apprehension. The encounters between torturer and detainee, and to a lesser extent between warder and prisoner, were among those which distilled the essence of apartheid and its adversaries with unique clarity:

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[4] Control by the courts over the exercise of discretion by the prison authorities was limited and ineffectual. The courts gave various very clear signals with reference to the `rights' of detainees and prisoners: they generally refrained from serious criticism of legislation designed to limit the 'rights' of detainees and prisoners; they consistently interpreted legislation restrictively, maintaining an entitlement to a narrow range of `necessities' or 'basic rights' rather than `privileges' or 'comforts'; and they signalled to the prison authorities that they had a very wide area of discretion with reference to the latter in which the courts would not readily intervene to protect prisoners against what amounted effectively to arbitrary rule.

it is an experience of huge intensity... it covers all the emotions...

everything is reflected in it... it was... devastating... Because you're

stripped to nothing, you're exposed to yourself in a way that doesn't

happen in any other situation. So that it does become a standard and you

always go back to it... At the same time it was an experience that you

can't recreate... the whole situation is totally artificial... And as soon as

you're out of it, it's gone... [an] experience which was like none other...

something you can never get away from. (Lewin interview)[5]

The worlds of incarceration, and particularly the dark rooms of interrogation, were a crucible of repression and resistance. What was the nature of these worlds? What was their truth and power?

State Truth and the Power of Writing

> ... police files are our only claim to immortality. (Kundera 1992:87)

The shadow of torture hangs over the interrogational encounter. The structure of torture, as described by Elaine Scarry (1985), has essentially three elements, the first of which is the destruction and obliteration of the detainee's world, self and voice/language through the infliction of pain. "Prison is the crucible of unmaking" (Breytenbach 1996:161). The overwhelming nature of this destruction helps explain Emma Mashinini forgetting the name of her youngest daughter ("this pain... was the greatest I have ever had": 1989:86, also 89-90) and the failure of Molefe Pheto to recognise his own daughter ("I realized the toll their interrogation had taken on me, to the point where I disowned my

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[5] Also Bam in Alexander et al. 1992:297, Lelyveld 1987:198.

own daughter... I wept late into the night that day": 1985:192). An altogether different world is imposed in the place of all that has been lost: "they had not only broken me, they had changed me. They had taken me from my world, cut me off from anything that could prop me up as part of my world, and made me a part of their world" (Lewin 1976:31).

In the second stage of torture, pain and the dissolution of world are made visible and objectified, most obviously through the making of a confession. It cannot be seen as a betrayal because the things that could be betrayed - self, friends, family, country, cause - have ceased to exist. The detainee is deprived of all control over, and therefore all responsibility for his/her world and words:

> World, self and voice are lost, or nearly lost, through the intense pain of torture and not through the confession as is wrongly suggested by its connotations of betrayal... To assent to words that through the thick agony of the body can be only dimly heard, or to reach aimlessly for the name of a person or a place... is a way of saying, yes, all is almost gone now... even this voice, the sounds I am making, no longer form my words but the words of another. (Scarry 1985:35)

The regime doubles its voice by making the detainee's voice its own; the detainee echoes the brutalised and brutalising voice of the interrogator; the detainee's life is displaced by the words of another as the state narrates itself through his/her pain. Following assault, Steve Biko suffered from a form of brain damage known as echolalia: the meaningless repetition of speech. "'Once they take you there, you'll have to prepare many yeses'" (in Lelyveld 1987:196, also 205-6). Torture, therefore, is used to continuously reproduce the state's ideology and vision of reality through its wounded and broken subjects as the detainee is written by/through the layered violence of

repression. The detainee's self, world and voice/language, mind and meaning, are de/reconstructed, un/remade, in the image of the state (see Folena 1989:228-9).[6] Truth is mediated, even colonised, by pain - "Pain is truth; all else is subject to doubt" (Coetzee 1982:5) - and becomes itself the subject of torture. What, in this context, in its anticipation, ongoing present and recording/remembrance, is the truth?

It was not that I knew any secrets, but what if I were broken to the point of telling lies which could incriminate the innocent? (Benson 1990:207)[7]

Always they wanted the truth, when I had no more truth to tell. I don't think they ever really understood that in fact there was nothing to give away. But they always tried to find it, this nothing. (Mashinini 1989:75, also see 76-7,81)

'No, that is the truth I have'... But I told them I've already told you the truth, so I don't know which truth now do you want... 'If the truth is what I know, then I will tell you.' (Dilimeni in Bernstein 1994:73-4)

6
    J. U. Jacobs, has also argued that the interrogator's truth is a pre-established fiction into which the mind of the interrogator is obsessively locked. What is sought is verification, confirmation, and ultimately compliance (1991). As one interrogator told a detainee: "'We've got you and today we shall beat all the politics out of your head because you don't want to listen.'" (Abel 1995:226). And taken a step further: "'We shall squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves'" O'Brien tells Winston Smith in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. "'Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing'" (1983:220,230). On the relationship between torture and the voice/narration, also see Slaughter 1997.

7
    Many activists worried about their ability to protect people and information, about losing control. Grace Cele says of her violent interrogation, "I didn't know what I was capable of saying or doing" (in Bernstein 1994:203). In her novel, *Death is Part of the Process*, Bernstein writes in relation to the character Indres, "He is afraid now not of their acts of violence, but of his own thoughts over which he no longer has control, the names and deeds floating through his head. He feels that if they only stand close enough to him, and keep quiet, then they will hear. He shuts his mouth and holds his teeth together in case words spill out" (1986:220); and: "Someone else has been talking from his mouth" (222, also 221,227-8,309).

Eventually... I told them that they could advance any reason and I would accept it. I would write the statement corroborating whatever they suggested, and I would sign it under oath. (Pheto 1985:132, also see 133-5)

Within this regime of truth the interrogator is "the master of truth" (Foucault 1978:67, also see Pfohl and Gordon 1988). The interrogator knows: knows everything and knows nothing, knows the detainee who knows nothing about them, knows more about the detainee than the detainee knows about him/herself. What he does not know he can find out or invent. The interrogator pretends to know more and/or less than he actually does, is clever and/or stupid, the good guy and/or the bad guy. Distortion and lies are the tools of his trade. The detainee is pursued relentlessly, bombarded with questions, left with no place of sanctuary, "no opportunity to withdraw, to reorganise, to reflect" (Schlapobersky in Bernstein 1994:84).

Q: If a detainee... on being interrogated... says 'I am not under any circumstances prepared to give you any information whatsoever' do you leave him alone or do you take further steps?

A: Well, he's got to be asked again.

Q: And again?

A: Yes.

Q: And again?

A: Yes.

Q: And again?

A: Yes

Q: And again?

A: Yes.

...

Q: Well then supposing you had a case of a suspect who was

detained because you, the police genuinely believed that he could give

certain information, and if in fact your belief was wrong and this man

couldn't give you information, would you keep on questioning him over

and over again?

A: I would question him, yes.

Q: You would, over and over again?

A: Yes.

Q: That would be a dreadful thing to happen to a man wouldn't it, if in fact

you were wrong?

A: Yes.

Q: It would be. And all that that man would be able to see as far as his future

is concerned would be an endless vista of imprisonment coupled with

repeated questioning?

A: Yes.

(extract from the inquest proceedings into the death in custody of the detainee, L. S.

Ngudle: Riekert 1985:121)

The detainee is left waiting, to anticipate and fear in silence, with nothing but themselves

to fight against. A question is asked but no chance is given to reply or no interest is

shown in the answer; no questions are even asked; answers are provided, dictated,

rehearsed. Deliberate contradictions, reversals of reality and roles, create an

atmosphere of disorientation, distortion and delusion/illusion, in which the detainee can

confess things into happening (Breytenbach 1985:118) and can confess to almost

anything: "'High Treason' / 'skinny dipping' / 'eating my great-aunt' / 'desecrating the

sabbath' / 'instigating the twentieth century,' / or whatever State Security requires that

week" (Gottschalk, "Petition to my Interrogators", in Oliphant ed. 1992:456-7). The

detainee is afraid and intimidated, susceptible to suggestion, confused, and often

compliant, on some occasions to such a degree that s/he is convinced of the veracity of his/her own false, fabricated confession (see West 1985, also Foster et al. 1987:43,147).[8]

Within the process of making a confession the detainee becomes a participant in the production of state truth, by articulating it in an alien and alienating language and narrative form and by providing a signature for its outcome (Foucault 1991:37-40,43-4,65-9, Weschler 1990:15). The making of a confession is part of the broader structure of torture whereby the detainee becomes complicit in his/her own un/re-making, complicit in torturing themselves (Mashinini 1989:87,90). A paradoxical identification and dependence, for example, is constructed and manipulated so that the detainee becomes eager to talk and to please. Breytenbach writes: "it becomes possible for one ultimately to be like a rabbit assisting wide-eyed and without kicking at one's own eating" (1985:51, also 62). The detainee either becomes complicit in the production of state truth, or, if s/he refuses to co-operate, complicit in his/her own pain. Breytenbach captures the process of torture and interrogation from the perspective of the interrogator:

> You are programmed. I cleanse you. I break you in. I break you down to
> the pure outcome of spontaneous confession and give-away and self-
> oblivion... You must just say. Say that which I must hear. Tell that which
> I know... You are my book. I create your past. Your future is in my
> hands. I leaf through all the painfully constituted files on your comings
> and your goings, the records of your thinking and the organigramme of

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[8] In the 1960s, in conjunction with the construction of a legislative stockade - "It was in the sixties, however, that the flow of enactments became a flood, and by the end of the decade the State security apparatus, by now a frightening engine of misery and destruction, had been fully constructed" (Mathews 1985:200) - the state security and intelligence system was subjected to a profound and sinister reorganisation. The Security Branch/Police changed from being an amateurish operation in the 1950s to one which was both professional and ruthless (Merrett 1994:38-9,58, Nicol 1991:329-34, J. Slovo 1996:85-6,94,121,143, Wolpe 1994:118,191).

your associations... I know already. I always know. But I must *prove*.

You are the confirmation. You prove. You are of my making. I am the

controller. I slit open, and then I sculpt... Write for me your cacography...

I am your *reality*... Describe your relationships to me. Tell me about

what is veiled. Admit even to that which you don't know. Be glorious!...

Why dost thou not love me? (57-9, also 25)

It is this process that is objectified in the confession. Power and powerlessness, and

their relationship with truth, take on a written textual dimension. Often the detainee

writes and rewrites a story which carves a groove in their minds (Sepamla 1986:60);

until they get it 'right'. Breytenbach states, "they do not ask you any questions; they

simply say, 'Write'; and I've written volumes, volumes. My life is eaten up by words.

Words have replaced my life" (1985:28). The words of the state replace the life of the

detainee. The written word is the truth and as such it wields power. The confession -

secured by violence and against the detainee's will and therefore an inherently

ambiguous form of truth - is the primary way in which the effects of state truth and

power are (re)produced within interrogation. Within the state archive, the status of the

confession is that of its first and most damaging document, the general standard

governing the production of official truth which, as such, conditions all that follows.[9]

What Foucault calls the "power of writing" plays an essential part in the mechanisms of

discipline.

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[9] In South African law a statement/confession could only be admitted as evidence in court if it had been repeated before a magistrate or justice of the peace (often a senior police officer) and reduced to writing. A written record of what the detainee had said during interrogation, which had not been formalised in the above-mentioned fashion, could not be produced as evidence in court. Also in relation to admissibility: whereas prior to 1977, the prosecution had to prove that a confession had been freely and voluntarily made, with the enactment of the Criminal Procedure Act (1977) the presumption changed so that the confession was assumed to be freely and voluntarily made unless the accused could prove, on a balance of probabilities, otherwise.

This turning of real lives into writing is no longer a procedure of

heroization; it functions as a procedure of objectification and subjection.

The carefully collated life of mental patients or delinquents belongs, as

did the chronicle of kings or the adventures of the great popular bandits,

to a certain political function of writing; but in a quite different

technique of power. (Foucault 1991:192, also see Harlow 1987:124-33)

Individuals are situated "in a network of writing", "in a whole mass of documents that

capture and fix them".[10] The documentation of this state biography/profile or archive

represents an ongoing de/re-construction of the oppositional self as subject and victim;

the police file is theatrically displayed and flaunted within interrogation as an exhibit of

state knowledge and power: immortality in the form of a police file. Pheto describes his

police file quite simply, "[m]y life history" (1985:23), while Sachs writes:

I too have a dream, that there will one day be a world without police

files... My biography is there, little details and big events that I have long

forgotten, recorded in the files of at least five countries, probably nearer

twenty. One day I look forward to examining the biggest one of all, that

of SACHS, ALBERT LOUIS (aka ALBIE) at Security Headquarters in

Pretoria. This is the Book that records implacably all the events of my

life... (1991:58-9)

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[10] This archive is given a more active definition by Matsuda, as what he calls "the memory of the state": "a structure of investigation, a central organization of dossiers and files, descriptions and clues and correlations, acting as a system of storage and retrieval – transforming 'identity' into 'identification'... Yet this accumulation of clues, documents and pieces of information did not only wait passively for examination... The information was exploited, circulated, sent by rail and transmitted by telegraph. Ultimately it formed part of a network of technologies and judicial mandates which moved with the vagabonds it hoped to track down. The 'memory' of the institution did more than remember – it acted" (1994:74).

Ultimately, Scarry goes on to argue, the issue at stake is power. She asserts that the purpose of torture/interrogation is not to elicit information ("what masquerades as the motive for torture is a fiction" (1985:28)), but visibly to deconstruct the detainee's voice, and that to see the question as motive is to provide the torturer with justification, while to see the answer as betrayal makes the detainee rather than the torturer, the detainee's voice rather than the pain, the cause of this loss of self and world (and of the process of rewriting). Such misplaced absolution and conferring of responsibility "turn the moral reality of torture upside down" (35). Within the state's 'regime of truth', however, pain is both objectified as confession, and falsified as the confession is read as betrayal rather than a cry for help, thereby ensuring that the pain is neither acknowledged nor addressed. Instead real human pain is converted into the regime's fiction of power.

In the final stage of Scarry's structure of torture the objectified attributes of pain are translated into the insignia of power. What is experienced by one as a continual contraction, of self, world and voice, is for the other a continual expansion. One person's pain becomes another person's power through "the obsessive mediation of agency" (45). Everything is absorbed into the realm of weaponry, which can refer equally to pain and/or power, from the torturer's fists and questions, the prisoner's family, mind, body and voice, to the truth and the written word. The weapon as a physical fact inflicts pain. As a perceptual fact, the weapon makes pain visible and enables some of pain's attributes to be attached to the regime. The prisoner's pain is perverted into fraudulent assertions of power, objectified pain is denied as pain and read as power: thus it is not the pain but the regime which becomes incontestably real and true, not the pain but the regime that is able to eclipse all else, not the pain but the regime that is able to dissolve the world. It is the truth and power of the state that triumphs.

The State Witness

The destruction of self and world and their reformation in the image of the state, the complicity and incorporation into another world, was most definitive and irreparable for those who became state witnesses and testified in court against their former friends and colleagues. First writes: "Van Zyl once said to me: 'You have something to sell. Sell it and get yourself out of here.' Sell others and save yourself..." (1965:131). However, there was a price to pay for this transaction - "After all the trauma, to go back to the community and be rejected again. It means you are killing this person twice over" (Mashinini 1989:94) - a price for which there was no ready currency:

> you could forgive, you had to forgive, anyone who simply told the police
> what he knew - what seemed unforgivable was that, though you broke
> because you were alone, you were prepared, when you came back to a
> more normal world, still to practice your solitude to the extent of
> betraying your friends so that you could save yourself... the step that
> made you a traitor was not that which told the police what they probably
> already knew, but that which turned you into a state witness when you
> were prepared to barter your friends for your freedom. (Driver
> 1971:115)"

11
  In most autobiographical prison writing the story of the state witnesses ends at the trial and no indication is given about their subsequent lives. One of the most fascinating aspects of Driver's novel, *Elegy for a Revolutionary* (1971), is that it looks at the character James Jeremy and the way in which he is perceived by himself and others after appearing as a state witness. Also see S. Jacobs' "Diary of an Exile" (1986), which tells the story of a lawyer whose past - notably his role as a state witness against someone who subsequently dies in custody - haunts and destabilises him in exile, and Gordimer's *The Late Bourgeois World* with regards to the character Max Van Den Sandt who commits suicide after turning state witness (1982: especially 19,55, also 79-80).

We had been friends... and we had been through things together which
made for very close friendship and comradeship. That was over, done,
and nothing could ever redeem the change. I sat in the dock and went off
to be sentenced. They stood in the witness box and bought themselves a
sort of freedom. Now - after my seven years inside - I am free and I am
sure I have had the better part of it. I sat in the dock where there was
plenty of room, lots more room in the dock for others with us four
accused. They stood alone, in the box, where there was room only for
one, like in a coffin. (Lewin 1976:72-3)[12]

A few state witnesses were willing accomplices - "drowning men who clutch the hair of
their best friends, pressing them down into suffocating seas of jail and death to save
themselves" (Bernstein 1989:145) - who broke quickly, manufactured their evidence to
suit the requirements of the state, to protect themselves at the expense of others, and
became travelling witnesses testifying at numerous political trials.[13] To become such a
witness was to acquiesce to and choose the destruction of a self and world after the pain
had been removed and some level of control regained. It was to take on the enemy's
voice and world as your own, to live the apartheid lie. It was to voluntarily extend
complicity to participation in the official rewriting of others and thereby become
irreparably rewritten oneself. It was the most complete restructuring of self in the image

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[12]
    One of state witnesses who testified against Lewin, and others, was John Lloyd,
'Ernest' in Lewin's prison narrative, who, as the parliamentary candidate for the Labour
Party in Exeter, England, was the subject of considerable controversy in relation to his
South African past over thirty years after these events. Lewin was quoted as saying, "'I
was totally betrayed. There can be no reconciliation, no question of redemption, no
question of forgiveness'". The same newspaper carries the personal testimony of Lloyd
himself ("'I do not condone terrorism'", *Independent on Sunday*, 29 October 1995). After
refusing to stand down, Lloyd was sacked as the Labour Party's parliamentary candidate
for Exeter.

[13]
    See Bookholane in Russell 1991:60, Dingake 1987:118,132, Joseph 1986:159-60,162,
Lewin 1976:72.

of the state. Who was the real person, the activist or the state witness? What did they genuinely believe?[14]

Both the written confession and the evidence of the state witness, as an integral part of a wider political function of rewriting, fed into the political trial. The political trial became a part of the South African landscape as the courts were enlisted to serve political goals. It was in the court room, where the written word - as the statements/ confessions of detainees and state witnesses, as the law, as judicial procedure and judgement: as the collaborative product of institutional practices of writing - was most conspicuously a lie, that it was most overtly read as and became the truth; where individual pain was most obviously and publicly converted, on the basis of the multiple rewritings of the state, into state power.[15] Ashforth asserts that "the real seat of power is the bureau, the locus of writing" (1990:5). Techniques for the production of state truth

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14
Those who were 'turned' under interrogation not only became state witnesses but were also recruited to work for the security establishment against their former comrades, as spies, agents and double agents, and, in later years, as members of death/hit squads. All, however, were in their different ways remade in the image of the state.

It is important to note that there were different kinds of state witnesses. Some were unquestionably more victim than villain. Farm workers and domestic staff from Lilliesleaf farm, for example, were used as state witnesses in the Rivonia trial in 1963-4 involving the core of Umkhonto we Sizwe's (MK's) leadership. Although not linked to any oppositional political activity they were subjected to lengthy periods of detention in solitary confinement - supposedly to secure their protection - and torture prior to giving evidence. Such treatment for witnesses, the political and the non-political, became widespread. Their often hopelessly compromised evidence was delivered in an atmosphere of fear and terror (see Lewin 1976:38-9,69-70 - and on state witnesses in the same trial: Hirson 1995:287-8,308-9,314-5,320,322-4,326-7,329,331-3 - also Moss 1981:204-5). There were also those who retracted/refuted statements made in detention and refused to give evidence for the state in court, thereby bringing upon themselves the prospect of further detention and/or a prison sentence for contempt of court/perjury (see Amnesty International 1978:30-3, Bernstein 1972:15-16,28, Dingake 1987:131-3, Joseph 1986:159-160,224, Naidoo 1982:204, Sachs 1990:284). Bernstein has written particularly perceptively about the many faces of the state witness (1989, especially 144-78, 1972:21-5). More usually detainees refused to become a link in the chain of persecution. Some, like Jeremy Cronin, were insulted by the mere suggestion: "and that was actually the point at which I was most angry with them. That was almost the most humiliating thing that happened to me, to be offered this. Because my whole self image was, I do make mistakes... but I was a communist... so I was outraged that they sh[...], to become a state witness which, I mean, was just not even, didn't enter into the picture" (interview).

15
Moss writes the following about the character David Miller in her novel *The School Master*: "and every day in the courtroom they unravelled the meanings of his life. He stood in the evidence piling around him like litter. Strange wrappings, words he had not remembered, fragmented conversations, fell around him as though he had become... something for the dustbin, the coffin" (1981:203-4).

and the co-habitation of truth and power conspired to produce the ultimate reality of the state power of writing: death, or more usually, imprisonment.

Discourses on Torture

Commentators on present-day torture, including Scarry, invariably argue that it is no longer employed, or primarily employed, to extract information and that the emphasis on that particular variant of the truth has been displaced by the desire to break and destroy: "It is not primarily the victim's information, but the victim, that torture needs to win - or reduce to powerlessness" (Peters 1985:164). There is some support for this hypothesis from South Africa.[16] But torture served, and more generally can serve, a variety of inter-related ends and objectives: to secure a statement/confession, the truth/ information, and/or a recantation and denunciation/renunciation; to elicit confirmation, the recording of the already known/determined in and through the voice and words of the detainee; to politically identify/create/brand those deemed torturable;[17] to spread a climate of terror and intimidation by parading broken victims (organisations, peoples), and, thereby, to undermine the societal capacity to hope and to act; to impose order and control; to hunt down and eradicate false truths and their adherents, and in so doing to purify state truth through the denial of difference and dialogue; to indoctrinate and

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[16] See Abel 1995:216,218,226-7,253-4. The following is from Ken Barris' short story "Double Exposure": "He understood the politics of the situation. It had lost any function other than to demonstrate his impotence. It had nothing to do with gathering intelligence or gaining information. It had everything to do with power" (1988:85-6).

[17] On the discourse of torture as predicated on an attempt to establish, uncover, maintain distinctions between groups within a population, and the wider implications of the desire to chart the ambiguous boundary between the torturable and the untorturable, see du Bois 1991: "Torture in... South Africa... creates what Sartre calls another 'race,' a species that is rendered, by the activity of the torturer, non-human... the torture reduces the particularity of difference, of otherness, to that fact of being tortured" (152-3).

convert; to punish, coerce, engender respect, subjugate and humiliate, induce

helplessness, vent rage, seek revenge and to engage in pure sadism.[18]

The emphasis may indeed have shifted within contemporary torture towards the

imperative of power to obliterate the oppositional self. And yet to speak of distinct

regimes of torture is misleading. Torture is a violent collaboration of means, objectives

and outcomes, in which truth and annihilation can be, perhaps necessarily are, pursued

simultaneously:

> 'His work is to find out the truth. That is all he does. He finds out the
> truth'... When I see Colonel Joll again, when he has the leisure, I bring
> the conversation around to torture. 'What if your prisoner is telling the
> truth,' I ask, 'yet finds he is not believed? Is that not a terrible position?
> Imagine: to be prepared to yield, to yield, to have nothing more to yield,
> to be broken, yet to be pressed to yield more! And what a responsibility
> for the interrogator! How do you ever know when a man has told you the
> truth?' 'There is a certain tone,' Joll says... 'Training and experience teach
> us to recognise that tone.'... 'I am speaking of a situation in which I am
> probing for the truth, in which I have to exert pressure to find it. First I
> get lies... then pressure, then more lies, then more pressure, then the
> break, then more pressure, then the truth. That is how you get the truth.'
> (Coetzee 1982:3,5, see also 96)

Torture's role within different regimes of terror can vary significantly (see, for example,

Pion-Berlin 1994:108-9). Under apartheid, it was the servant of a racist ideology. But it

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[18] For discussions of the objectives of torture see du Bois 1991: especially 145-57, Peters 1985:161-4, Scarry 1985 and Weschler 1990:237-42,265-6.

was also an inexact practice rooted in the specificities of time, place, personality and context. During Michael Dingake's first interrogation he was told "'We want information. Information [...]'", while in the course of a second period of interrogation this had become: "'I want confirmation! Confirmation! Confirmation from you!'" (1987:105,153). This specificity extended to the micro-times and -places of interrogation, from hour to hour and room to room, for both detainee and torturer. Torture was a flexible tactic or strategy. It was a component of the wider functioning of violence, the significance of which in part resided in the manner in which it unsettled and manipulated thresholds and boundaries: between torture as a precise instrument in the service of a prevailing ideology/regime and torture as an agent of random and generalised terror, between discreet methods, objectives and results, between pain and power, truth and fiction, the oral and the written, the conscious and the unconscious, the self and the state, betrayal and resistance, order and chaos:

> In the end my mind could no longer betray: the surface from where the
> tongue can be steered was couched in lies, in mist, in unreality. Names
> and places and events had been rearranged ingeniously, in coordination,
> under a rule of sheer terror. Reality was out of reach and so was I[...] I
> had become unbreakable, I was beyond talking, I had gone beyond.
> Beyond some line, but I still don't know which. Beyond some terrible
> limit. (Pastoors in Schreiner ed. 1992:17)

The truth and power of torture was precisely this terrifying unsettling and remaking of reality.[19] The destructive force of torture resides in its simultaneity, in a complex

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[19] Another example of this phenomenon is the way in which state violence blurs boundaries within and between aspects of oppression. In apartheid South Africa, the torture-punishment-discipline evolution plotted by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* was reworked within detention and imprisonment. The evolution to some extent characterised the passage from detention to imprisonment, but in various forms and to varying degrees its components also coexisted simultaneously within both detention and imprisonment. An extended historical/temporal evolution was accompanied by an intense spatial and strategic relationship marked by simultaneity as much as by transition. The spectacle of torture, the display of broken bodies and minds, retained its power: "To reduce a person

process of inter-related and overlapping parts, which feed into and from one another.
The process and its consequences are, in the end, both intended and unintended,
conscious and unconscious, the subject of control and direction but also risk and
unpredictability. Due to the proximity of absolute power and control to their absolute
absence, to chaos and rebellion, torture's ultimate strength is also its fatal weakness.
From the beginning, the momentum and totality of repressive violence is undermined by
internal tensions and contradictions, by a lingering inexactness. These cracks and
fissures in the edifice create the footholds for resistance.

To recognise torture as encompassing a range of means, objectives and outcomes
requires a modification of Scarry's powerful but partial three point structure for torture.
The following discussion begins by addressing one such avenue of modification:
resistance.

At the Interface Between Opposing Powers of Writing

No power or truth is absolute. Within the interrogation process the detainee retained a
residue of each. Many of the South African detainees who made statements claim to
have participated in a damage-limitation exercise and/or in a fictionalising process. The
line of demarcation between truth and fiction was blurred deliberately and unwittingly
both for and by the detainee during torture and interrogation. Detainees entered
interrogation armed with 'legends', believable and defensible alibis - "a legend is
actually very close to some kind of truth" (Langa interview) - prepared for every
anticipated eventuality.[20] If 'legends' proved ineffective a second, and related, line of

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to a weakness of babbling, to confuse him in private and parade his humiliation
publicly, constitute a sickening spectacle, which affects the whole society"
(Breytenbach 1985:343, also 180, see du Bois 1991:153-7).

[20] In a way that strangely parallels the capacity of detainees to be convinced of the
truthfulness of their forced and false confessions, Langa also claimed that 'legends'
were sometimes so convincing that the detainee came to believing them.

defence in the making of a statement was often an attempt to 'control' or 'manage' the process, to choose a point at which and the manner in which to 'settle', to try and define the parameters within which a statement was made while again constructing a plausible story. This latter exercise could be attempted in various ways. Through preparation and practice - activists were trained in resistance techniques, read prison memoirs, discussed and handed on an accumulation of experience, prepared names to divulge, answers to questions - through silence, lies, and divulging a narrow truth - "truth, but not the whole truth, so help me God!" (Singh interview) - through playing smart and stupid, and through feigned ignorance and loss of memory. It was possible deliberately to forget in order not to disclose, to erect mental barriers between that which could be sacrificed, that which should be held in reserve, and that information that had to be mentally partitioned off, preserved at all costs. During the course of an interrogation it sometimes proved possible to piece together what the interrogators' knew and what they did not know and therefore wanted. Detainees bought time, and even satisfied their captors, by revealing information that was useless or already known, and by only implicating themselves or those out of the country or otherwise no longer vulnerable. Detainees came to cherish their small but significant victories: the familiarity with and anticipation of interrogation techniques - Cronin describes finding himself "smiling in recognition of [their] moves" (interview, also see Wolpe 1994:186) - reversals in the flow of questions and answers, the successfully 'managed' statement that brought with it the sense of having retained and regained something.[21] As methods of interrogation evolved and grew in sophistication over time, so too did the methods of resistance.

Those detained in the early 1960s, however, were badly briefed, inexperienced, and ill-prepared for what lay in store. The official line was that torture and interrogation should

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[21] For descriptions of attempting/making a 'managed' statement see, for example, Breytenbach 1985:343, Dingake 1987:103-6, Hirson 1995:288-9, Jenkin 1987:36, Pheto 1985:55-6,60,71-2,93-5, Sachs 1968:241-55, Wolpe 1994:193-4.

be withstood and that no statement should be made.[22] But virtually everybody, eventually, made a statement of some kind, and in time many received guidance about how it should be done:

> the training that we would give comrades would be you are not to make any statement whatsoever for the first three days, so hopefully that will enable the structures that you are working in to dismantle whatever is happening and to get incriminating things somewhere else. And then you will make, depending on how much pressure is put on you, you will make a series of statements giving as little information as possible in each successive statement and there are certain things you have in your mind that you will not make a statement about. But at a certain point you have got to satisfy them that they think they have got everything that you know, and that might take three, four, five, six bad weeks... so... it was a... series of statements giving more every time but hopefully withholding the absolute vital information and giving comrades at least three days before you said anything, regardless of what they did to you... what they had to give was stuff that incriminated them that didn't incriminate other people. And, because people don't want to incriminate themselves they would be very careful about what information they gave. But, the incrimination of other people... was absolutely the final thing when you thought they were actually going to kill you... And it worked. (Schoon interview)

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[22] Both a degree of unpreparedness and an echo of the hard line approach were to endure within opposition circles. On the former see Foster et al. 1987:93-4,124,163,197-8, also 115,146-7,164-5.

This process of pain-, truth- and information-management was an extraordinarily difficult task. Beyond the inevitable coercion was the fact that the detainee was in a position of radical unknowing, ignorant, often, about what the interrogator already knew, about what within the interrogator's discourse was true and what was fiction, about the source of any given piece of information and who among any other detainees had said, or was likely to say, what, and about how any incriminating evidence might be used. The detainee was continually double-guessing, covering old tracks, re-inventing him/her self, working from fragments and on hunches, straining the bounds of consistency and the believable. This was the life story at its most creatively provisional, and selectively strategic. The end result, however, was that the detainee managed to distort the echo of the torturer's voice. Using the meagre resources available, interrogation became an arena of contestation and the statement, written with, against, through, by the state, a violently collaborative text, a textual synthesis of lives, truths and powers:

> the testimony takes on a new interest as the *intersubjective* production
> of... inquisitor and... witness, a convergence of imaginations more than
> an objective account of real events. This convergence takes place within
> a monstrously asymmetrical dialogue, to be sure, but one in which there
> is nevertheless an exchange, with *real* violence traded for a *narrative* of
> violence. (Tedlock 1993:147)

It is possible to construct a chain of violent collaboration that went beyond the immediate encounter between interrogator and detainee to encompass a wider circulation of life stories in/through which the detainee confronted mobile interrogation teams and police files, the continual recycling of information and people, detainees played off against one another, used to break and inflict violence on one another, state witnesses telling "the full story, his story, my story, our story" (Lewin 1976:70); and,

more generally, the active memory of the state. Numerous, diverse, sometimes contradictory accounts of lives converged on an arena that extended into the political trial and beyond, an arena dense with prior versions, with lives jointly told, already told, pretold and foretold.

The chain of violent collaboration extended in various ways beyond the confines of interrogation. Existence for the detainee and prisoner was structured around mechanisms that enabled some kind of contact to be maintained with other detainees/ prisoners and that opened windows onto the outside world. Such contacts represented a reaching out and a (re)connecting, provided a means for the retention/restoration of voice, self and world, and were frequently written in form: from illicit writing serving all kinds of purposes on surfaces as varied as toilet paper and cell walls; to the writing and receipt of letters, smuggled newspapers, studying, and so on. The loss of writings was often devastating, signifying the/another loss of self and world: "That's the greatest loss that I had in my life"; "And I was lost. That was really a most terrible moment" (Matlou, Schlapobersky in Bernstein 1994:78,86). Such activities, at the interface between opposing powers of writing, helped to shape the beginnings of an oppositional power of writing that challenged the hegemony of official discourse, and its truth-power dynamic. The written word was intrinsic not only to the structure of repression but also to the structure of resistance.

Prisoners' letters provided a symbolic transformation of, and transportation between, worlds and forms of the written word. Writing was again able to be the bearer of hope and comfort, of a different kind of truth and power. The prison walls receded. This is Breytenbach writing about seeking sanctuary at night from the singing of those condemned to death:

your letter is delightful, larger and lighter / than the thought of a flower

when the dream / is a garden, / as your letter opens / there is an unfolding

of sky, word from outside, / wide spaces... of the orange tree decked out

in white blossoms / opening with the sun, / I could smell it on the balcony,

/ I can smell you... I will be suspended from the sky of your words, / give

that I may dwell in your letter / all the days of my life... your letter is

wonderful... as your letter opens / there is an unfolding of sky, word from

outside, / memory, ("your letter", 1988:92-3, also 1985:173,370-1:

inserted slash marks [/] are my own and are used throughout the thesis to

indicate the end of a line within poetry)

This reclamation of the word did not go uncontested by the state. Problems arising from

correspondence, for example, were fairly uniform. Both the content and length of letters

were strictly circumscribed. In addition to being cut, censored - "There was something

else - I could just read the word 'power' the prison had blacked out" (Gordimer,

"Amnesty", 1992:251) - lost, delayed and withheld, letters were often subject to other

mindless and petty stipulations. Some forms of harassment were cynical in the extreme.

Dingake complains that with the passage of time the withholding of letters became

"common and indiscriminate", and that the censorship of outgoing mail ended when it

became too vulnerable to outside scrutiny but was replaced by a policy that required

prisoners to simply re-write their letters. This policy was "a master plan which enable

prison authorities to pose as angels to the outside public while behaving atrociously to

the prisoners" (1987:166-7). As the quotations below illustrate, sometimes

disillusionment set in: the first is from an account by a prisoner, the second is from a

poem to/for a detainee.

So little happened on the Island or, rather, so little happened that we

were allowed to write about, that getting something to say was quite

difficult and we never got much pleasure from writing. We wanted the

contact, but with hardly anything to communicate we would throw it

away and destroy our few painfully put together thoughts. (Naidoo

1982:188)

This letter comes to you / empty of the things / I wanted to say / empty of

the shock, the horror, / the pain of the day / framing only black marks /

on a white page / framing only hopes / in a fearful age / this letter comes

to you / with all my love / but / empty... (Pillay, "A Letter to Bandi", in

Oliphant and Vladislavic eds. 1988:211)

The incarcerated responded to the official apparatus of control with their own counter-

strategies such as smuggling and writing using private codes of meaning. According to

Dingake, letters, visits and other channels of communication were a "lifeline" that "kept

us going in spite of their frequent use by officialdom as instruments of mental torture"

(1987:159-60,171). Various arenas of continuous contestation and invention were

established. To provide another example, during most of the apartheid era political

prisoners were officially denied access to all news, with the partial exception of

demoralising and destabilising news.[23] By depriving prisoners of knowledge about the

world outside, the authorities attempted to isolate, demoralise and depoliticise a vital

political constituency, thereby rendering them ineffective, while prisoners - through

smuggling, interrogating new prisoners and information gleaned from trips outside,

through visitors, letters and studying, criminals and warders, through arranging

fragments into a greater whole and reading between the spoken and written lines -

sought to fight this asphyxiating regime. Naidoo, for example, states: "Newspapers were

our lifeblood. We ate, slept and dreamt news, and were in a constant war with the

authorities over it - we to get it, they to keep it from us" (1982:131), and: "Every single

[23] See Breytenbach 1985:35-6, Dingake 1987:120, Gregory 1995:134-5,175, also 197, N. Mandela 1995:504, also 607, W. Mandela 1985:84, Naidoo 1982:155.

prisoner at some time or other participated in smuggling newspapers. The authorities discovered all the methods mentioned in this narrative and put a stop to them, but there were many more which they have never found out about, and which must remain secret" (154, also see Jenkin 1987:119-22, N. Mandela 1995: especially 492-3). Perhaps the most remarkable contribution to the newspaper saga was not the continual and pervasive stealing and smuggling but the actual production of a newspaper for a period by the white politicals at Local Prison, Pretoria. The newspaper, called 'The Gleek', began as a way of packaging and circulating stolen newspaper cuttings but became a mixture largely of often frivolous, sometimes slanderous, 'stories', creative writing and a diary of events, hastily produced, circulated and destroyed each Christmas.

> And I mean that became terribly important... it started because Costa
> Gazides came back from further charges in Jo'burg... with a whole set of
> cuttings of the Strachan case... and was thrown into a cell where there
> were three of us and we had about two hours and we were furiously
> reading the cuttings. Then, I said we've got to put them together so that
> everybody else can read them. So we actually very quickly made up a
> little newspaper, just of cuttings, quickly stuck these things together in a
> sort of A4 form. Which we were then able to smuggle through the
> section and everybody read them... It was totally clandestine and totally
> secret... it was basically... a Christmas thing which we used as a
> celebration and as a form of protest... And it became a sort of rag mag
> really... a very very strong force for cohesion, because it was totally
> illegal... if it had been found... it would have been dreadful... it was a
> total act of defiance... but it was very creative... in some ways a sort of
> creation of genius, it was a marvellous thing... we'd produce it by about
> Christmas and then it would go through the section and... come back to
> me and I'd have to cut it up and flush it. And that was the most terrifying,

terrible thing... And I mean the funny thing was that we discovered after a couple of years that the word gleek, which came from a poor joke that somebody told about Costa being a Greek, gleek was actually a Shakespearean word, it comes into *A Midsummer Nights Dream*, and it means spoof or tactic, so it was amazing [...] (Lewin interview, also see Lewin 1994)

Like the undiscovered methods of smuggling newspapers mentioned by Naidoo, this initiative could not be discussed by Lewin when *Bandiet* was written, "for obvious reasons". Autobiographical accounts, like statements, were 'managed' in accordance with an evolving political purpose.

While progress was haphazard, contradictory and uncertain, the net result of the complex interaction of forces - written and non-written, legal and illegal - that together comprised the pressure for change in prison conditions, as prisoners were upgraded and subject to new regulations, was a marked improvement.

In prison, Robben Island in particular, the retreat was tangible and could be measured in leagues. From one letter per prisoner in six months to one letter every month, from cold sea water showers in winter to fresh hot water showering in all seasons, from news blackout to uncensored newspapers, from indiscriminate physical assaults to hospitalisation of deserving cases in mainland hospitals - the list could go on and on. (Dingake 1987:228: on Robben Island 1966-81)

[Cronin talks of] a well defined space in which prisoners had rolled back the regime quite considerably, very noticeable when I arrived... I think the difference between prison as I encountered it and what it must have

been in the 60s and even leading into the early 70s, was that they were

not trying to change us, or operate on us in a heavy handed way... They

were trying to manage incarceration... they wanted minimum disruption

from you, they were in charge and they would assert that... but I think

that physical conditions - in terms of relative comfort, diet, space -

generally we managed through the period I was there. Again you would

get problematic warders... [but] [w]e managed our daily routines... much

much more than the ordinary prisoner... We placed orders on a monthly

basis, we drew up/ran work schedules, we decided who would clean at

what time... we defined what was clean, a little bit more than we might

have wanted to but a lot less than they wanted... We refused to do

endless routine work... and that process continued through the seven

years that I was there... we began to get them running around us a little

bit in terms of daily routines. (Cronin interview: in prison 1976-83)[24]

The harsh regime for political prisoners was characterised by both considerable

improvements and reversals. Prisoners were always caught between the

immense cathartic importance attached to such improvements and the fact that

they were, in some cases, illegal, and/or generally subject to the dominant

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[24]
Many improvements in conditions were the result of campaigns originating from and consistent pressure by the prisoners themselves. There were also, however, important external initiatives to assist prisoners and ease their plight. Three articles published in 1965 in the *Rand Daily Mail* shortly after the release of Jock Strachan who had served three years in Local Prison, and largely informed by his experience and evidence, were important in exposing conditions in South African prisons (see Cook 1974:33-8,46-7,64-71, Merrett 1994:68-9). The role played by released prisoners in exposing conditions and publicity in the press continued, over the years, to be important. Other domestic support/pressure came from family networks, human rights and anti-apartheid organisations, and progressive lawyers (on access to lawyers and legal challenges/actions, see Buntman 1996:109-10, Cook 1974:47-50, Jenkin 1987:117-19, Naidoo 1982:121,195,203-4, Shityuwete 1990:221-9,245-7. Van Zyl Smit states: "It cannot be ignored that in the past 25 years prison law in South Africa has been shaped almost entirely in the course of challenges directed by 'political detainees'" (1987:158-9)). International pressure from a variety of sources gained momentum and significance over the years, and lobbying and visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross and Helen Suzman are frequently mentioned in prison accounts (see Suzman 1993:137-69). External attention was often vital to the success of struggles initiated by the prisoners (Buntman 1996:110).

characteristics of prison administration, harshness and vindictive arbitrariness.[25]

Such characteristics applied to the administration of the fledgling oppositional power of writing as to all other aspects of prison conditions. The detainee, and to a lesser extent the prisoner, therefore, operated from within worlds cordoned off as much as possible from outside sanction and control, but they were also the focus of increasing levels of both internal and external scrutiny and pressure. Contradictory demands produced the ambiguous blend of severity, improvements and reversals that characterised conditions.

The struggle to un/remake and rewrite the detainee/prisoner, to enforce and maintain the official power of writing, although obviously operating at differing levels of intensity, was relentless: "an indefinite discipline: an interrogation without end, an investigation that would be extended without limit... a judgement that would at the same time be the constitution of a file that was never closed..." (Foucault 1991:227).

> In fact... the interrogation never ceased... the first trial with its conviction was just one step in the ongoing process of dissecting and undoing the psyche and washing the brain. (Breytenbach 1985:180, see 179-85, also Dingake 1987:133, Mkalipi/Alexander in Alexander et al. 1992:303-4)[26]

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[25] Official study was another form of writing/the written word at the interface between opposing powers of writing which, like letters and newspapers, served as an arena of contestation. Lewin states that courses taken through the University of South Africa (UNISA) became "the pivotal point of our existences" (1976:98, also Niehaus 1994:137-9. Hirson, previously a physicist, built the foundation for a new career as a historian: 1995:119-20,142,161-2,205-9,248,345-7,352,354-5). However, as Dingake claims the study privilege "more than all the others needs to be put into proper perspective" (1987:171). According to the Robben Island experience, from the start in the 1960s the privilege was "entangled with strict conditions" and harassment. There followed a whole string of attempts to negate the right to study: the ending of UNISA subsidisation of prisoner studying in the late 1960s was quickly followed by the prohibition of postgraduate studies and the denial of permission to study certain subjects such as history, law and political science as an undergraduate; in 1977 it was announced that no prisoner could do post-matric studies; and so on. Subsequently, post-matric and postgraduate studies were restored but again with extremely tight conditions, notably that masters dissertations had to be approved by the Prisons Department. Study privileges were never enjoyed by the majority of prisoners, were curtailed continuously and at times simply cancelled.

[26] On monitoring, supervision and control, by the Security Police in relation to political prisoners, see Buntman 1996:122,124,177 footnote 20, Hirson 1995:326-7.

At the interface between competing powers of writing control was sought by both sides over the forms of written word to which detainees and prisoners had access, over the ability to write, over what was written, and in particular over what was written about the person in question. Radically different conceptions and practices of truth and power were locked in conflict. Official control over the written word was significantly, if unevenly, compromised. The realm of the written word was variously underpinned by violent collaboration, by competing forces that influenced the context and manner of writing, but in the war that raged around letters and newspapers, as in many other similar conflicts, battles in various innovative ways could be won. Detainees and prisoners tried to reconstitute and rewrite the prison experience, and themselves within that experience, against the grain of state discourse. In this evolving process they regained access to aspects of voice, self and world of which they had been stripped during interrogation and became complicit in their own remaking, in the formation of an alternative archive and image of the self. This archive contained a form of discursive truth, knowledge and power for which the state archive had no equivalent in scope or complexity: the autobiography.

Autobiography and the Power of Representation

Elizabeth Hanson has argued that although "the infliction and the representation of torture are events of different phenomenological order, their comparison is instructive" (1991:61). The same point applies, to varying degrees, to the whole range of experiences from detention and imprisonment. Hanson goes on the say: "For the practitioners, torture is a violent extension of an insufficient discourse; for the victims, its representation is the discursive extension of bodily resistance" (61-2). The dynamics of torture can in part be reversed within its narrative representation: the detainee is served by silence and obfuscation within interrogation and vocality and truth within its

representation - thereby providing evidence of torture and interrogational techniques as well as modes of resistance - while the reverse is true for the state; the torturer appropriates the detainee's voice in interrogation but the detainee appropriates the scene of torture within representation thereby making the state speak from within the oppositional discursive terrain rather than the reverse. That oppositional attempts to reverse, resituate, and remake the experience of incarceration can be most persuasively undertaken through representation, and more specifically through autobiography, make the latter a form endowed with considerable, if sometimes ambiguous, truth and power.

The crucible of incarceration, with its textures of violence and pain seems universally to demand "'factually insistent'" narratives (Young 1987:404, also 1990:67,80). South African prison writers testify to the truthfulness of their accounts: Kantor defines his memoir as "a factual account" (1967:vii); Pheto claims that the "contents of this narrative are true" (1985:8); even Zwelonke's fiction projects "a hard and bitter truth; fiction mirroring non-fiction, true episodes and incidents" (1973:3). Hence there is a common belief among the writers themselves that prison writing attains authority through a narrowly defined conception of what constitutes the truth. The writer seems compelled to assume the role of witness.[27] The capacity of the state to manufacture its own truth, to have it implemented and to a lesser extent believed, was essential to the generation of apartheid political power. Similarly, prison writers have felt that their power was contingent upon a capacity to generate truth and have their truths believed. Truth is seen as linked to power: the reason for the truth imperative becomes clear.

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[27] Breytenbach is alone in constructing a more complicated, self-conscious and even ironic understanding of the concept of a true confession. He felt it imperative to "get rid of the unreality", and states: "This is the true story of what happened" (1985:27,333, also see 338). And yet he undermines/queries his own quest for truth, for it is a concept that he dismisses as "a convention": "there are no finites; just movements of mind, only processes"; "nothing beyond the organic reality of pattern and repetition and illusion and rhyme and rhythm"; "[o]ne mustn't be like those who always simplify 'reality' by attempting to understand it" (36,87,151,308). At different stages the reader is introduced to his true confession as "also the instantaneous invention of what might have happened", the possibility that "the unsaid must be more truthful", the certainty that things have been omitted and forgotten and that there may well be mistakes, and the tendency for the human memory to remember selectively in an attempt to "escape from itself" (17,63,151,271,288,338).

Within this study, however, the truth imperative will be filtered through the dominant theoretical argument of the thesis, and thereby linked to a 'higher' truth. Autobiography provides the opposition power of writing with a uniquely definitive form: at once, a personal story, an articulation of oppositional writings and readings of imprisonment; a form that bridges attempts to create a counter-discourse from within and outside the prison; and, to varying degrees, juxtaposes conflicting constructions of truth and power, and, situates the violence of state forms of discourse within dominant oppositional discursive paradigms. The autobiography is the oppositional power of writing as archive, as 'owned' archive.

This chapter argues that to be a political prisoner is to be variously written, to be contested through writing. The word is a weapon that both inflicts pain and secures power. Everyone becomes a writer. Prisoners are relentlessly and violently rewritten - through the confession/statement, the testimony of state witnesses, the law, the political trial, and the regulations governing imprisonment - within an alien power of writing. The prisoner's sense of self and world is undermined, pain is made visible and objectified in writing enabling it to be denied as personal pain and read as state power. The official power of writing consists of these cumulative written truths. It is a collaboration between government, civil service, the judiciary, and even the incarcerated themselves: a conspiracy of the state. Where narrative meaning remains ambiguous, it is invariably interpreted against the prisoner. Reading and writing, and language itself, become subject to the dominant characteristics of the state: absolute power, lawlessness, the 'false motive syndrome', and 'bureaucratic tyranny' render the word a duplicitous lie beyond the prisoner's control. The multiple rewritings of the state create an archive of the self, a self framed within the official power of writing and defined by its subjection to the state. This written self is isolated, destroyed, rewritten to

serve a political end; it is unrecognisable and unwanted, a testimony to powerlessness, violence and repression.

The power of writing, however, is a contested arena; no archive is unpolluted by its 'other'. The prisoners' attempts to retain or restore a sense of self and world also has to be relentless and lawless. From the start and the 'management' of the statement the state power of writing is contested. Rival powers of writing emerge - from the ungrammatical tattoo to the writing of autobiographical accounts - which provide a way of salvaging the written word, an alternative truth/power and the oppositional self from the enveloping state lie. It is at the interface between powers of writing that the violence of collaboration is most fierce. The oppositional power of writing also consists of cumulative/collaborative written truths but they write towards an alternative archive of the self, a self framed within the oppositional power of writing and defined by its resistance to the state. It is within autobiographical accounts that these counter-discourses are most comprehensively articulated.

As has already been outlined, there is no monopoly over the political function of writing. Just as official rewritings can be turned against the authorities, used, carefully contextualised, to construct the oppositional power of writing, so the written words of the incarcerated and oppositional prison writings can be used against their authors, and others, in their unmaking. Meaning is unstable, inter-textual, context-bound. The dominant intention and purpose of autobiographical writing, however, is to restore elemental political ground to the prisoner. The axis of narrative, and ultimately political, truth and power is relocated as the incarcerated restore and make visible a sense of self and world, and as official prison narratives are eclipsed, contextualised and turned against apartheid. These are the contours of the contested arena of the power of writing, at stake is the question of on whose terms imprisonment will be both written and read, represented and interpreted.

Many produced, "[a] narrative, answering the comradely demand (not that other demand, uttered by those who want to know for other reasons and who use instruments of torture to wring the narrative out of one), the comradely demand to know, tell us what happened" (Horn 1992:85). The second part of this chapter will examine the implications of the oppositional archive, and specifically the autobiographical text, for relations of truth and power.

ii) Detainees and Prisoners

Ruth First and the Art of Winning

During the early 1960s, which saw a quickening in the pace of attempts to crush, particularly black, political opposition, the government introduced the 90- and 180-day detention laws.[28] Ruth First was detained on 9 August 1963 and held for 117 days. Her detention under the 90-day clause came three weeks after the Rivonia arrests. Two periods at Marshall Square police station in Johannesburg were interrupted by 28 days spent at Central Prison, Pretoria. She was a political activist of long standing, a member of the South African Communist Party, who had worked primarily as a journalist. She was also a member of a family immersed in political activism. Her detention and subsequent account of the experience were informed by this personal-political nexus.

First participated in the unfolding life of a political community whose experiences related to her own as preparation and consolation. While alone in detention First could sense that she was among others, friends, similarly detained: "We were all serving time" (1965:74). On the door in the exercise yard at Marshall Square police station she found that other 90-day detainees had scratched a "detainees' register": the exercise yard "had become our place of reunion and our archive" (41). The written word served as a means of communication and a gesture towards solidarity, a collective meeting place where the individualisation of official discourse could be undermined.[29]

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[28] A number of those detained during this period, mostly under the 90-day law, wrote about their experiences: First 1965, Kantor 1967, Lewin 1976. Albie Sachs documented his detention under both the 90- and 180-day laws, in *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs* (1990) and *Stephanie on Trial* (1968).

[29] The written word served this function in many ways, particularly for prisoners: written communication bolstered morale and solidarity; letters became public property; news was learnt, disseminated and endlessly discussed; study was both informal and formal, ranging from prisoners teaching others basic literacy skills to assistance with official study for degrees.

An awareness of the experience and lives of others is reflected in First's prison memoir: "she interleaves with her own story a number of other stories of political detainees... whose experiences might otherwise have remained untold... it becomes a veritable archive of detention texts" (J. U. Jacobs 1991a:198, also P. Naidoo in Schreiner ed. 1992:85-121). These italicised inserts, separate from yet inextricably related to her own framing narrative, provide an extension of her story, spatially/geographically, temporally and politically beyond the confines of detention; of the particular experience of a white woman detainee into a more general pattern of political repression affecting a political community; and from the fragmentation and partiality that characterises the knowledge of the detainee to a greater narrative and political whole that provides its context. The prison memoir as collective meeting place breaches those most sacred of prison boundaries between self and others, inside and outside.

A more sinister meeting between individual and collective experience took place within interrogation. While previously, according to Ruth First, "[j]ail spells had not broken us; they had helped to make us", with the introduction of the 90-day law "we were in for some disastrous collapses" (1965:132). During the early stages of detention First's interrogation was generally "desultory" and "perfunctory" (51,79). Approaching the end of 90 days First was filled with the anticipation of freedom and fear at the possibility of being redetained for a further 90-day period. On day 89, First's mother and children visited her and brought the news that B was talking. Twenty minutes later, while still suffering from a sense of panic and betrayal, First was informed that she was to be released. Her release was a day early, taking her by surprise and depriving her of a day in which to adjust to what had happened and prepare for possible futures. There followed the vicious charade of release and re-detention. It was at this point that First was driven to a response that although perhaps uncharacteristic of her was entirely characteristic of, indeed intrinsic to, the structure of interrogation/torture: she actively participated, became complicit, in her own demise. While at her lowest ebb and

suffering from an ulcer, First embarked upon a hunger strike as a form of protest and to draw attention to her plight. Applying pressure when the victim was emotionally most fragile and desperate, at 'cracking point', the interrogators moved in quickly. Feeling that B talking had brought about a critical change in her position and a desperate need to act, First prepared to make a statement. After the making of this statement, First thought that she had in fact lost control and participated in her own rewriting:

> though I had decided at the outset that I would play out a small measure of rope, it took the slow process of the interview for me to realize fully that I was winding it fast around me. There was no time to wriggle, to fabricate, to gauge reaction, to probe, to find out anything for myself. I was breaking down my own resistance. It was madness for me to think that I could protect myself... I had no idea what they knew, what contradictory information they had wrenched from someone else. They were giving nothing away; they had already become too experienced for that. (120, see also 112-13)

The written words of the state enveloped her: "I was caught in a web of statements about me that they had taken from other people, statements which were not true" (123). She knew the ways in which statements were used, and says of her own that it "had probably been cyclostyled by now and placed in other dossiers, and might be brandished in front of some other detainees remaining silent. 'What's the good of holding out? Here's another who has cracked and told us all'" (126). Her reaction to having made a statement is worth quoting at length; it represents the most poignant acknowledgement of vulnerability and frailty in South African prison literature:

> They had beaten me. I had allowed myself to be beaten. I had pulled back from the brink just in time, but had it been in time?... above all I

was fighting to salvage my respect in myself, in the hope that my associates in the political movement could still preserve confidence in me... I was in a state of collapse... for the gnawing fear that they could destroy me among the people whose understanding and succour I most needed, and that once they had done that I would have nothing left to live for... I was persecuted by the dishonour of having made a statement, even the start of a statement... It would be impossible to explain such an act, to live it down... I had presided over my collapse with a combination of knowingness and utter miscalculation... I had been stupid. Weak. A failure. By day and by night I went over this self-exposure... I felt unimaginably tired and dispirited. I could not cope any longer... a decision was forming in my mind... There was only one way out, before I drove myself mad, and as the truest indication to anyone who was interested that I had not let the Security Branch have it all their own way. (125-8)

This period of First's detention culminated in her having a breakdown and attempting to commit suicide by taking an overdose of pills.

A suicide note, written on "the flyleaf of the crossword puzzle book, with the pencil that was the property of the South African Government" (128), contained references to having not given in nor endangered those who remained free; she had kept their secrets. First's reaction to having made a statement was that of a political activist who felt she had contravened a code of conduct and whose ultimate fear was that the Security Branch would publicise fictions about her - fictions in which she was somehow implicated - amongst those she needed most; that her political allies would ostracise and abandon her because of a supposed betrayal. In her mind the community of which she was a part had turned against her because she had turned against herself. The world

of the apartheid state, its written word and pernicious truth, had expanded to eclipse First's own to the extent that she understood her statement and believed it would be understood by others as an act of betrayal rather than a cry of pain.

In the aftermath of the failed suicide attempt First began both to analyse generally how the Security Branch worked and had refined their techniques, and to unravel the campaign against herself: "I can see the instructions in The Grays' order book or wherever they keep their collection of texts..." (134: on their mistakes, see 120-1,135). The interrogation continued and First began to realise with pleasure that her statement had not provided the required information to use either against others or herself. Recovery was based on the realisation that she had exercised enough control over the process of making a statement, that it was sufficiently collaborative, to render the final result useless. Although pain was inflicted and objectified in the form of a statement, it could not be converted into power for the apartheid regime. The statement was a manifestation of contested pain, truth and power. First was able to reinterpret the meaning of her interrogation.

> At last I permitted myself my first scent of victory. I determined to shake off the all-devouring sense of guilt at my lapse. I had been reeling towards a precipice and I had stopped myself at the edge. It had *not* been too late to beat them back. I had undermined my own resistance, yet I had not after all succumbed. In the depth of my agony I *had* won. (135-6)

While one of the ways in which the representation of torture, as opposed to its infliction, can be (or provide the illusion of being?) effective, is in transforming a complex reality into a simplistic victory, First's account provides a more nuanced argument. It does, however, illustrate that official power was not omnipotent, that it could be contested, and that there was a way back, even from the precipice of

(self-)desecration, to a kind of oppositional victory. The political community of activists was a weapon in this encounter, that from the perspective of the detainee was a potential source of power - of support and inspiration - and pain - in that it could be turned into an agent of destruction by being made subject to state manipulation. By containing the experience of pain, the loss of control and break-down, largely within the subjective realm, directing it inwards, onto herself, rather than projecting it outwards onto others, First was able to protect, and secure her status within/reinclusion into, a community of political friends. At great personal cost, but in the long term it was because of this strategy not in spite of it that First survived and indeed triumphed. To win the interrogational encounter with such scant resources and while in such pain, as First and many others did, represents an extraordinary manifestation of oppositional truth and power.

Albie Sachs and the Freedom Fighter as Soft Hero

> There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. (Benjamin 1973:258)

Albie Sachs also provides an assessment, followed by a reassessment, of interrogation, but in his case it was necessitated by two radically different experiences of detention. Under the 90-day provision he was held for 168 days and did not make a statement of any kind. Sachs recognised that there had been factors in his favour: the absence of physical torture; access, for a period, to writing materials and books.[30] As an act of resistance it was, nevertheless, a triumph over adversity, a triumph consecrated when, on being released, he ran six miles and threw himself fully clothed into the sea. There were to be fewer factors in his favour when Sachs was detained again two years later

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[30] An application was brought on Sachs' behalf which resulted, until the court order was reversed on appeal, in detainees being allowed access to reading and writing materials. The judgement in the case, *Sachs v Rossouw*, persuaded him that there was "scope for law, even in the midst of tyranny" and did "so much to restore [his] belief in the value of law" (1990:155,158).

under the 180-day law. During the intervening period he wrote *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs* and continued to practice as a lawyer. Rumours began to circulate about a special team of interrogators relying on prolonged sleep deprivation normally accompanied by the 'statue treatment' - enforced standing - to break prisoners: everyone was being broken. Then Sachs himself was re-detained. The greatest fear of the ex-detainee/ prisoner is the fear of going back inside again.

At Caledon police station the interrogation began almost immediately. The interrogators sneered at the methods used against Sachs during his previous detention. Their core strategy soon became clear. A team of interrogators worked in shifts alternating violent verbal attacks with "attrition by silence" (1968:230). Although allowed to sit throughout, he was deprived of sleep. Sachs eventually felt that he would have to 'settle': from the experience of previous detainees subjected to no-sleep torture he understood that those who held out the longest had broken the hardest, whereas those who had broken relatively early had been able to limit the damage, restricting the amount of information they had revealed. Against the demoralising effect of this knowledge he tried to initiate a kind of counter-interrogation in the hope that he would be able to "reduce the extent of their victory" (247-8). After 21 hours of interrogation Sachs made a statement. Later he experienced an "overwhelming sense of failure and fatigue" (254) and refers to a feeling of having been "'processed'" by the police (260). His release came after three months in solitary confinement and he claims that during this period he "had never really recovered from" the interrogation (272).

Separated in the history of repression by a single crack of the legislative whip, Sachs' encounters with the world of detention were dramatically different. The most significant theme traversing the abyss of the self that yawns between these experiences is a re-evaluation and rewriting of the role of the detainee/prisoner as hero. After his first period in detention Sachs wrote of the "perfect political prisoner" - of the political

prisoner as hero - as an ideal to be aspired to and a model to follow (1990:90). In complicated ways Sachs himself was perhaps inevitably dusted with the brush of heroism: by a resistance movement in need of heroes and by his own ambiguous attitude that both attempted to distance himself from the ideal while buying into its mystique. Sachs was aware that to some he was a hero, conscious of how his performance on being redetained would compare, and uneasy in the knowledge that if he fell from grace the fall would be precipitous.

Albie Sachs ends his jail diary with the following lines: "I write and I write... I must record my story as accurately and honestly as I can. Then should they take me in again I will know that there is something of me outside which will continue to exist whatever they do to me" (285). But the book was also something that he took with him back into detention. In Sachs' second prison narrative, *Stephanie on Trial*, he describes his feelings when redetained having written about his experiences as a 90-day detainee:

> As I sat analysing my gains and losses I realised that my unease and self-consciousness had been strengthened by the book I had written about my previous experience. While working on it I had been compelled to build up a complex picture of myself, and to examine precisely how I had behaved when under the stress of imprisonment and isolation; now that I was back in the sort of situation which I had been describing, I found myself repeating the phrases I had used, conscious of their inadequacy, yet almost tempted to conduct myself according to them. (1968:210)

The text of *The Jail Diary* was an unnerving mirror in which Sachs was ultimately unable to recognise himself. As an incarcerative episode the first period in detention in some ways became a weapon that worked against him: the interrogators were out to

avenge a perceived defeat while in a process strangely parallel to this his construction of an optimal prison self served to undermine him.

After this second detention the task of writing about the experience was of a different order altogether. Sachs was forced to question the role of the heroes of imprisonment and the standards and expectations for which they were responsible. It was a mystique that he himself had helped to create: "in a much smaller way I myself had added to the mythology by writing of how I had survived five months of solitary confinement... Yet it was only the successes which were publicised; the thousands and millions who had succumbed to their torturers were never mentioned, since there was no audience for defeat...." (259). It is interesting to note, in this regard, that *Stephanie on Trial* which includes Sachs' account of his second period of detention is virtually unknown, in sharp contrast to his other much lauded autobiographical writings. The continuous refinement of the techniques of interrogation within such a fundamentally unequal encounter meant that most would emerge compromised and scarred. An ideal that had previously been thought vital to motivating the resistance of political detainees/prisoners had proved to be a dangerous illusion. Realistic preparation for capture was needed rather than idealistic stories of heroism. Sachs' second detention experience can be understood as a negotiation between ideal and absolute standards and an evolving (self-)knowledge and reality (also see, for example, 94-101,271). Writing about military regimes in South America Jean Franco states that such regimes were distinguished by the ambition to go beyond mere repression to the extermination of the hero, to create a world without exemplary acts or grand gestures, inhabited by the anonymous and the annihilated (1992:104-7,109). Sachs, however, provides an alternative vision, with vastly different implications for the truth-power equation, that evolves towards a softer, more sustainable heroism.

The final twist in this discourse on heroism followed an incident in April 1988, when Albie Sachs was the victim of a car bomb attack in Maputo, Mozambique (see Pauw 1991:170-4). His injuries were massive, and included the loss of his right arm and the sight of one eye. But he survived. Again Sachs had to deal with being seen as a hero, a symbol of resistance. Having hero status bestowed upon him provoked similar reactions to before: it unsettled him - there was no choice or volition involved in his survival; some had chosen a more difficult road than his and had received less recognition, and yet he became a symbol of courage and indestructibility to them - but it was also a source of comfort and pride.

"They" had "tried to kill [him] because of [his] writing" (1991:73). Sachs had to relearn how to write - as he had during his first detention when provided with a pencil and paper: "I am early man learning to write, a child making its first marks" (1990:161) - but this time with his left hand, and again he wrote about his experience of pain and healing, in *The Soft Vengeance of a Freedom Fighter* (1991). This third poignant encounter with heroism and the written word harks back to the first. As a 90-day detainee Sachs had contemplated writing about his experience in a form that was immediate, direct, interactive:

> I will write a play... I feel somehow that circumstance itself shapes for
> the stage the material of our present lives. I will select from the material,
> and an expert can do the trimming and joining necessary for a smooth
> and interest-arousing production... The idea is to make the situation as
> immediate as possible to the audience. It is not just Mr X whose fate is
> being depicted on the stage, it is the man you see before you. Everything
> you see is true. We will recreate our story exactly as it happened... by
> writing this play I combat my isolation and defeat the attempts of my
> jailers to break my mind. (1990:93-9)

While recovering from the bomb blast, Albie Sachs saw a special benefit performance of the play, *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs*, adapted from his autobiographical account by David Edgar. Sachs writes: "What I like about the present situation is the idea that the young Albie... is coming to the aid of the middle-aged Albie" (1991:181). The dream of writing a play operated as a form of resistance and healing in detention, was later written/adapted, and a quarter of a century on served the same function in performance after an assassination attempt. Such is the truth and power of writing (and performance).

With this curtain call a very personal heroic cycle was completed. But more generally, an evolving chain of heroic lives, and the ideal(s) they personified, was resurrected, and to them Sachs added his definitive contribution: heroism as life lived in preparation for a confrontation - or in this case several overlapping encounters - with apartheid power, which is then survived and overcome; heroism as a wariness of having every action or word judged against the background of this confrontation, and a desire that it be both seen and lived through to what lies beyond; heroism in small deeds, in trivial daily actions, in simply carrying on, in the taken-for-granted; and, finally, heroism as the fulfilment of "deepest longings" and the triumph over the "most intimate uncertainties" (36-9,79-80,102,149,152, 186,200-3). Sachs returns on three occasions to heroism and the heroic as they have impacted on his life, culminating in a vision of a softer heroism entirely compatible with a freedom fighter seeking to exact a soft vengeance.

Sachs' experience illustrates that texts intended to be part of oppositional discourse can in fact function in particular circumstances - such as redetention - to reinforce the official power of writing. Meaning is inter-textual; autobiographies can be documents of both civilization and barbarism. The self and the self-image do not coincide; control over the written word and the self within it is inexact and incomplete. After his first

detention Sachs was able to invest personally in the idea of political prisoner as hero; on being redetained he was forced to live the inadequacy of his own written word/self as a harsh reality eclipsed constructions of heroism; and, finally, while recovering from an assassination attempt he reclaimed a softer heroism - as First had earlier reclaimed a sense of victory - for the forces of resistance. Sachs' autobiographical archive is the site of a fundamental reassessment and rewriting - of the relationship between self and self-image, of the ideal of heroism, and of the oppositional power of writing - culminating in a more complex and complete understanding of each.

Breyten Breytenbach: 'I Write: I am the Writer'

By 1967 the South African government had devised a piece of legislation that synthesised and refined much of what had gone before: the Terrorism Act. Between 1967 and 1982 this Act was the central piece of security legislation. Among a number of important trials during this period was that involving Breyten Breytenbach, a leading Afrikaans writer.[31] Breytenbach was sentenced to nine years' imprisonment in November 1975 having been found guilty of various charges after returning to South Africa from France on behalf of a white resistance organisation, Okhela. Following his conviction Breytenbach spent almost two years in solitary confinement at 'Beverley Hills', Pretoria Maximum Security Prison (also known as Central Prison). In a second trial that began in May 1977 he was found not guilty of further charges under the Terrorism Act, but guilty of a less serious alternative charge, of smuggling out letters and drawings while in custody, under the Prisons Act. During this trial publicity was given to the conditions in which Breytenbach had been held and in July 1977 he was moved to Pollsmoor Prison, Cape Town. At no stage was Breytenbach considered to be a "normal prisoner"

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[31] Others who wrote about incarceration under the Terrorism Act include Cronin 1987, Jenkin 1987, Kuzwayo 1985:198-218, Makhoere 1988, W. Mandela 1985, Mashinini 1989, and Pheto 1985.

(1985:278). The authorities went to extraordinary lengths to isolate him and he spent less than half a day at Pretoria's Local Prison where other white male political prisoners were held.[32] By the time of his release in December 1982 he had served seven years of his sentence. Breytenbach left the country, returning to Paris where he had been in exile prior to his imprisonment.

The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, as had already been mentioned, is dangerous terrain in which to excavate for truth: "If it can be written about, it doesn't exist" (241). Breytenbach simultaneously professed the need to tell the truth while writing against any fixed concept of reality.[33] These modes of representation are uneasy cohabitants: the former driven by the political necessity to tell his own story, represent his own reality and have an alternative/outside reality and audience available to him; the latter driven by the conditions of imprisonment/writing and by a philosophical belief in the dissolution/creation of reality in language, in transience and transformation, in seeing unity in opposites, complementarity in paradox and contradiction: "Freedom", for example, "is accepting unfreedom, denying that they are opposites, reading one in the other, and going beyond" (87, also 282-3).

Breytenbach's world-view is inevitably turned back on itself/the self. The `I' is imagined, invented, projected and hidden behind masks: "There is no 'I' there is no name, there is no identity. But there are unchanging manifestations, habits, a hulk, a carcass, recognizable" (25, also 13). The story becomes "the reflection of a search for what really happened, and for the identity of the narrator" (338); prison, a world where

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[32] Breytenbach's isolation was not totally due to the dictates of the state. At Pollsmoor he was held at his own request in a cell on his own, and so clearly sought a kind of privacy (see 198). It was always, however, only a kind of privacy: "and still no privacy to your solitude" (Breytenbach, "prisoner", 1988:31).

[33] Breytenbach has written elsewhere of the dual capacity of the act of writing, "giving account while inventing itself" (1996:159).

people extend to one another "the courtesy of accepting their lives as invented" (346).
Breytenbach left the country after his release clinging to his manuscripts, "to the
fragmentary scenario of [his] identities" (331). "The mirrored self-images", as J. U.
Jacobs explains, provide "the privileged view of the voyeur into the complex 'I' that is
the authorial Breyten Breytenbach" (1986:104).

The audience to whom *True Confessions* is addressed is similarly complex and
ambiguous: Mr Investigator, Mr Confessor, Mr Interviewer, Mr Investerrogator, Mr
Investalligator, Mr I, my dear dead I, Mr Eye, Sir, your Honour... (his interrogators, his
readers, his wife, his alter ego, a black activist, a judge....). It is, as David Schalkwyk
wryly notes, "like confessing to God, Christ, and Satan at the same time" (1994:26). "Is
there really a you? Isn't there, in the final instance, only an amorphous but all-
encompassing investigator?" (1985:239); "I face I, me against Mr Investigator. I cannot
lose. I cannot win. I am free" (154).

Identity-construction is further complicated by more overtly political factors.
Breytenbach's identity is constructed on the fault-line of an Afrikaner heritage that is
both compulsive and repulsive, which can not be lived with but which equally can not
be lived without. An often savage critic of apartheid he is also an Afrikaner and much
lauded Afrikaans writer, and as such was both the ultimate traitor and, in a system
predicated on race, still one of the chosen. The ambiguities of this position were
unmasked, their essential nature thrown into relief, in prison, by a series of particularly
intense relationships - with his interrogators, his warders, with the state more
generally... - within which he was bound in an intimate death embrace of loathing and
identification/dependence/complicity: "violator and victim (collaborator! violin!), are
linked forever perhaps, by the obscenity of what has been revealed to you, by the sad
knowledge of what people are capable of. We are all guilty" (343, also see 180,337,341-
4). "Nobody is clean. No heaven exists" (360), Breytenbach writes, and asserts that he

did not consciously seek revenge: "We are too closely linked for that... [they] are not monsters but people like you and me" (339). He urges the need to recognise the humanity of the enemy. With his captors he shares everything and nothing. All are guilty, all are human.

With such an 'I' - fractious, fragmented, irretrievably implicated, (self-)alienated and yearning to belong - the line between self and 'other', oppressed and oppressor, confessor and interrogator/audience, becomes blurred. What is the truth and power of such a prisoner?

Breytenbach was the artist-exile who would be a revolutionary. In the context of his repeated attempts to turn "transgressive speech into transgressive act" (Coetzee 1991:62), the return to South Africa in 1975 can be interpreted as an acknowledgement that he had been unable to achieve such a transformation from outside, and through the written word alone. Return, arrest, interrogation and imprisonment were to forge all sorts of linkages between inside and outside, between the word and the deed. During his trial, Breytenbach apologised for a poem entitled, in translation, "Letter from Foreign Parts to Butcher", subtitled "for Balthazar" (the South African Prime Minister at the time was Balthazar John Vorster): "'I would specifically like to apologize to the Prime Minister for a crass and insulting poem addressed to him. There was no justification for it. I am sorry'" (in Coetzee 1991:58, also 61-2,80).[34] Breytenbach, it seems, felt that a deal had been struck - he does not mention the apology as part of the deal (although it is unclear why else he would have made it), and asserts in relation to his statement that "[w]ithout being political it was an attempt to explain how I got to be standing where I was, without rejecting my convictions" (1985:63) - in which in exchange for various

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[34] See Breytenbach 1983:4-5. This poem perhaps helps explain Vorster's response to Breytenbach's arrest (see 1993:100).

concessions on his part (pleading guilty, foregoing making a political statement from the dock...) concessions would be made in return and he would receive the minimum sentence allowed in the resulting circumstances of five years, and that having fulfilled his side of the bargain the state reneged on theirs (see 60-71,314). Betrayal by the Afrikaner establishment followed self-abasement; humiliation was heaped on humiliation. To add insult to injury, he was disowned by the ANC (see Breytenbach 1993:123-4). At this moment, feeling multiply betrayed and alienated, Breytenbach lived out the paradox of his identity most poignantly. In terms of the sides of the South African conflict he was ultimately on both sides and, therefore, on neither.[35]

Breytenbach refers to shameful and improper conduct, to disgrace - "It is true: I am not a hero" (1985:337) - and states that heroism should not be expected either of oneself or of others (360, also 378); to a desire to please (62, also 29,48) and to an ambiguous foundation for survival and resistance: "*resistance... survival, is made up of a million little compromises and humiliations*" (258, also 65,360). But alongside submission, humiliation and self-loathing, Breytenbach talks of the need to take responsibility for remaining aware and choices taken, and of interests that are irreconcilable (337,360). There is compromise and complicity, but not total collapse. He refused to be a state witness. After the strictures and pressures of the incarcerative world had been removed, however, Breytenbach's reflections upon himself within that world are both painfully honest and less than candid. While neither uncritical - "But I tried also not to paint myself prettier than I am" (337) - nor, in general, seeking to simply omit the regrettable, the self-analysis, the blend of fact and fiction, often appears deliberately vague,

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[35] On further occasions, apart from during his first trial, Breytenbach's actions in prison were naive, idiosyncratic, self-serving... It is difficult to find the right word. From prison in Pretoria, for example, Breytenbach wrote a letter offering his services to the security police: "I thought I was clever... I thought I could still manoeuvre and try to catch them at their own game. But those were the desperate delusions of the trapped animal..." (1985:181-2, also 1983:5-6). The letter was produced during his second trial where he denied that it had ever been his intention to work with the police (1985:250). How should such an act be interpreted: as an attempt to out-manoeuvre the security police? as the actions of a blind man walking into a trap? as a product of the mental torture of isolation? or, as a genuine offer to collaborate? Also on the naive, idiosyncratic and self serving... see 201-3 on the Chris Barnard film; 234-8,246-9,253 on Lucky the Pimp and the second trial.

obfuscatory, self-interested. An underlying tension between uncovering and obscuring meaning appears conveniently to obscure clarity and detail on occasion: "writing can be used as topsoil for burying mistakes. Notwithstanding... that it is at the same time the maggots which lay bare the structure[....]" (171: see, for example, 337-40).

While some of the conditions of Breytenbach's imprisonment were harsh, even by the standards of political prisoners, he was also granted what Coetzee calls "odd touches of indulgence". Significantly, he was granted permission to write; the works he wrote were taken into custody on completion but returned to him on release; the censors allowed the publication of his works in South Africa. While the 'terrorist' was imprisoned the Afrikaans poet remained free (Coetzee 1992:375-81).[36] Those who were trying to destroy him also granted him a means of survival.

The official rewriting of Breytenbach was achieved to a unique extent by and through his own written words (although it should be noted that they also came to, were used in, his defence). During the interrogation Breytenbach had simply been told to 'write': as the questioning continued he was repeatedly asked to write, repeating an invented story, trying to keep track of the layers of invention and deviation. The pages piled up, into volumes; words replaced his life. For detainees, this much was not particularly unusual. But he was also interrogated about the contents of some of his creative work. Material that he attempted to smuggle out of prison was intercepted and used as evidence in the second trial to validate the charge that he had used illegal means to communicate with the outside world. Both Sachs and Breytenbach were undermined by their own written words, but while for Sachs the process was internal to the writer/detainee in the case of Breytenbach the interrogators laid claim to his written word, to him being a writer, and

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[36] Dingake reports angrily that prisoners on Robben Island were not allowed to write creatively despite the fact that this privilege had been conceded to Breytenbach (1987:181-3).

turned both into weapons to be used against him. His words became traitors and poetry "the very noose" (243, also 360).

Coetzee identifies a "hidden contestatory dialogue" as a characteristic of Breytenbach's prison poetry, and talks of the "hidden voices *against* which [he] speaks" (1991:71, see 70-7). In doing so Coetzee draws on Mikhail Bahktin's discussion of a dialogue in which what is visible and present is a response and reaction to, and is profoundly structured by, an invisible, implied presence and discourse. The hidden contestatory dialogue can be seen as a form of violent collaboration between Breytenbach and the state, of writing whilst being written. Writing from within such a context bears the multiple traces of its origins. Breytenbach says of his trial statement: "Read it - you will also hear the insidious voice of the controller in it" (1985:63). He was allowed to write even in detention and the resulting volume, called *Voetskrif* (*Footwriting*) was dedicated to his principal interrogator, Colonel Broodryk, at his insistence, according to Breytenbach: "you dedicate this to me and I allow you to have it published" (156). One poem was omitted (also see Breytenbach 1983:5).

In prison Breytenbach was allowed to write on condition that it was not shown to any other prisoner or warder, that no attempt be made to smuggle it out, that each piece be handed in for safekeeping on completion, and that all notes be destroyed. Therefore, the authorities were Breytenbach's censor, literary agent, and the guardian of all his written material.

> A bizarre situation... when you write knowing that the enemy is reading
> over your shoulder; when you have to write deeply down in yourself as
> you can because you need this to survive; writing in a desperate attempt
> to communicate with the outside, with the world, with the people closest
> to you, knowing beforehand that it cannot reach them and knowing also

that you are laying bare the most intimate and the most personal nerves
and pulsebeats in yourself to the barbarians, to the cynical ones who will
gloat over this. (1985:159)

Breytenbach wrote to outwit and elude his captors; he wrote at night, in the dark; he
wrote into a void: "Writing took on a pure shape, since it had no echo, no feedback, no
evaluation, and perhaps ultimately no existence" (161). Writing, imagining and
forgetting became blurred. In the land of the disappearing text, alone with himself, the
tendency was to end up "writing in circles, raking over clean soil, coming back to sniff
again and again at the same old sour vomit" (160).

The contradiction and compromise inherent in this process, its attendant conditions and
the uses to which such writing could potentially be put, was clear, but for Breytenbach
writing was a matter of survival. The essential principle was to continue writing, even if
only with the minimal demands of integrity that the writer places upon him/herself and
on the "umbilical cord" with the outside world/normality: "It is possible to falsify for
some time the thrust of one's words by inserting them in an environment controlled by
the enemy, but eventually - if what you write is 'true' to yourself at that moment - it will
become evident and be rectified" (158). While in prison Breytenbach not only wrote but
had books published and translated. Despite the manuscript being unfinished, and
censored within South Africa, Breytenbach agreed to the publication of the first,
Afrikaans, edition of *A Season in Paradise* (1976), because of the "need to be able to
contribute something to life outside... the urge to communicate... in order not to have
my voice cut off entirely..." (157, also 158). The hidden contestatory dialogue extended
even to material written prior to imprisonment. Breytenbach's writing and publishing
from within an alien power of writing moved beyond the notion of a contest between
competing powers of writing, or any dialogue of a contestatory nature, to a relationship

where the difference between competition, dependence and collaboration/complicity was often blurred.

Writing had still further dimensions. While in prison, Breytenbach's "function in terms of his usefulness to the inmate community", was defined in terms of him being their "scribe" (163-8). The scribe had to be able to write for all occasions: letters; poems; translations; applications for jobs; requests to the authorities of various kinds - for mercy, parole, release, transfer; and so on.

> So I was continuously inventing their lives too... You name it. I am the
> writer... they were quite convinced that whatever life I could invent for
> them would be far better than the one they had... And some came and
> wanted me to write their life stories... there are as many novels in there
> as there are human beings going to hell. (165-6)[37]

It was as a writer that Breytenbach found his most significant point of self-definition: "I write: I am the writer" (154). He used his talent as a writer as a saleable skill and a consciously double-edged weapon in his struggle for survival:

> Writing becomes for me a means, a way of survival. I have to cut up my
> environment in digestible chunks. Writing is an extension of my senses.
> It is itself a sense which permits me to grasp, to understand, and to some
> extent to integrate that which is happening to me... But at the same time I
> realize that it becomes the exteriorization of my imprisonment. My
> writing bounces off the walls. The maze of words... these themselves
> constitute the walls of my confinement. I write my own castle and it

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[37] Breytenbach was also a scribe for members of the prison authorities (168-71).

becomes a frightening discovery: it is unbalancing something very deeply embedded in yourself when you in reality construct, through your scribblings, your own mirror. Because in this mirror you write hair by hair and pore by pore your own face, and you don't like what you see. You don't even recognise it. It won't let you out again[....] Who am I? Where and who was I before this time?" (155-6)

The word was the source of survival and of (self-)destruction; it was a means of escape and of confinement; it could represent, replace, maintain and transcend reality; it was his reality.

In *True Confessions* Breytenbach stresses the need to purge himself of his prison experiences - to burn, vomit - to tell everything in the hope that this would allow him to put events out of his mind forever: "You write on in an attempt to erase" (155). The outcome was the word and text as an "interstice of freedom" (337). But it is an ambiguous freedom. Writing about prison after his release, Breytenbach conjures a figure on the page, in the image of the mirror, on the page as mirror, which confounds and mocks his attempts to see himself clearly - as Sachs found the self is not the self-image - and tells him, as the interrogator had previously told him, to try again. This process begins with *True Confessions*, a book which Breytenbach dictated:

And then, this same process is an open-ended one... this jumbletalk, this trial... Here I am. Here the truth is also. I hope, Mr Investigator, that that is what you expect of me. Because, you know, you could force me to deny whatever I say immediately after having said it; and you could probably force me to start all over again. I can tell you in advance that if I were to do that it would come out differently; it would be different; I'd no longer be there; I'd be somebody else - as sincere, as keen to help, as

obsessed by the necessity to confess... Listen to me. I shall confess. (13-14)

The writer before the page/mirror and the co-operative detainee/prisoner under interrogation have become one. In the dialogue/interrogation/trial between self and page/mirror the truth, a different truth, will emerge. Breytenbach attempts to bring together the often mutually antagonistic doubles and paradoxes of his identity and life in the page/mirror. Coetzee argues that the attempt, which takes place in *Mouroir*, to merge the self and the mirror-self, to achieve reconciliation, is unsuccessful. "Instead, a new surface recurs at every turn, becoming a point of entry into yet another branch of the labyrinth... he has deferred the confrontation with his twin, and further has turned this deferring into a model of textual production" (1991:80). The central images are the mirror and the labyrinth. Wherever Breytenbach looks he sees reflections of himself; the search for the self is endless. On the basis of the interrogational encounter, when the life story was returned and repeated, Breytenbach has constructed the written confession as a creative strategy without end. Almost a decade later, frustrated by phantoms from his dreams and past, he was to write: "My journeys have become embarrassing confessions" (1993:189). Breytenbach has tried to incorporate the censor/ persecutor/policeman into himself, into the process of composition - as the figure in the page/mirror - and 'manage' them in that way, and, in so doing, to turn the confrontation into a textually productive dialogue (see Coetzee 1991:77-84).[38]

Breytenbach, having been a prisoner, "would remain one in [his] mind" (1985:304, also 283), and as a result continues to return to the "same old sour vomit" of imprisonment. It has become a motif in his writing, a part of his world view, a universal condition, something he will carry with him always: "all these walled cities of incarceration

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[38] On bringing an end to confession, see Coetzee 1992:251-93.

became blurred and concentrated in my mind as *The Place*. *The Place* also grew on the page. Not as if there were any such thing as exorcism" (1996:161). One of Breytenbach's characters, Mano, writes from prison in South Africa:

> I am an integral part of a self-repeating whole. I am in prison, I have
>
> always been here, I shall always be here, even beyond my death. The
>
> story, the play, will continue. At most I could say that had I not been here
>
> it would have been slightly different. And since no real change can take
>
> place, everything becomes conceivable. (1989:257-8)

Breytenbach is inescapably part of an ongoing imprisonment narrative, and in the chapters he inhabits while no real change takes place, everything becomes conceivable.

In large part this is because the self becomes variously, or what Coetzee describes as "multiply", double (1991:79); the self and/as 'other': detainee-terrorist and interrogator, oppressed and oppressor. The writer/written embraces interrogator/censor/audience and detainee-confessor/writer, confession/confessor and autobiography/autobiographer, the written word as a means of salvation and destruction, and various powers of writing. An entire world view is constructed in this way. In the overlapping networks of writing Breytenbach rewrites the conceptual framework within which imprisonment is conceived. Deny oppositions, read one in the other, and go beyond. Relevant oppositions include freedom and captivity, survival and death, resistance and submission, heroism and betrayal, truth and fiction. Deprived of clear boundaries and familiar certainties upon which to base control the state is deprived of power and the prisoner, or at least this prisoner, is empowered, to locate 'interstices of freedom' and by the horizon of that which lies beyond.

However, such a process also has its dangers because the prisoner-writer is also deprived of clear boundaries and familiar certainties upon which to base resistance. The danger of attempting to incorporate and 'manage' all things - including diverse powers of writing - within the self, of dialogue and the elision of difference, are of an excess of identification, however ironic this may sometimes seek to be, of understanding too much and seeking to speak from inside too many things. The confessor and interrogator in *True Confessions* are equally fragmented, mirror-images, even, apparently, the same. Such a fluidity and indeterminacy is incapacitating with reference to the choices required for political action. In this context the question must be: who is getting inside the head of, taking possession of, whom? Breytenbach's dialogue is increasingly with and within himself, a self-interrogation in which the hidden voices against which he speaks are his own demons. It is a dialogue of questionable value, both politically and creatively, which takes place at an ever growing distance from the reality he seeks to engage. Breytenbach has exhausted the confession of its capacity for illumination and release.

Being able to write in prison, Breytenbach wrote with, against and through the official text. Official control and power was open to tremendous manipulation. Opposing powers of writing were locked together in a relationship of antagonism, dependence, and complicity/collaboration, within a fraught and contested process that spanned interrogation; the conditions in which Breytenbach wrote; what he wrote about and the way he wrote about it; the fate of his work both inside and outside the prison walls; and his role as a scribe for both prison inmates and prison authorities. All of Breytenbach's writing in and about prison is in a way violently collaborative, haunted by the shadow of the 'other' and/as self.

Hugh Lewin and 'The Kommies'

> It is as though delimitation itself were the bridge that opens the inside to its other. (de Certeau 1984:129)

While the task of retaining or recreating something of one's own world in enemy territory was immeasurably difficult for the detainee or prisoner in isolation there was, predictably, greater safety in numbers. Breytenbach's move from Pretoria Maximum Security Prison to Pollsmoor Prison heralded a significant improvement in his prison conditions, perhaps most importantly including interaction with other prisoners. But he was never considered 'normal'. Normal white and black male prisoners went to Local/ Pretoria Prison and Robben Island respectively, where they were held in groups and consequently had a very different experience of imprisonment.[39]

Hugh Lewin was held for 84 days as a 90-day detainee before being charged under the Sabotage Act. He was subjected to two interrogations. Initially he was made to stand and deprived of sleep and eventually made a 'managed' statement. In its aftermath he felt like "debris" (1976:31). A second interrogation followed the bombing of Johannesburg railway station by a fellow member of the African Resistance Movement (ARM). This time the tone was different, there were threats to kill him and he and others were assaulted. He divulged further information in an attempt to stop the beating. Lewin was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment in December 1964, most of which he spent at Local Prison, latterly in a new section built especially for white political prisoners. However, nearly 18 months into his sentence, he and the other white politicals were moved to Central Prison, also in Pretoria, for a period of eight months. While at Local Prison they had been isolated as a group of white politicals in an

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[39] Women political prisoners were also segregated by race, and over the time period under consideration were held at a variety of different prisons.

otherwise black jail, for this brief period they entered the cauldron of Central Prison where they had to establish a niche among the diversity of convicted white criminals. The crucial components of Lewin's prison experience and identity were being among a peer group of white political prisoners and the period at Central Prison when this group were initiated into prison society and, in a sense, into South African society. He was released in November 1971 after serving his sentence in full. Four days after his release he left the country for England.

The composition of the group of white political prisoners changed over time: Lewin met 26 fellow-prisoners in all, the group never at any time exceeded 21 and by the time he was released had declined to nine. Among them were some of South Africa's most prominent white political prisoners (Bram Fischer, Denis Goldberg). The symbolic importance of this community of prisoners for apartheid, for the non-racial credentials of the ANC and for the future of whites in/and South Africa, outweighed its numerical strength: "and the authorities knew this. The fact that there were whites in prison for political offences... actually undermined their whole philosophy" (Schoon interview). It also played a significant role in the struggles of the wider community of (political) prisoners. By facilitating participation in a community the transition from detainee to convicted political prisoner helped to restore ties to a past life and world. As a partial counter to the terrible isolation and loneliness of imprisonment, Marius Schoon talks of

> the incredible support... from comrades in prison... [they] are actually
> one of my major reference groups, also one of my major support groups.
> Even people that I have some sort of political difference with, I know
> that if I'm in trouble and I pick up the phone and I speak to them,
> something will be done; and it will be big things if necessary... I mean
> that was one of the really positive things about prison which will stay
> with me all my life. (interview)

Lewin describes the group as "united in their opposition to the outside regime... yet often fiercely combative of their own personal or political perspectives" and as the "South African Left in a nutshell... a basketfull of itching hedgehogs" (1994:5). There was, therefore, an often precarious balance between the solidarity among prisoners united in their opposition to the authorities, both inside and outside, and various forms of friction - "We disagreed about almost everything except for our hatred of the existing regime" (Hirson 1995:2, also 139,141,247) - as the following quotations illustrate:

> Very early on we formed... a committee called recce, came from
> Recreation Committee... which was basically the sort of executive...
> people were elected and each one had a constituency... it grew... as... the
> society grew... and... started organising itself. And it was absolutely...
> key. And it had to do with, obviously with prison conditions... with the
> sort of submissions that we prepared... a running list of key things... big
> issues in terms of our daily lives, in terms of improvement... our
> treatment... but at the same time it became a way of not controlling, but
> certainly... sort of keeping at an even keel, the considerable differences
> that were within the group... there was a huge and very intense political,
> ideological battle between say Moscow and Peking... To a certain, much
> lesser extent, there were the sort of old liberal ideologues, who were
> outside the group. But the main intensity was between the party people...
> And recce actually functioned very well in terms of maintaining some
> sort of semblance of unanimity within the group... it was a stop gap... a
> sort of valve for expressions. (Lewin interview)

> There was a kind of political committee... people's morale was observed,
> and steps were taken in very self-conscious ways often to ensure that an
> individual didn't get lost to the group, or become isolated... [it was] part

of... making our own space more liberated... in prison I read... Colin

Turnbull's *The Forest People*... [about a] Pygmy band in the Congo rain

forests... and he describes the micro behaviour of a hunter-gatherer band.

We'd evolved in Pretoria prison almost an identical code... for the same

reasons... And he describes what happens when quarrels break out, even

if one person is clearly wrong... they don't all side with the one that's

right, they split almost evenly... and talk it through with them and

reassure them, and re-establish stability and so on. They're all sort of

things that had evolved within the prison... we would always have people

that were more problematic, politically or psychologically... that would

require special attention... lots of its [the committee's] time was occupied

on behaviour... someone would launch a one person hunger strike... that

would then disrupt a carefully laid campaign around some issue where

trying to isolate a particular warder... Tensions would develop, and it

was very very important to manage those... we could do grievous damage

to each other... Before I got there there was one person who... came into

prison very demoralised, personality complexities, and was then

persuaded to report to the authorities on what was going on... and the guy

eventually... took a lighted cigarette or a match to his eyes, Thoms, a

really tragic case. When I got there that was a strong part of oral

tradition... it was very hard to handle that one because he was actually...

reporting... to the cops. Realised retrospectively that they had done the

wrong thing, they had isolated him and that made him a constant running

sore for the group, because he was a part of them but they didn't include

him... We had a very integrationist approach, very strong integrationist

approach. (Cronin interview)[40]

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[40] Also see Hirson 1995:141,248,348-9, Jenkin 1987:95-6.

So the group sought social cohesion and organisation to fight loneliness and provide mutual support, to manage internal tensions, to present a united front to the authorities and fight for improvements in conditions.

Needless to say, over the years this community evolved and changed, and internal fractures were, on occasion, too deep for the established mechanisms to contain. Examples of periods of heightened tension included the above-mentioned occasion when a member of the group, Raymond Thoms, worked with the regime (Lewin 1976:99-101, Hirson 1995:4-6,73-4,141,265,267-8, Jenkin 1987:82); signs of group disintegration towards the end of the period at Central Prison (Lewin interview, also see Hirson 1995:95,343-4); divisions caused by the successful escape in 1979 of Tim Jenkin, Alex Moumbaris and Stephen Lee (Jenkin 1987);[41] and, the rift over how to respond to President Botha's 1985 offer of release, conditional upon the renunciation of violence (Niehaus 1994:133-7).

Another manifestation of the pattern of division/fragmentation and community/linkage was that prison, according to Lewin, was a "complete world, a life complete in itself, without reference to anything outside itself" (1976:50); but later he notes that it was also a mirror of society, particularly with reference to its inherent corruption, violence and inhumanity (152-3,176-7).[42] Many facets of this fascinating continuity and change

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[41] In addition to the frictions generated by planning and preparing for an escape attempt, the aftermath, even if and perhaps particularly if the attempt was successful, was also profoundly ambiguous. While the successful escape struck a blow for the forces of resistance, it also had negative implications for political prisoners, those who assisted both inside and outside, and family and friends (Jenkin 1987:131,154,173-4,200,211-12,221,223,225-6,231-40, Levitan in Bernstein 1994:271-8, Wolpe 1994). In the aftermath of the escape by Jenkin, Moumbaris and Lee, for example, the harassment of the remaining white politicals included their removal from Pretoria Prison to 'Beverley Hills' (Central Prison), where they spent a harrowing period as neighbours to those on death row. Meanwhile Pretoria Prison was refurbished and its security improved. They returned to a harsher, more barren environment. The white political prisoners were divided into smaller groups, relationships and the community were shattered, isolation increased and the intensities of small group living were exacerbated (Jenkin 1987:231, Niehaus 1994:126-8,134).

at the interface between prison and wider society were a new experience for the white political prisoner. In this regard, the period spent at Central Prison was crucial.

On arrival at Central Prison, Lewin describes the politicals as being "absolute innocents" and "softies, lost in a society such as Central" (106,129).[43] The "kommies" (129), as they were known at Central Prison, gained cohesion through their previous isolation as a group, but also due to the group's distinctive profile. This included the reasons for their imprisonment, a firm belief in their collective innocence and a pride in themselves and their actions, particular and harsh conditions of imprisonment, and the social and political ways in which they stood out from the rest of the prison population. Particularly in Central Prison, where a person's crime was their key to the society, a sense of community served as a life support system for these chronically atypical prisoners. To be a member of a recognised group was important for a number of reasons, perhaps most importantly, for protection. From his eight months in Central Prison, Lewin was able to construct a sense of the mechanics and practices of prison society. It was dangerous to trust anyone and nothing was of value unless it could be traded: tobacco, dagga, bodies, friendships, information - all were commodities. The authorities tolerated, indeed often encouraged and participated in, such activities. This society was to a large extent structured around smuggling (tobacco, dagga), sex, 'narks' (informers), and so on.[44] In Central Prison the 'softies' lost their innocence.

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[42] Breytenbach also depicts prison as a coherent entity in itself - "a world with its own culture - language, customs, laws, myths, structures" (1985:346), "a world apart with its particular castes and culture and language, its own reality, in fact" (272, also 1996:161) - and a world that in a variety of ways reflects South African society (see "A Note on South African Prisons", 1985:345-8). In a way that perhaps links continuity and change, Hirson indicates that for the political prisoner imprisonment concentrated, intensified, and exaggerated the societal, political and the personal (1995:160-1,246-8,349). According to Schoon these processes encompassed both positive and negative elements: "To me prison was a microcosm both of the worst and the best in South Africa" (interview).

[43] For another interpretation of this period at Central Prison, see Hirson 1995:95-6,328,341-4.

[44] Breytenbach had a not dissimilar experience at Pollsmoor Prison, where for the first time he was "inserted in a prison community" (1985:263), "plunged... into the complete prison universe" (276). The chapter entitled "I Was in Pollsmoor" (261-309) contains

As a part of the process of initiation into the corrupt and corrupting atmosphere of Central Prison, oppression had to be lived in totally unfamiliar ways. At Local Prison they had always been aware of the privileged treatment granted to them as whites within a largely black prison. In Central, with its predominantly white inmate population, the political prisoners formed an unlikely alliance with the roughest prisoners of all, hardened criminals and murderers, the old-timers who had rebelled against the corruption of prison society and often had extremely tarnished records (129-33, also Breytenbach 1985:292). The latter group, with whom the politicals shared an antipathy towards authority and government, provided protection for the politicals and together they were the lowest, least privileged members of prison society, the resident 'blacks'. Lewin writes about his prison experience:

> I am also glad that I have been through it... I cannot regret that this has happened to me... it was only as a prisoner - as a bandiet in a South African jail - that I could begin to realize what life is like for most South Africans. I am white. I had to go inside to know what it's like to be black. (1976:14, also 129-31,137-8)

What does Lewin mean by this? Political prisoners constituted the section of a particular society who were both the least privileged and had the least chance of advancement. They were inherently guilty with all that that entailed in terms of victimisation and oppression. Prison provided an insight, through participation, into a criminalised society that oppressed people for what they were rather than for what they had done and in which to survive it was necessary to fight and cheat the system, to find ways of beating it, to become a criminal: "You must, to survive prison, become a

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many descriptions of the prison inmates and Breytenbach's relationships with them, and a dissection of the constituent components of the prison (271-8).

successful criminal. Only as a practising crook can you gain any comfort for yourself or retain any sense of personal dignity. It is this complete denial of normal social behaviour and accepted morality which makes prison so different from Outside..." (50). The criminalised and imprisoned prison society was a microcosm of the criminalised and imprisoned South African society. Lewin came to understand that the logical outcome of an underclass status was a solidarity forged through common suffering, but also frustration, resentment, desperation and anger.

While there is considerable irony in this scenario, it remains valid: that it was in a white environment, by learning about and living through the implications of being at the wrong end of its heterogeneity, categorisations, hierarchies, discriminations, and arbitrary violence, that Lewin came to acquire an understanding of what it meant to be 'black'.[45]

This sense of experiential solidarity translated into an authentic position from which to write, and even into a feeling of creative liberation, for a number of white political prisoners.[46] Cronin claims that his lyrical leanings, that had been silenced as his political involvement grew outside, found expression inside prison: "But my love / to be removed / jailed, endorsed out, banished / man from woman is / After all / nothing unusual in this / Our country, in these times..." ("Itchy with its...", 1987:75, also 73):

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[45] Other white political prisoners describe similar sentiments. Breytenbach states: "I know. I know what it is like to be black in a white country" (1985:27). And again: "I feel I can identify from within with all the poor bastards of that ravaged country... Prison has destroyed the barriers and broken the stays... I am the syntax of the people. The tense and the tenseness (1986:208-9, also see Blumberg 1962:148-9, Stephanie Kemp in Sachs 1968:182, and Jenkin 1987:175). Clearly imprisonment was not the only experience that enabled whites to feel this paradoxical sense of outcast solidarity, but equally clearly no other experience forged the solidarity so comprehensively.

[46] This is Marius Schoon: "I actually found that I was being remarkably creative... I... feel I did some of my best writing in prison... something else that prison did for me, which was a very liberating thing... partly because of the contact that we had on a day to day basis with Bram Fischer, partly because of seeing the thinking of other comrades that I was in prison with, for the first time since I'd been at university, I felt emotionally liberated enough to be writing in Afrikaans again, which I had deliberately not done. So, for me, from a creative point of view, prison was actually a very liberating experience". (interview)

my lyrical voice... was very contorted before getting into prison... but I
think being a voice on the wrong side... on the under-privileged side of
the apartheid spatial arrangements, which I hadn't had before as a white,
outside, sort of gave me a confidence, a lyrical voice... Gave me what I
felt was an authentic position to speak from, where the lyrical feeling,
love, sexuality, whatever, was connected to a majority position, albeit at
the time I was a minority of a minority of a minority where I was [laughs].
But somehow that minority of a minority connected to a broader
solidarity, and gained quite a lot of confidence [...] of writing from that
position... I felt I could speak... as a victim of apartheid with
authenticity... I didn't... before then, I just felt that it was an indulgence...
Neruda's got a lovely phrase about poetry, lyrical poetry's about sort of
finding solidarity in solitude... (interview)

Cronin wrote in part at least, as an act of faith, for performance, for a black audience, in
a South African English and in an attempt to participate in forging a shared national
culture.[47] The political imprisonment of whites, in a context where their incarceration
was to use Cronin's words both exceptional and exemplary, facilitated a solidarity and
participation that went beyond ideological or theoretical sympathies to a form of political
and creative authority and liberation. As Gordimer writes, "There is no moral authority
like that of sacrifice" (1989:294, also Lazarus 1986-87: especially 146). The state can
also, therefore, be said to have contributed to rewriting white political prisoners, by the
very act of imprisonment, in unexpected and unintended ways, as 'blacks', and in ways
that were politically and creatively empowering.

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[47] Cronin 1986:15-17, also see 14,18-19,23.

A further manifestation of becoming 'black' was the presence of death at Central Prison due to its function as South Africa's hanging jail. Rose Moss writes the following about the character David Miller in her novel *The Schoolmaster*:

> The prison began to sing for him... The harmonies sweeping round him eroding his separateness. They were singing for him as though he would die the death of an African convict. They were singing as though he lived his last days now with them, in their prison, their condition, their endurance... Hour after hour their song held him and comforted him, and protected him... It was death, but they knew death. It was loneliness, but they knew... It was fear, but they knew... They knew... But, they assured him, the power was theirs. *Nagawethu*, They welcomed him. The power was his also. Their power was his power... He was white in South Africa, and the Africans were singing for him. They made him himself and more than himself. They included him in their history. They found an echo of their lives in his life. Under one law. (1981:236-7)[48]

Those condemned to death were disproportionately black, the only blacks in an otherwise all-white jail. Blacks were only allowed to enter this white prison society to die, but the presence of black death, of black death at the hands of the white state, was pervasive, enveloping. Its most enduring symbol was the singing of the condemned: "They were there, the inescapable chanting centre of the prison, usually unseen, always present" (Lewin 1976:148). Death was something that had to be lived with. "It was like living with a murdered man permanently in the front room of your home... You cannot

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[48] For Lewin to live amidst the procedures and atmosphere of official killing took on added poignancy because his friend, and fellow member of the ARM, John Harris, had been hanged there in 1965. While a work of fiction, Moss' novel draws on certain aspects of the Harris story.

get away from it... This was the most terrifying thing about Central... Not that it was difficult to live there, but that it was so easy..." (148, also 153). Only after being held at Central did Lewin "realize, fully, the utter horror of capital punishment" (152). Capital punishment provides a return to the linkages between prison and wider society. As a site of criminalisation and violence, Central Prison distilled the essence of apartheid: "the violence inherent in the laws of apartheid... this violence has its natural counterpart at Central in the gallows, the essential symbols of official violence" (153).

As noted in the earlier discussion of 'The Gleek', Lewin left a great deal out of his original prison account. The calculated omissions included strengths, such as the forms and degree of organisation, support and solidarity - "Hugh wrote his book very carefully, those strengthening things didn't come out, he didn't want the authorities to be able to try to break them" (Schoon interview) - and weaknesses, such as an analysis of personalities and differences within the group. An important implicit acknowledgement in this strategy is how easy it would have been for weaknesses to be exploited and for strengths, such as 'The Gleek' or forms of smuggling, to be turned against the prisoner community. Prisoners were still inside, the community was still in existence, and Lewin's prison narrative, like many others, was written very carefully, 'managed' in accordance with a time- and place-specific political purpose. It was a 'half-told' narrative, and consequently a 'half-known' story. With the fall of apartheid, the context of writing and reception has changed: "what I'm trying to do... is to put it in novel form so it's not identified with any particular character... [a]nd at the same time raise the sort of issues that were there: the weaknesses, the irritations...", and also to address other omissions in *Bandiet* such as the possibilities for co-operation suggested by the sometimes surprising alliances forged within prison (Lewin interview). These writings and rewritings of the prison experience suggest a concern less with self-interrogation than with forging alliances and community building - between black and white, factions

of the left, criminals and politicals - within prison, within South Africa as a whole, and in

ways that linked the two.

Despite their political commitment white political activists remained privileged within

South African society. While this sense of privilege was maintained in some prison

contexts it was removed and reversed in others. This, in conjunction with the still

pervasive ideology of apartheid, contributed to the layered experience of continuity and

change. Imprisonment provided Lewin with an insight into new dimensions of what it

meant to be a South African, into what South Africa was like for the majority of its

inhabitants, as he lived some of the discriminations of an oppressive order. It forced him

to become a member of an underclass.[49] And Lewin used his reformulated identity, the

experience of being 'black' in a society ravaged by official violence, to ask uncomfortable

questions - if the opponents of the regime or of authority could work together inside why

couldn't they do so outside? - and to contest official discourse, notably on the

relationship between prisoners, between prison and societal context and, most

importantly, on the prevailing social and political order.[50] Lewin sang for the disinherited

and the outsiders with a particular kind of insight and intensity: the insight and intensity

of having had to live that which previously had only been imaginatively shared in a more

abstract manner.[51] In the process he explored the possibility of a more encompassing

sense of solidarity and belonging, of being South African.

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[49] Lewin appears to advocate imprisonment: for others to go to prison and to learn what life was like for the majority of South Africans would be "good"; while he believed that "any person, in any society, should know what it is like to live in a hanging jail" (14).

[50] Barbara Harlow has argued - particularly but not exclusively in relation to women's prison writing - that autobiographical prison accounts rewrite the social order and the categorisations and discriminations on which it is based, in the light of a broader political vision and struggle (1987:117-53).

[51] In a portrait of a white American jazz singer, Sheila Jordan, Lewis Nkosi claims that her musical power in part derived from "the fact that though white Sheila is really 'a Negro'... I cannot tell whether she is Negro by choice or through circumstance, but I have been a Negro long enough to recognise another Negro when I see one - even under a white skin. She sings ultimately for the disinherited, the outsiders..." (1965:76).

On the basis of the preceding readings of prison autobiographies it becomes possible to contemplate the most dramatic exchange at the interface of prison and society, one that goes beyond a shared oppression to a shared humanisation and liberation. What kind of prison community, what kind of societal transition and transformation, was required for the (re)vision of a South Africa articulated through and from the experience of imprisonment to achieve a material reality in a changing society? To begin to answer this question it is instructive to turn to the Robben Island phenomenon.

Robben Island

> State repression designed to destroy individuals paradoxically forged collectivity. The prison is to state repression what the factory was to capitalist exploitation - it aggregates, homogenizes, and fosters communication. (Abel 1995:254)

Imprisonment presents political activists and movements with the ultimate transformative challenge: the site of the worst extremes of oppression can be transformed into a symbol of political resistance; into a symbol of an alternative societal vision. The essential meaning of Robben Island, which must inform an understanding of its uneven evolution from 'hell-hole' to 'university', resides in the extraordinary power of one such symbol. Transformation depended upon the collective power of prisoners. This transformation was in part achieved and disseminated within and through the power of writing, and is comprehensively articulated in autobiographical accounts. These accounts communicate the sense of a community at once oppressed and destined to assume power.[52]

Political prisoners held on Robben Island between about 1962 and 1966 experienced

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[52] This message is a recurrent theme despite the fact that autobiographical accounts from Robben Island cover a range of perspectives: short and long term prisoners serving time during different eras on the island; varying political affiliations; and experience in different sections of the prison.

the most barbaric prison conditions perpetrated under apartheid. A number of factors coincided to facilitate Robben Island as 'hell-hole', including the often arbitrary hostility, racism and brutality of white warders - "The racial divide on Robben Island was absolute: there were no black warders, and no white prisoners" (N. Mandela 1995:459) - the race and class conflicts implicit in their encounter with a new type of black prisoner; the deliberate use of common-law prisoners and gangs as intermediaries of control; racially discriminatory and inadequate food and clothing; and hard labour, perhaps most notoriously associated with work in the quarries. Autobiographical accounts document numerous examples of ill-treatment, inadequate medical attention, and unnecessary/violent deaths. Extreme violence was the essential characteristic of Robben Island during this period. One incident of violence is given prominence by a number of the prison accounts, including that by Zwelonke:

> Mr Mlambo, a twenty-year-stretch man, a short man, was made to dig a pit big enough to fit him. Unaware of what was to follow, he was still digging when he was suddenly overwhelmed by a group of convicts. They shoved him into the pit and started filling it up... When they had finished, only Mlambo's head appeared above the ground. A white warder who had directed the whole business, urinated into Mlambo's mouth. The convicts tried to open his tight-locked jaws, but could not... When the warders had finished, his face was covered with piss. Then vicious blows of fists and boots rained around the defenceless head sticking out of the ground... When they were tired of the fun, they left him to help himself out of his grave. (1973:14)[53]

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[53] Also see Dlamini 1984:26,59,65, Naidoo 1982:82-3.

Buntman has argued that combating the physical conditions that threatened the very survival of prisoners on Robben Island was the primary form of resistance in which prisoners had to engage before they were able to extend their struggle to the advancement/development/renewal of individuals and organisations. The improvement of conditions was a fundamental precondition for, and allowed prisoners to concentrate on, using their imprisonment as productively as possible (see Buntman 1996:93-111).

A second era on Robben Island lasted from roughly 1966 until 1976-77. In the words of Naidoo the change was from a situation of "the chains bound" to one where "the chains loosened". Various improvements in facilities and conditions took place: work conditions became less unpleasant, medical facilities were upgraded, and common-law prisoners, a privileged class, were gradually removed from the island. Political prisoners were able to occupy vacated intermediate positions of power and control which could be used to enhance their well-being and unity rather than to destabilise and undermine. While the food remained both inadequate and of a poor standard, and racially discriminatory provision was a major point of contention, Dingake notes that when the kitchen was taken over by political prisoners food preparation improved (1987:211, also N. Mandela 1995:598-9). A further characteristic of this period was that the balance of power among the political prisoner population shifted. Many short-term prisoners were released or moved to other prisons and relatively few new inmates arrived on the island. The result was a much more stable prison community increasingly dominated by the ANC.

The reason for the change that took place at the end of the 1960s is difficult to identify categorically. The authorities may have felt that the previous brutal regime had failed to break the political prisoners, feared the politicisation and even recruitment of the criminals - there is evidence of political prisoners influencing the broader prison population both during the early period on Robben Island and when the group of white

politicals moved to Central Prison[54] - and/or they may have been wary of adverse,

particularly international, publicity. In conjunction with external developments and

initiatives a political space was gradually being created from within the prison itself,

with the result that prisoners were able to begin to mobilise more organised resistance

themselves. In this context the 1966 hunger strike was a turning point. According to

Dlamini it was organised with the aims of addressing grievances including food,

clothing and shoes, work conditions and inhuman and brutal treatment. Significant

concessions were made and although some were later retracted and the supposed

ringleaders were severely punished, things on the island had changed: "whatever the

authorities did to us, they could never take away our sense of victory, or our sense of

power... somehow the atmosphere on the island was never exactly the same as it had

been before" (Naidoo 1982:174-5).[55]

While progress overall was uneven, for example in relation to studying, and some

grievances, such as access to news, had not been addressed, in general the enemy had

changed: "Before, our enemy had been physical cruelty, now it was boredom, isolation,

the psychological decay of an endlessly unproductive and confined existence" (Naidoo

1982:248). When Dingake arrived on Robben Island in 1966 facilities and provisions

that might have eased boredom and isolation for political prisoners remained "grim":

"Officially, prisoners were entitled to one letter in six months, one visit in six months,

no photos, no games, no sport and no other things" (Dingake 1987:191). However, as

conditions eased sporting/recreational activities expanded and a cultural renaissance

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[54] On the politicisation/education of common-law prisoners by female political prisoners, see Makhoere 1988:99,101-4,111-15; also see La Guma 1967.

[55] Also on the hunger strike see Dingake 1987:140-1, Dlamini 1984:181-93, Naidoo 1982:164-75, Zwelonke 1973:129-43. Through the inadequacy and inequality of its provision, its withdrawal as a means of punishment, and its voluntary refusal as a means of protest, food became a weapon that could be used by both the authorities and prisoners (Buntman 1996:101-2). On the ambiguity of the hunger strike as a weapon for political prisoners, see N. Mandela 1995:502-3. Generally on the reasons for improved conditions on Robben Island, see Buntman 1996:106-11, 181 footnote 13.

took place. Among the emerging cultural forms were vocal groups and choirs, plays (see Fugard et al. 1974), and bands, often organised in concerts.[56] Later, however, all choirs were allegedly banned without explanation. Naidoo provides a particularly rich insight into the activities in which he played an organisational role. He was Secretary of the Makana Football Association (or Mr. Assoc. as he reputedly became known) and describes the development of football until 26 sides played in three divisions. Football was followed by a whole range of other games and sporting activities. Once films began to be shown he became secretary of the Film Society. There is evidence both of prisoner ingenuity and increased organisation in the field of recreation and culture and the familiar arbitrariness in the way such activities were facilitated and obstructed by the authorities.[57] Although over time it proved difficult to maintain standards and interest, these activities played a vital role in sustaining mental/physical alertness and morale, as a source of release and escape, and as a unifying agent. Robben Island was a poignant example of a prisoner community displaying determination and inventiveness when reduced, often repeatedly, to nothing, individually and collectively, by continually reinventing a meaningful life and world; by (re)creating forms of contact, comfort, stimulation, and recreation.

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[56] The cultural and political role of song for black prisoners on Robben Island, on death row and elsewhere, is worthy of particular note. Songs appear to have performed a variety of functions on the island from entertainment, to the regulation of work and the boosting of morale.

[57] On the above mentioned examples/recreation see Dingake 1987:208-10, Dlamini 1984:170-6, N. Mandela 1995:535,539-41,581-4,596-8, also 614-15,625, and Naidoo 1982:176-7,182-3,204-7,219-23,229-33,247-9; also on sport and recreation, see Buntman 1996:115-20. White male prisoners displayed a similar degree of innovation and creativity in devising activities in the face of arbitrary interference: see Lewin 1976:98,183,186-7,191-201,220-1, also Hirson 1995:3,266-7,348, and Jenkin 1987:140-5. As has already been mentioned, improvements in prison conditions were uneven, liberalisation non-linear, characterised by arbitrary and destabilising regression and permanent struggle. Conditions on the island were influenced, among other things, by personal caprice, successive prison regimes, by the turnover and humanising of warders, and there is evidence that improvements coincided with the appointment of better educated and more humane warders. One period of regression took place during the Colonel Badenhorst regime in the early 1970s, while another accompanied the transition to his namesake, Major Badenhorst who arrived in 1981, from the relatively liberal four year reign of Colonel Harding (Buntman 1996:98-9,111,139; also on change and its unevenness on Robben Island, see N. Mandela 1995:512-3,535-6,543-51,568-9,581-2,593,596-9,602).

Any attempt to define the meaning and significance of this period on the island needs to recognise that many of the changes, especially in the areas of culture and sport, may have been 'allowed' and even encouraged in order to pre-empt and diffuse more threatening forms of resistance. From this perspective reform can be seen as an attempt to co-opt and provide reassurance to inmates while providing a superficial veneer of reasonableness to the outside world (see Young 1987:417-18). On the island, however, the picture was complicated by the fact that both sides sought to influence and manipulate this complex process. Dingake's perceptive account gives some insight to the ways in which the prisoners sought to deal with, and indeed participate in and use to their own advantage, the acknowledged dilemma of carefully managed reform. For example, he describes the controversy among prisoners about whether to accept football facilities caused by the fact that this was one of their lesser priorities. However, while seeing it as "cheap propaganda to disguise the quintessential conditions on Robben Island", the offer was accepted and used as a lever for further improvements (Dingake 1987:209-10).

Dingake refers to Robben Island as "a laboratory of a major political experiment": a range of variables were manipulated by the authorities, initially mainly physical and violent in nature and then in this period more subtle and psychological. The evolution of conditions was bound up in a fluid balance of power involving the government, prison inmates and the outside world. But as Dingake notes, by the time of his release the experiment was not yet over (203).

Academic and political education had taken place from the early years on Robben Island - there were, for example, literacy campaigns during the 1960s (see Buntman 1996:112-14,126-8,157) - but the period after 1976-77 has gained notoriety as the era when Robben Island became "the site of an extraordinary programme of political education" (Bundy in Mbeki 1991:xix). The prison writings of Govan Mbeki

illuminatingly reflect this development. They are a collection of some of his contributions to the political education programme, written, circulated and preserved in prison. The writings formed part of debates on the island and were intended to be read by prisoners. They reflect Mbeki's life, experience and beliefs, and are therefore of considerable autobiographical and historical importance.[58]

From the late 1970s the balance within the prison population on the island was severely disrupted, firstly, by the arrival of Black Consciousness supporters after the Soweto uprising, and then by an influx of MK members. Competition for recruitment and the relatively unsophisticated political understanding of many of these newcomers made a formalisation of political education necessary for the ANC. Its sympathisers needed a knowledge of their own history and the struggle against apartheid, not least so that they could counter the claims of rival political groups on the island. Many of the new prisoners exemplified the condition summed up earlier by Zwelonke: "As soon as I awoke from my political sleep I found I was in the struggle, and as soon as I began to understand the nature of the struggle I was in prison" (1973:9).[59]

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[58] The introduction to this collection, by Colin Bundy, provides background to the political education programme and is drawn on extensively below.

[59] Buntman states, in relation to the period between 1977 and 1980, that most of the post-1976 arrivals identified with or were members of Black Consciousness groupings, although their political identification was often not very strong. These militant youths joined a prison community that was stable and ageing, and to some degree resigned, bored and self-saturated, deflated by the attrition of prison life and the extended lull in the struggle against apartheid. The result was a period of conflict - ideological, organisational, generational - during which there were sometimes violent tensions over such issues as recruitment, leadership and resistance strategies. Buntman differentiates between the incoming generation's categorical resistance - resistance as a matter of political principle, resistance as public, everywhere and always, resistance as a state of constant revolt - and the older prisoners' preference for strategic resistance, which entailed a pragmatic understanding that to withstand and make productive use of imprisonment it was counterproductive to expend energy on constant revolt and instead concentrated on creating/maintaining a space within which to develop organisations and members in a way that would influence the political terrain both inside and outside. By 1980, Buntman argues, a large degree of convergence had been reached on the rules governing prisoner society and how best to conduct the struggle in prison and on release. While the younger generation came to embrace the perspective of the older men - significantly, by early 1980s the ANC had re-established its dominance on the island as a result of recruitment and the arrival of MK cadres - they nevertheless revitalised and rejuvenated prison life (Buntman 1996:137-66. For Nelson Mandela's reflections on this period, see 1995:576-81, also 597-8; on his own attitudes to resistance and facilitating change, also see 496-8,519).

A similar, if less pronounced, sense of generational difference can be gleaned from Jenkin, who on arrival at Pretoria Prison entered a prison environment in which conditions had eased considerably (1987:145,177-82) and relations with the warders were characterised by mutual accommodation (72,104-9,180,237), and perceived it to be a

Among the factors which made it possible to implement political education on a considerable scale by the early 1980s were improved communication between the sections of the prison, regular access to newspapers, and the official study programme through UNISA which provided both content and cover for political education. Therefore the perceived need for a coherent programme of political education coincided with factors facilitating its development. Complex procedures were devised to produce, copy, distribute, discuss, and conceal the documentation and courses of study, as well as to set up and run study groups. Prisoners facilitated an educational revolution, from relatively greater dependence on the unpredictability of official study to the greater control of educational facilities created from within, while maintaining the essential coexistence of the two.

The balance of influence and power in the Robben Island transformation remain unclear. The arsenal of tactics available to the prisoners were limited - deputations, memoranda, representations to visitors sympathetic or hostile, hunger strikes, go-slow strikes, sideline-sniping, attempts to humanise individuals through normal conversation - but they were used consistently (Dingake 1987:150). As Dingake goes on to acknowledge: "The odds are always against prisoners in any contest with the authorities... Where they are determined to have a showdown, there is very little the prisoners can do except protest and continue to exert pressure for restoration of lost privilege" (171). What is extraordinary about Robben Island is that the authorities were forced to concede so much to those perceived to be so dangerous. By the 1980s Robben Island was a political experiment over which the government had been forced to relinquish control. As the political significance of Robben Island increased, the authorities were caught between an organised inmate community and increasingly

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becalmed zone devoid of meaning and purpose (173,176-7,181). The single minded intent of newcomers - in Jenkin's case to escape - created frustration and unease for all concerned.

hostile external public opinion. Central to the transformation of Robben Island was the collective power exercised by the prisoners themselves.

Autobiographical writing about Robben Island reflects both the fact that prisoners often brought to and took from the island a political agenda and an organisational affinity, and the increasingly collective way in which prison life was structured by the prisoners themselves in ways that simultaneously reinforced and cut across political/ organisational differences. The official policy was that of "each-prisoner-for-himself", designed specifically to isolate, divide and impose an official hierarchy of relations. This was challenged by the inmates: "every warder and officer would tell us that prison regulations forbade us to use the word 'we', that we were in prison as individuals and not as a group, but we would persist in saying 'we' and 'us' when speaking to those in charge, however high their rank" (Naidoo 1982:241, also N. Mandela 1995:470,488). In Weschler's terms, the battle on Robben Island between state and opposition was over the right to say 'We'. While the official power of writing and organisation sought to individualise, the prisoner population's collective forms of self-representation were duplicated in similarly collective forms of self-organisation, such as committees:

> From the inception of the prisoners' committee real pressure against
> harsh jail conditions started building up... Whereas, de jure, we could not
> act in concert as prisoners, when it came to representation to prison
> authorities, a de facto recognition of our communal grievances and
> interests soon became the order of relations with the authorities.
> (Dingake 1987:150)[60]

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[60] Buntman states: "Over time, an extensive committee structure evolved... to regulate the relations and activities, between and within organisations, that formed the substance of prison life" (1996:100). A complex network of sports and recreation committees was established, for example, with detailed constitutions governing rules and organisation.

However exaggerated some portrayals of the collectivisation of life on Robben Island may be - some writers, for example, describe lines of dissent and division between competing political organisations, while others minimise the extent of differences[61] - as a process it represented a significant attempt by the prisoners to regain control of their own lives. The forbidden use of the collective 'We' facilitated a challenge to, and a rewriting of, prison regulations, the official power of writing, and the text of imprisonment. The content and form of education, for example, were significantly rewritten by the power of the collective. Furthermore, extending beyond the organisation of life in prison, and in a manner both more marked and more consisted than that of white political prisoners, the forbidden use of the collective 'We' served the same function with reference to the conventions of autobiographical narratives (see Harlow 1987:148-53). Language, both in its oral and written forms became a collective meeting place; and, in part as a result, modes of self-representation helped forge new realities.

The purpose of this reconstruction of the Robben Island story through an autobiographical collage, compounding the agency of the collective 'We', lies in the incredible, if uneven, transformation it records, over three decades, of Robben Island as a place of imprisonment. The role of the word was crucial to the process of change and

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[61] Dlamini and Dingake, for example, play down differences while Naidoo is very critical of the PAC (1982:88,145,165,167-8,180-1,226-33,236-9). Buntman states that according to one of her interviewees the security police used Naidoo's discussions of tensions within the PAC as a basis of interrogation (1996:180, footnote 112). Exploiting organisational differences was just one of the ways in which the authorities sought to pursue a policy of divide and rule: others included the separation of prisoners into different sections within the prison and the playing off of one section against another, discriminatory provision of food and clothing, attempts to exploit differences of ethnicity, region of origin, and/or generation, the negotiation tactics of the state and its definition and use of leadership. In a variety of ways, therefore, the state sought to structure prison life on its own terms. While there were, of course, inter- and intra-organisational divisions, individual disagreements and informers, and divisions in relation to strategies of resistance, the level of solidarity and co-operation achieved was a remarkable achievement, especially with regards to the unity in attitude towards the state/authorities and in establishing a shared set of mores and rules to govern life on the island. As in Pretoria Local, differences and tensions were carefully managed (see Buntman 1996:120-5,128-30,132,143). On unity, and various forms of division/difference, from the perspective of a leader, see N. Mandela 1995: in addition to references already mentioned: 494,501,523-7,547,551-2,557,605-7,625-7,636-9,653,662-3; also Neville Alexander, Fikile Bam and Kwedi Mkalipi 1992, particularly on the multiple and enduring benefits of unity, solidarity and organisation (personal growth/development/education, the ability to disagree with but still respect others, discipline, and more).

again it is within the autobiographical archive that the rewriting of the island is most comprehensively documented. The Robben Island story has taken on a life of its own: the accounts of prisoners have created a legend; prisoners narrate their felt experience and the legend born of that experience; the narrative of the legend creates the prisoners and their recollections and representations. The danger of the Robben Island story is that the narrative of positive and multiple transformation will become, perhaps has already become, a template that is self-censoring and excludes and silences other versions, the broken and disenchanted, the conflicts and errors. The strength of the story lies in the manner in which it fulfilled its strategic political purpose within a clearly identified political terrain, in the manner in which it not only drew on but also fed back into experience, life and action.[62]

As Buntman notes, political prisoners played an important role in keeping resistance and banned political organisations alive inside South Africa: "For nearly thirty years, the only place in South Africa where the ANC and PAC could remain intact was on Robben Island" (1996:132). Imprisonment on Robben Island contributed to the growth and sophistication of people, organisations and resistance. The complex society and culture enabled the prisoners to learn about and share organisational and administrative skills, and provided an education in tolerance, mediation/negotiation, mutual support, political and organisational development, and dealing with the enemy. Prisoners took these skills and insights into the liberation struggle on their release (see Buntman 1996:130-5,165- 6). There is a long history in South Africa of detention, trials, and imprisonment functioning as a collective meeting place and locus of organisation and mobilisation, but it was Robben Island which fed most immediately into popular political folklore, wider political resistance to apartheid, oppositional ideological debates and ultimately

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[62] Examples of narratives which unsettle the trope of transformation include *The Island* (1974), by Fugard et al.

positions of power. The Robben Island autobiographies are increasingly self-conscious constructions of a collective political self, world and oppositional power of writing, reflecting and participating in the transformation of the island from 'hell-hole' to 'university'. Ultimately they write towards the assumption of political power, towards the transformation not only of the prison and the interface between prison and society, but also of the country itself; the act of imprisonment contributed to rewriting not only prisoners, but also the nation, in unexpected and unintended ways. Articulations of the imprisoned self - the 'I', but more particularly the 'We'- have fed into and helped to construct aspects of contemporary South Africa. An ex-Robben Island prisoner is its first democratically elected President; the state is peopled with fellow ex-prisoners; it is mobilised by a societal vision forged, in part, in the struggles and transformation of imprisonment, and in particular of this island prison.

Conclusion

Scarry argues that everything becomes incorporated into the torturer's arsenal of weapons during interrogation, weapons that refer equally to pain and power. Such an argument can be extended in a society built upon violence and pain, though in diluted form, beyond the moment of interrogation to imprisonment and even to the aftermath of release. The written word and the life story are weapons in this prolonged encounter; weapons that can inflict pain and confer power; weapons, like all others, available not only to the torturer but also to the detainee/prisoner. Autobiography is one of a series of weapons which although potentially available for use to undermine the detainee/ prisoner, as in the case of Sachs, is primarily a weapon of redress, a means of reducing pain and returning power to the incarcerated. In these accounts pain is made visible from the viewpoint of the detainee/prisoner thereby enabling it to be acknowledged for what it is. The world of the incarcerated is brought into the light - from resistance and fortitude to, admittedly less frequently, compromise and submission; from complicity in

unmaking to complicity in remaking - thereby providing a narrative within which pain can be laid bare. As the detainee/prisoner reclaims a voice, a sense of self and world, gains a restoration of worldly self-extension, the equivalents of the captor contract as they are given a defining context. In the process the latter are seen for the barbarously narrow, partial and depraved illusions that they are and some of the destruction of detention and imprisonment can be repaired. Scarry writes:

> As torture consists of acts that magnify the way in which pain destroys a person's world, self and voice, so these other acts [such as autobiography] that restore the voice become not only a denunciation of the pain but almost a diminution of the pain, a partial reversal of the process of torture itself. (1985:50; [] bracketed comment my own)

Detention and imprisonment are variously written, indeed must be continuously rewritten, even within the oppositional archive of the self. The momentum of the counter-discourse of truth and power finally became irresistible: from the detainee and/or prisoner as winner to the possibility of a more sustained and collective victory through the agency of a softer, but more enduring and human, heroism; from the appropriation of power implicit in an, albeit idiosyncratic, rewriting of the framework within which imprisonment is usually conceptualised - deny oppositions, read one in the other, and go beyond - to a reworking of the relationships between prisoners and prison and society, and more generally of the South African political and social order and, finally, to the transformative truth and power of the collective, notably within and through the (written) word, to the extent that the world of the prison could participate in the actual restructuring and transformation of a nation. A narrative archive has been created which serves as a place of reunion, healing and transformation. This is its 'higher' truth and power.

This extraordinary process of transformation, however, was multifaceted and remains variously incomplete. Parallel to the un/remaking of voice, self and world within incarceration outlined in this chapter, and the contested textual representation of this process, a similar and irretrievably linked un/remaking and representation was taking place in the somatic domain, on the surfaces and depths of the body. It is the body in pain and in death that the next chapter will address.

Chapter 2: From the 'Space of Death': Discourses on Torture and Custodial Death

i) The Body and/in Space

> 'I didn't think I'd come out alive; in fact, I was seeing death. But I was prepared to die as
> long as I died for the truth...'(Mofokeng in Russell 1991:45)

In the lexicon of Michael Taussig, detention without trial is an expansive 'space of

death'. Passage through this space, where 'reality is up for grabs', can, however, be

variously transformative and provide a range of counter-discourses. This, in one form or

another, is the truth and power of the prison writing discussed in the previous chapter:

that its authors moved through the 'space of death' to create a counter discourse, an

alternative vision of reality and society to that advocated by apartheid. But death never

lost its sting.

To be detained/imprisoned is to be buried alive, entombed. Death is multiple, layered,

continuous, totally separate from life and yet continuous with it. To be a detainee/

tortured is to anticipate death (Foster et al. 1987:152), to be on the verge of death - "I

was growing worn out with pain... feeling myself on the edge of life, near to death"

(Naidoo 1982:23): Weschler speaks of "edge-of-death tortures, such as drowning"

(1990:53) - to move in and out of death, to cross the threshold of death many times and

in many different ways - "I died many deaths that night" (Pheto 1985:95, awaiting an

announced intensification of his interrogation; also Gordimer 1988:366). It is to not

know if one is alive or dead, to feel oneself actually dying and to think oneself actually

dead: "After a while I wasn't even sure that I was still alive... I had become a thing. I

even thought that I was dead" (Mofokeng in Russell 1991:51). Breytenbach writes: "*The*

Place taught me the cold and splendid lesson that survival comes at the price of feeding

small morsels of oneself to death" (1996:161). It is, finally, to wish to die, to embrace

death.

Forms of secondary or simulated death under apartheid included solitary confinement, the making of a statement/confession, and the decision to become a state witness. In addition, there was the experience of actual physical pain - "[p]hysical pain always mimes death and the infliction of pain is always a mock execution" - and many were subjected to actual mock executions (Scarry 1985:31, also 49,61, see Pheto 1985:127-8, Issel in Russell 1991:76). Detainees were told they or others close to them were going to die. A sense of having been irrevocably changed by detention and imprisonment was often bound up with death: "I feel that there are areas that will never be alive in me again" (Breytenbach 1985:337, also 130,318,339,341-4).[1] Among opponents of the regime, everyone knew someone who had been tortured. Comrades, friends, had perhaps died in custody. Symbolically, and in ways that were very real, enemies of the state were shown, and became, the tortured, dead body.

But death was a weapon within the interrogational encounter and as such was the subject of contestation. As the final, and decisive, victory/defeat, death was simultaneously imposed, resisted, embraced and subject to manipulation by both sides in the encounter. Like a chameleon the detainee learnt to "wear / [his/her] own death / like another disguise" (Cronin, "Chameleon", 1987:105). This chapter will focus on custodial death at its most material and physical, because it was from this origin that all other forms of custodial death gained their meaning and towards which they all gestured. In the institutionalised space of detention without trial, Ahmed Timol 'fell' to his death while trying to 'escape' from the 10th floor of John Vorster Square in Johannesburg; Steve Biko was beaten into a semi-coma and then transported 750 miles to a prison hospital in Pretoria, naked, in the back of a landrover; Neil Aggett was under interrogation for 62 hours prior to his suicide by hanging. In this arena of brutality and

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[1] Also see Lelyveld 1987:186-7, Kuzwayo 1985:218,232, W. Mandela 1985:126, Mashinini 1989:100,105-6.

terror can there be illumination through extinction; can death provide a more vivid sense of life; what kind of reality is 'up for grabs'?

The Body and the State

This is a place where bodies are their own signs. (Coetzee 1987:157)

The physical body was located within the oppressive and pervasive body politic of apartheid. Torture was part of a process whereby the state violently registered its power on-in-through the bodies, both alive and dead, of its subjects: on-in-through their identification and categorisation, their location, mobility and removal, poverty and productive 'use', their punishment, suffering and pain: "the body is... directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (Foucault 1991:25, see 24-31).[2] Within this complex of power and knowledge what is the meaning of torture?

Elaine Scarry argues that the pain of interrogation and torture leads to the annihilation of self, voice and world, and that this destruction is "experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or as the body swelling to fill the entire universe" (1985:35): "and the world grew smaller. It shrank into the room and to the circle where he was standing. It shrank to his head and his head filled everything. Throbbing" (Moss 1981:13). Body and world merge in this pain-induced process of contraction and expansion. The detainee is consumed, "swallowed

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[2] Other ways in which the South African state violently registered its power on-in-through the bodies of its subjects included the use of parcel bombs: "ever since I've never worn a bathing costume, because my back has got holes in it... backside, my bum quarters, the whole... I lost all my teeth. So daily I'm reminded, I've got to take off my bloody teeth" (P. Naidoo interview).

alive", by the physical, sentient body in pain (see Scarry 1985:50, also 46,49,57). "Pain...

had usurped his body... It was his body... His whole body was held together on a

framework of pain..."(La Guma 1972:169):

> The pain has no beginning, nor has it an end. It is an endless, infinite
>
> presence, an even flow across time and space, a cool surface that reaches
>
> into the corners of my numbness, drives out the comfort that the
>
> numbness brought. (S. Jacobs 1986:99)

Torture forges the parameters of a world as the one-dimensional reality of the body, the

body as universe colonised by pain.[3] What is created, in essence, is the total body:

"What I am made to undergo is subjection to the most rudimentary needs of my body: to

drink, to relieve itself, to find a posture in which it is least sore... They [the torturers]

were interested only in demonstrating to me what it meant to live in a body, as a

body..." (Coetzee 1982:115).[4]

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[3] The body in pain comes to constitute and determine all meaning: see Bernstein 1986:216. In contrast to the physicality of the detainee as body, S. Jacobs describes the eyes of the interrogator Human as windows into "the infinite space contained within the shell of his body... an empty cell" (1986:96); the interrogator is hollow, with, in the words of Breytenbach, a "dead hole in his centre" (1985:56, also see Scarry 1985:46,57).

[4] Jean Franco argues that one of the ways in which men are forced to live in detention/prison as if they were women - the dichotomy between masculine and feminine, active and passive, resistance and submission, is often shared by both state and its opposition, and is epitomised by the challenge to the tortured male "to behave like a man and die or to become like a woman to survive" - is by coming to understand what it means to be constantly aware of their bodies, of every bodily function (1992:109,111). Pursuing a different but related argument, Weschler states that torture attempts to accomplish its aim "by situating its discourse at the intersection of two of the most primordial mysteries of human being: incarnation and solitude". He continues by postulating a violent collaboration between the body and death within the structure of torture:

> To people who have been attempting to behave in a lofty, selfless manner, it elaborates the incarnation of lofty ideals (of the soul) in a body. It subverts the soul through the vulnerability of the body in which it inheres, teaching that one can be reduced to one's own body and nothing else - the horizon of the wide, wide world with all its wide, wide hopes can become constricted to the point that it becomes entirely effaced. Likewise, torture impresses on the individual - and again, particularly individuals who've been living for others, among others - the fact of the absolute solitude of human existence, which is finally, in its most extreme expression, solitude before death. That sort of knowledge, which ordinary people can ordinarily sustain for at most a few moments at a time, once in a long, long while, torture forces its victim to withstand for hours, days, weeks at a time. It is a harrowing knowledge, and is intended to harrow. The scream that comes welling out of the torture

The total body is rendered multiply naked. The process of stripping away, stripping

bare, is particularly pronounced in solitary confinement and interrogation, and the

passage through the various gateways into and within the prison domain, but it also

penetrates to the very core of state power and individual powerlessness in detention and

prison more generally.

> Prison, for me, is the absolute stripping away of all protective layers:
>
> sounds are raw, sights are harsh, smells are foul. The scars are there, like
>
> tattoos on the mind... Setbacks are experienced with a body-
>
> consciousness. (Breytenbach 1985:258-9, see 21-3,119,305, also Foster
>
> et al. 1987:123)

> You are stripped bare and given back only what they think is necessary.
>
> They strip you at the beginning and they go on stripping you, endlessly ...
>
> You are stripped bare of everything that you can call your own,
>
> constantly stripped bare of anything that you make your own; you are
>
> stripped bare in an endless process of peeling off your protective
>
> covering and leaving you naked. (Lewin 1976:41, also 42-3,50,54-5,75-
>
> 7)[5]

The incarcerated body as world is exposed, pure and complete in its naked

vulnerability. In part this is because the oppositional body is perceived by the state to be

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chamber is thus double – the body calling out to the soul, the self
calling out to others... (1990:238, note omitted)

[5] Also see Foster et al. 1987:123,142,151, Hirson 1995:224. Foucault argues that the
penal system is the form in which power is most obviously seen as power. Imprisonment
"is certainly the most frenzied manifestation of power imaginable... Prison is the only
place where power is manifested in its naked state, in its most excessive form... for
once, power doesn't hide or mask itself; it is cynical and at the same time pure and
entirely 'justified', because its practice can be totally formulated within the
framework of morality. Its brutal tyranny consequently appears as the serene domination
of Good over Evil, of order over disorder" (1977:210).

an object of knowledge, the site or location of truth. This ideology of truth, which

locates the truth as hidden, buried, within the body, sanctions torture as the means of its

extraction, production and reproduction.[6] The validity and authenticity of truth is

correlated to the degree of violence and pain inflicted, to the difficulty of its excavation/

creation. In its naked vulnerability the body is also made to manifest a form of

blankness, it is reduced to a template, an empty page, to be inscribed. The self as body

is seen to harbour the truth in its depths and surfaces. Torture facilitates a somatic

transformation in which excavation becomes inscription and depth becomes surface: the

truth is brought to the surface of the body and made manifest (see du Bois 1991, also

Folena 1989:228).

In South Africa the tortured body was subjected to violent beating and assault, to being

bound and suspended in what was called 'the parachute' or 'the helicopter', it was

subjected to electric shocks and cigarette burns, drowning, strangulation, suffocation, it

underwent forced exercise and was made to stand or assume unnatural positions, such

as the 'chair', for hours on end, it was shackled and chained, kept naked, deprived of

sleep and sexually abused.[7]

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[6] A note of Weschler's is apposite here: "In this context, the metaphor of the *dentist's drill* is particularly apt (its actual use is based on a profound intuition) in that the dentist's drill both *drills in*, burrowing and depositing a terrible knowledge, and *exposes*, bringing to light and rendering raw a terrible knowledge and susceptibility that is always already there, just beneath the surface" (1990:269). Marguerite Duras' novel, *The War: a Memoir*, gives fictional life to this model of torture when the torture of an informer is directed by a female member of the French Resistance. During the course of the interrogation/assault Therese "realizes for the first time that in a man's body there are layers almost impossible to pierce. Tier upon tier of deep truths difficult to reach". The body is a site of excavation, the truth the subject of exhumation and production/reproduction: "You have to strike. Smash. Shatter the lie. The vile silence. Flood everything with light. Extract the truth this swine has in his gullet... Beat him till he ejaculates his truth, his shame, his fear... Demolition work. Blow by blow. You have to hold out, stick it out. And then, soon, there will emerge, quite small, hard as a seed, the truth" (1986:134-5: also see Moss 1994:13).

[7] Some of the names given to torture methods suggest a passage through the 'space of death'. For example, a former policeman testified in court that as a policeman he had covered suspects' heads with two bags, one of them plastic, in order to make them talk, a technique he said was known as 'showing suspects the ghost'. Although this did not relate to a security law case it is safe to assume that similar techniques were used on political detainees (Riekert 1985:145).

It is important to underline the sheer sensate physicality of many of these torture techniques. Electric shocks, for example, were experienced as explosion, needle, burning; in a raking and tearing of flesh, in spasms following one another so fast that they became "one fearful stiffening of all [the] muscles", muscles as "iron transmitting fire..."; in uncontrolled shaking and convulsions - "like a broken puppet... his limbs... fell away from him, jolting and leaping in some fantastic dance which only horror linked to him" - in a "thousand worms" writhing under the skin, breaking "through the surface...".[8]

Standing - within a circle/square drawn on the ground, while balancing on bricks, or simply standing in itself, for long periods of time - while less overtly violent and wounding was nevertheless a profoundly bodily experience, an experience of pain-induced bodily concentration:

> Only the long intense concentration on muscles in legs and ankles,
> straining, wanting to burst and crack, and a tense ache beginning in the
> ankles and creeping up the legs, thighs, digging into my back and
> shoulders. If only I could lean forward... release the ache, stop the pain...
> trying to think the pain away... I was no longer standing... my legs were
> fixed into a solid mass of concrete... holding me up, pressing up into my
> back and forcing my shoulders forward, forcing my head to burst open
> burst open, under the weight of a huge sheet driving the ceiling down...
> holding out and feeling too tired to hold out any longer... in a daze of
> pain stretching across my back and shoulders... wanting food wanting
> sleep wanting to drink wanting to stop. Wanting to talk... Nothing
> mattered any more... 'OK I'll talk'. And I sat down. (Lewin 1976:25-30)

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[8] This paragraph is a compilation from Bernstein 1986:348-53 and La Guma 1972:173; also see Foster et al. 1987:134,151.

For two nights and three days... I had stood still... I was reminded several

times to stare ahead and to remain still... My legs were clearly swollen.

They had grown very hard to the touch, as hard as new lemons... My legs

were shapeless, straight and stiff as poles, and thick. The canvas jogging

shoes... stretched beyond their capacity... Now and then, whether I liked

it or not, I had to bend down... to find some relief, as if the upper body

was weighing too much on my legs, causing them to shoot the numerous

pains... As soon as I had raised my trunk to an upright position again, the

armies of pain would rush back in a flash. At times I thought that the

pain was in my mind, that it would soon be over. (Pheto 1985:127-9, also

see 121).[9]

The 'statue treatment' illustrates the way in which the deconstruction of the body - like

that of the mind/self and world - is a process in which the detainee is made complicit.

The body is turned against itself, it becomes not only the object but also the agent of

pain, a weapon in its own unmaking. Scarry writes, "what atrocities one's own body,

muscle, and bone structure can inflict on oneself", and she continues: "The prisoner's

body - in its physical strengths, in its sensory powers, in its needs and wants, in its ways

of self-delight, and finally even... in its small and moving gestures of friendship towards

itself - is, like the prisoner's voice, made a weapon against him, made to betray him on

behalf of the enemy, made to be the enemy" (1985:48, also see 47,53-5).

Ultimately, the framework of torture encompasses a collaboration of the physical and

the psychological, the body and mind, working together and against one another in a

complex symbiotic interaction and complicity that the detainee both resists and in

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[9] Also see Bernstein: "In twelve hours they had reduced his physical activity to that of
a very old, very arthritic man..."; and: "Exhaustion and pain became a great cloud
filling his head, swelling it to an enormous size, a head made of grey mist, a living
sponge" (1986:197,332-3, see 330-6).

which s/he participates. Again it can be seen to unsettle and manipulate thresholds and boundaries. This, for example, is John Schlapobersky describing the combined effects of prolonged standing and sleep deprivation, for a period of five days from Friday to Wednesday broken only by one period of rest on Monday night:

> it was a very strange state of wakefulness, because by Sunday I was hallucinating and I didn't really know where I was... who they were. I didn't know the time of day... I didn't have a sense of place... I think my own sense of fighting them became much less obvious by Saturday night. Sunday, my feet swelled up... I was in a lot of pain... On the Monday, I can remember walking into walls. I would start walking in this tiny room, dashing into the wall and wake up with a terrible fright and hurt my face. And I can remember them[...] little clusters of them standing at the door... laughing at my confusion. On the Monday night, not only my feet were swollen but also I was very oedematose in my thighs... I think it was Tuesday morning that they woke me. I was more confused than at any other point. I wasn't sure if I was dreaming or awake... I was slightly crazy. (in Bernstein 1994:83-5, also 1972:40-1, 1986:221)

Further examples of the collaborative physical-psychological nature of torture, that traverse detention and imprisonment, are the sexual and gender-based torture and ill-treatment of women, sensory torture, and incarcerative conditions.

In South Africa, the sexual and gender-based torture of women ranged through and beyond the following: attempted rape, actual rape, sexual and sadistic harassment and torture (see Ebersohn 1990:186-200)[10]; verbal and physical denigration of the female

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[10] On the relationship between gender and torture/resistance in South America in the 1960s and 1970s, see Franco 1992. Franco states that the treatment of women prisoners was "rooted in sadistic fantasies" (109).

body; innuendo and covert suggestion; humiliating and gratuitous body searches and vaginal examinations; a refusal to provide or dispose of sanitary towels; the absence of certain types of clothing, such as underwear; incarceration while pregnant and/or with small children, miscarriages and childbirth; separation from and threats to children and other family members; and more. Such torture and the combination of physical and psychological elements, could be terrifying.

> I burst into tears when a security policeman said to me, 'I really enjoy interrogating women. I can get things out of them and do things to them that I can't do to a man.' I was terrified by this statement. (Mohamed in Russell 1991:37)

> He asked me, 'What have you got on?' I said, 'I've got on a dress.' He said, 'I want to know what you have got on underneath.' I replied, 'I've got underwear on.' Then he wanted to know the color of my underwear. I said, 'I've got black panties on.' Then he said, 'That is not all I want to know. I want to know what is inside your panties'... I said, 'Look, this is my personal affair. It has got nothing to do with you.' Then he walked over to me, pulled at my dress, and started unbuttoning it while he said, 'Well, if you won't tell me, I'll have to find out for myself'... I was completely devastated... I couldn't even scream... He said, 'I am Frans Mostert. That is normally how I introduce myself,' and he shook my hand. (Issel in Russell 1991:74-5)

> During the unending months of incommunicado isolation, my life was peopled, crowded, with my dear ones... now I am outside, yet I cannot reach them... My children, please come back... My womb, my womb, they've torn it out. Not all at once... little by little, day by day, and when

the wounds healed they tore off the scabs, little by little, day by day, and it hasn't ended... In the end... I had become unbreakable... Beyond some terrible limit. That was, my children, when you retreated into the mist... I discovered the mist in the psychiatric ward and I lay there, listlessly, beyond reach... That's when insanity attacked, when straight from hospital they had me put back in my special cell. Like still now in my dreams, it came disguised as a child, as a baby... my daughter... your baby... you'd called me... And I wasn't there... only a child yourself... Had I at last answered your cries? Later, in the clean, spiteful prison... they consolidated their victory... they slowly tore at the womb and at the four navel strings... We finally kissed, my children, but I'd been too far... there is always the mist. And so I walk on, alone... Why this endless sentence? Set me free, let me run, let me hug, touch, kiss... and teach me how to love again. (Pastoors in Schreiner 1992:14-19)[11]

Sensory deprivation and monotony - "Cement-grey floors and walls / cement-grey days / cement-grey time..." (Brutus, "On the Island", 1973:71, also First 1965:7) - unusual sensory variation, sensory excess, over-exposure, and assault - the latter most overtly through the perforation of ear drums - also took place at the intersection of physical and psychological torture. Detention in particular was a world where the tastes were those

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[11] The whole of Part 1 of Russell's (1991) book provides powerful testimony in relation to this discussion (see especially 37-43,52,61,71,74-5; also see CIIR 1988:17-23, Foster et al. 1987:135, W. Mandela 1985:99-100, and Zoleka Dilimeni and Gloria Meek in Bernstein 1994:75,157). Sexual torture was also inflicted in different forms and to a lesser degree on men. One example being the often violent homosexuality amongst the criminal population on Robben Island in the early 1960s into which political prisoners were deliberately introduced.

On various aspects of family, children, and separation see Baard 1986:72,78,84-5,87, First 1965:48,54-6,81-3,103-4,122-3,141, Lekota 1991:i-v, Makhoere 1988:27,120-1, Mashinini 1989:85-7, Sachs 1990:122, 1968:137, J. Slovo 1996:110-11,120-1,140-2. Also see Bernstein 1972:39, and in general, Blumberg 1962, Clayton 1992, Kuzwayo 1985, W. Mandela 1985, Russell 1991, Schreiner 1992, and Wolpe 1994. In times of incarceration and oppression more generally, families, and particularly women/mothers, were drawn into the public sphere and became a major source of resistance; as oppression enveloped their immediate and extended lives so they sought to resist, and thereby became participants in the process of un/remaking (see Franco 1985: especially 414,416,419-20, and 1992:112-16). The main organisational manifestation of this phenomenon in South Africa was the Detainee Parents' Support Committee (see Coleman in Russell 1991:80-90; on the opposition of mothers to obligatory military service for whites, see CIIR 1989:77-8; also CIIR 1988:46-9).

of blandness, blood and fear, and the smells of burning flesh, excrement and the accumulated filth of oneself and others. Pheto suggests 'Smells' as a possible nickname for himself, which can be juxtaposed against the cleansing metaphors of interrogation: "'Has he been dry-cleaned yet?'" (Pheto 1985:41,115). It was a world of layered blindness and limited horizons, where sunlight rarely penetrated the darkness or fought back the artificial light. Voice and words were appropriated not only during interrogation but through the imposition of solitary confinement and silence. So few words were spoken in a day that they could be counted. Seen in isolation they became precious (see Breytenbach 1985:26,177-8,280). The sounds of silence echoed to the aural backdrop - sharp and piercing noises, screams and cries of pain, tape recordings of family members being abused[12] - of terror and death.

Human touch lost all sense of warmth and compassion. Lewin writes about the aftermath of his imprisonment: "When I get out / I'm going to ask someone / to touch me / very gently please / and slowly, / touch me / I want / to learn again / how life feels". He talks of seven years of being "untouched", "out of touch", "untouchable" and/or touched only through the mediums of "fists" - "beating beating... screaming / don't touch me / please don't touch me" - and "paws" - "patting... searching... prodding... systematic / heavy, indifferent / probing away at privacy". "I don't want fists and paws / I want / to want to be touched / again / and to touch. / I want to feel alive / again / I want to say / when I get out / Here I am / please touch me" ("Touch", in Feinberg ed. 1980:84-5). Elaine Mohamed makes very similar observations about the aftermath of her detention: "I needed a very strong acknowledgement of my body... I needed reassurance that my body was fine because it had been hurt so much, or my conception of it had been. Whenever I'd been touched during my seven months in solitary, it had been to degrade or to physically hurt me" (in Russell 1991:44, also 42).[13]

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[12] See Human Rights Commission 1990:417, Issel in Russell 1991:75-6; also Lelyveld 1987:198, Niehaus 1994:110.

[13] On the extraordinary significance of nurturing physical contact also see Alexander in Alexander et al. 1992:309, Mashinini 1989:83. The lack of such contact while

The senses, therefore, were reformulated in the confrontation with state authority within the sensorium of pain, fear and state power. What was the nature of this sensorium?

This death world is filled with sounds you never imagined, steel on steel, fear and rage; with the pervasive smells of not very clean men (with no joy) cooped up in a restricted area, of evacuation and badly cooked food, of clothes worn for too long by too many different bodies; with the sights of nearness - grey, brown, grey-green, brown-green. (Breytenbach 1985:125)

The feel of liquid. The smell of urine. The feel of mucus and tears on his cheeks and nose and mouth and face. The smell of blood. The weak limbs. The sight of people standing over him without jackets, their ties loose, their shirts unbuttoned, their shirt sleeves folded back. All these crowded Oupa. (Serote 1983:175, also see 37-8,52-5,57-8,61-2,67)[14]

A final illustration of this body-mind matrix is the contribution of the various facets of incarcerative conditions, of which the two former examples form a component, to mental and physical torture: for example, exposure to the elements; insufficient and/or inedible food; appalling levels of hygiene (filthy cells, inadequate, ill-fitting and dirty clothing and similarly unclean blankets - "The stale blankets, that were never washed,

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incarcerated was the product of many factors, including isolation, the absence, and/or even in later years the rarity, of contact visits for prisoners and, paradoxically, a puritanical attitude towards physical tenderness/compassion/contact, and particularly homosexuality, in many prisoner communities.

[14] An earlier description by Serote of a police station is also worth quoting at length: "A mixture of deodorant smells and paper, tobacco, old furniture, turned into a single smell, which characterises all the places whose functions are proclaimed by notices, where warnings burden walls, counters and filing cabinets, where the sweat, tears, vomit and blood of many many people, who came and went, who never made it out of the doors, leave their spirits hanging in the air, which can never ever be cleaned. All these seemed to sing, seemed to whisper, seemed to warn us about where we were, and said something about our fate. The fluorescent lights seemed dim, and in rhythm with the voices they seemed determined to penetrate, destroy, and hung over our head so delicately, it was our lives hanging on them. There was going to be a display of power. All the eyes, the movements, the faces, the silence in the room, even the way those lights issued their light, everything was about power" (53).

puffed a persistent, but mild, nauseating stench..." (Zwelonke 1973:72) - irregular access to or non-existent washing facilities, bucket lavatories in the cell, no toilet paper); and innumerable physical humiliations (nakedness, body searches). For many these conditions contributed to the development or exacerbation of distress and illness. Ruth First's ulcer functioned as a kind of barometer of her increasing anxiety and stress which culminated in her mental collapse and suicide attempt. Emma Mashinini lost weight, suffered from hypertension, back ache and a range of indicators of physical degeneration such as the loss of teeth and splitting of nails, as well as long term physical and mental effects. Breytenbach writes "I started having trouble with my hair and my skin and my eyes. Suddenly I developed boils and cold sores", and notes a deterioration in his eyesight.[15] Damage was done to the eyesight of many Robben Island prisoners by the years of quarry work.[16]

The examples of the (female) sexual and sensory based torture and ill-treatment, and the conditions of incarceration, provide further illustrations of the ways in which torture operates, cumulatively, through the wounding and death of body and mind, through repressive violence and self-destruction, and through a conscious and unconscious combination of its components, towards a whole that is greater and more terrifying, because unknown and unpredictable, than the sum of its parts; but a whole that is also, in a way that can potentially be utilised by resistance, out of its author's control.

The body becomes devoid of taken-for-granted certainties, like the voice, something of which the detainee is constantly and acutely aware but over which s/he has little or no control. After interrogation Breytenbach claims, "I couldn't sleep... Everything came tumbling back. I couldn't control my body. I was shivering, my legs were shaking; I

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[15] See First 1965:73,79,111,126,130, Mashinini 1989:64,69-70,72,76,85,88,90-9,100,105-6,108-14,132, Breytenbach 1985:146,255. Also see Dlomo in Cook 1974:73, Kuzwayo 1985:207-9,218, W. Mandela 1985:104, Thuso Mashaba in Bernstein 1994:69-70.

[16] See Gregory 1995:108,206, N. Mandela 1995:482, Shityuwete 1990:194, also Cook 1974:53,73.

couldn't even quieten my lips..." (1985:31).[17] The loss of control, before, during and after torture, is caused by tension, fear, pain, and relief. Inhabited in new ways, the body/self becomes unfamiliar and unrecognisable. But is also more than an inability to recognise oneself, it is, as Emma Mashinini testifies, an inability to know how to recognise oneself, such has been the nature of the experience and the extent of the change undergone (1989:87).

The body, like the statement/confession, is a product of state violence. It is reassembled by the state in its image, as a text within its archive. The body is appropriated as a hostile territory, occupied and colonised; it belongs to another:

> For the promise of his body, he said, he would / tell them anything they wished to know. / But slowly and methodically, piece by piece, they / removed it from him. And when they had finished / he could no longer recognize [himself]... / It seemed as if everything belonged to another. / And for eight years he would search everywhere / and not find it, and would go on living a life / as someone else, someone who walked with a limp / and who was deaf, and who could not speak. (Reid Skinner, "The Body is a Country of Joy and of Pain", in Bunn et al. eds. 1988:466-7, also Sepamla 1981:170,216)

The body is isolated, naked and vulnerable, disorientated and confined, dehumanised and humiliated, in discomfort and in pain, exhausted, assaulted, violated, scarred, broken, punctured, penetrated, probed, dismembered, misshapen, turned inside out. The somatic cartography of the state finds its contours in never-ending pain, unhealed wounds and scars, deformed posture, awkward movement, and immobility, in damaged

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[17] Also Ebersohn 1984:103, Foster et al. 1987:128, Pheto 1985:103,133.

senses, in physical and mental degeneration and illness, and more.[18] Ariel Dorfman (in Taussig 1987:4) tells an old Chilean story about a child abducted by witches. To break its will the child's bones are broken and sown back together abnormally. The eyes, ears and mouth are sealed, the head is the wrong way round so the child walks backwards. This creature is called an *Imbunche*, and Dorfman accuses the Pinochet regime in Chile of attempting to make every Chilean and Chile itself into an *Imbunche*. Much the same could be argued for South Africans and South Africa under apartheid. The body of the detainee/prisoner embodied the layered violence of incarceration and apartheid. The manifestation of truth and power embodied on-in-through the detainee's/prisoner's body represented the state's power of writing in its purest form:

> It [torture] assured the articulation of the written on the oral, the secret
> on the public, the procedure of the investigation on the operation of the
> confession; it made it possible to reproduce the crime on the visible body
> of the criminal; in the same horror, the crime had to be manifested and
> annulled. It also made the body... the anchoring point for a manifestation
> of power, an opportunity of affirming the dissymmetry of forces.
> (Foucault 1991:55, also 41-4,56,66)[19]

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[18] Predictably, the state acquired the ability to maim and kill without physically wounding, to leave no physical trace, no mark, no scar on the damaged body of the detainee who had been forced to stand for hours on end or deprived of sleep, struck with an open hand, strangled with a wet towel or subjected to other forms of suffocation. But, of course, even the smooth surfaces of apparent silence have a story to tell.

[19] Foucault also writes, "The body, several times tortured, provides the synthesis of the reality of the deeds and the truth of the investigation, of the documents of the case and the statements of the criminal, of the crime and the punishment" (47). Nowhere is the process of inscription more powerfully captured than in Kafka's story, "In the Penal Colony" (1988:140-67). Here punishment takes the form of a device which literally writes with needles on the body the law that has been disobeyed, and it is through this agonising process of wounding that the body's owner comes to know their guilt, crime and sentence.

The Body and Resistance

> Bodies have an effect and a meaning. They are practical weapons; they challenge the system. They resist the system; they fight the system. It is an absolute message: death or country. My death or my country... Bodies are obstinate signs... (Desnoes 1985:40)

The body, however, is not simply an inert mass to be excavated or a blank surface to be inscribed by an all-pervasive state power and knowledge. Both Foucault and Scarry abandon the passive body to the monopoly of the state.[20] For Allen Feldman, in contrast, while the power of the state remains significant - *"The surface of the body is the stage where the state is made to appear as an effective material force"* - the interrogatee learns "to manage the interrogation through his management of his body and other techniques that subvert domination effects... turning the interrogator's violence against their ostensible objectives" (Feldman 1991:115,138: italics in the original). The "specialized techniques" and "adaptive technologies" (201) of the body provide access to the ways in which it retains and regains agency and power. The body, adopting various strategies and masks, becomes a site on-in-through which the struggle for political power takes place; like the word, the body is a double-edged weapon, like the statement/confession, the body is 'managed' and violently collaborative. The truth and power of resistance, as well as that of the state, is registered on-in-through the body, its depths and surfaces.

One example of a self-defence mechanism learnt or instinctively practised by the body to manage pain is that of self-detachment or -distancing. Here the body and mind are complicit in the process of survival and/or remaking rather than unmaking. As a conscious and/or unconscious act the self, variously defined, stands outside the body, establishes a distance from it and, thereby, from pain and fear. Through this almost mystical/religious disembodiment the body is sacrificed in the hope of maintaining and preserving something else (see Desai and Marney 1978:126). The self-distancing of

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[20] On this aspect of Foucault's work, see Lash 1991.

mind/soul from body is clearly illustrated by/in the following quotations: "'The only thing they can do is kill my body. They are not going to get my mind, and my soul will live on in my children and in other people'" (Issel in Russell 1991:65,75); "They tried to kill my mind... but had to go through my body to reach it... my body didn't let them in... [it] stood in their way and so they took that also away from me. There was only the mind left" (Pastoors in Schreiner ed. 1992:15,17, also Foster et al. 1987:147-8). As part of the same transaction the body is surrendered to pain in exchange for silence.

The most powerful literary image of this silence is the mouth as healed and therefore sealed wound; another is that of the mouth, throat and words turned to stone. It is a small step from the difficulties and reluctance associated with confessional speech - "The mouth is thick, the tongue is a rock, the lips are weights... The words are as heavy as stones... Two stones... fell, cracked, split open... fragments embedded in my conscience; how many more must I attempt to prise out?" (S. Jacobs 1986:100-1; also see Breytenbach 1985:239) - to the mouth as healing/healed wound. Sam Bhengu in Wessel Ebersohn's novel, *Store Up The Anger*, reflects upon a mouth that is both parched and injured:

> the same organ, the point of contact between tongue and cheeks feeling like a place where a wound was healing. Once the healing process was over his tongue and cheeks would all be joined together. The cavity that was now in his mouth would be closed permanently. (1984:117-18, also see Bernstein 1986:350,352)

Detachment from the body exposed to violence - the body divested of any sense of self and voice, the body divorced from mind - is, however, both involuntary and voluntary. It is involuntary in the sense that the state attempts to double its voice at the expense of and through the body in pain (see Scarry 1985:48-9). It is voluntary in the sense, any

sense, that the reverse - the body in pain eclipsing the multi-tongued state - can become

a meaningful reality. In the following example self-detachment and forcible

detachment are taking place simultaneously.

> Nothing they could shout at me was real... It wasn't me they were
>
> shouting at. It wasn't me at all... 'You're going to talk, you're going to die,
>
> tonight we'll kill you'... He... began hitting me: hard cupped fists, hissing
>
> through his teeth, hard fists to the head and face... beating beating while I
>
> screamed and pleaded... facing a tunnel full of fists and screams and
>
> hissing... I cannot say how long it lasted... But long enough to feel it
>
> would be the end, thinking: This is it and this is what it'll be like and I
>
> wonder if I'll actually know when it's over. Detached, never fully able to
>
> fix the body on the floor as me, not feeling hurt by the blows because it
>
> wasn't me they were hitting; somebody else... But me screaming
>
> screaming... offering two scraps of information that I'd withheld before
>
> and which I hoped might stop the beating... (Lewin 1976:34-5)

Lewin is self-detached, a spectator to his body's brutalisation, and up to a point the body

in pain is surrendered to silence. But he also has a form of detachment imposed upon

him because he is in pain and because his pain is objectified in a statement: his voice in

the moment of its mutual recognition - "me screaming screaming" - his and theirs; but

increasingly theirs. The statement, however, does not symbolise his complete

annihilation because it is partial, 'managed', two scraps of information.[21]

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[21] Also see Grace Cele in Bernstein 1994:203, Shityuwete 1990:139-40,142, Wolpe 1994:190. The protagonist in Steve Jacobs', *Diary of an Exile*, initially resists detachment - "Stubbornly, I cling to consciousness. Why? Would it not be easier to lapse into darkness, to let the blows transport me into a region where I can feel nothing?... No. I want to be aware of the things they are doing to my body" - and then embraces it - "My consciousness floats away, beyond the walls of my body, beyond the limits of this building... my consciousness soars" (1986:98,99-100). For fictional depictions of (self-)distancing see La Guma 1972:171-3, and Ebersohn 1984, for example, 96-7, in which the body is described as a prison and detachment from it as freedom (also 103).

The (self-)distancing process - the fragmentation of the complete self - is a particularly difficult one to control. This is perhaps best illustrated by those individuals who start to show symptoms of a split-personality and schizophrenia, which takes place at the interface between self-preservation and madness (Mohammed in Russell 1991:39-41,44, also Sachs 1990:252-60). As such examples indicate, there is also the possibility of the annihilation of both body and mind, or of the body rather than the mind being preserved; the sacrifice and destruction of the latter rather than the former, consciously or unconsciously, by the detainee and/or the interrogator. The precarious, fragile and multi-faceted 'management' of body and mind during the infliction of violence and pain can occur in the context of partial destruction - of body and/or mind - as merely a stage on the way to total destruction, of partial preservation/resistance as a stepping stone to an eventual complete preservation and resistance, or any number of complex and contradictory variants in between.

(Self-)distancing is one example, albeit like all others an ambiguous one, of the many ways in which the body retains a capacity for resistance, self-nurturing and healing, in which it seeks to complement its self-awareness with greater self-control. Some of these mechanisms relate to a broader framework of pain, its reception, mediation and negation. Protective mechanisms are both instinctive - "my hands raise themselves (I have no control over their movements) with a knowledge of their own that the head must be protected at all costs" (S. Jacobs 1986:97) - and learned. The body can to a degree be prepared for torture. Pheto writes: "I rehearsed... defences, blocks to ward off their blows, falling positions and breakfalls to protect... vulnerable parts of the body... I made a point also not to forget to put on a lot of clothes for padding" (1985:95). It can mediate the infliction of pain through verbal interjections, provocation, cushioning, deflection, evasion, and/or a complete lack of resistance. In the aftermath of torture the

body can be nursed and in time will at least partially heal itself. In short, the body

'manages' both the reception and consequences of pain.[22]

Numerous other techniques and technologies of the body reformulate it as friend rather

than enemy and/or challenge official control over the body. This somatic remaking can be

achieved through the body - its care, functions, exercise - as obsession and as self;

through the body as carer ("the incalculable freedom of caring for someone or something

else!" (Breytenbach 1985:207)); through the body known anew, as hiding place and safe

place ("Nearly any part of the body of man or beast can be used for hiding and

transporting illicit articles" (Breytenbach 1985:227, also see 228)), as commodity

("Nothing was of value unless it could be traded: tobacco, boom, bodies, friendships -

they were all commodities" (Lewin 1976:166)), as personalised and politicised; through

the body as remembered or imagined, in love and/or in resistance.[23] Other more dramatic

challenges to official control over the body included hunger strikes, suicide attempts,

escapes, and assaults on, rather than by, state personnel.[24]

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[22] While it is a misrepresentation to abandon the body to the will of the state it is equally dangerous to overstate the agency of the body in pain, given the huge imbalance with regard to agency and power. To overstate the detainee's agency runs the danger of making the detainee preside over his/her own destruction. Pushed to its limit such an argument potentially rationalises and even legalises state violence as necessary in order to suppress the inherent and presumed violence in the detained body (Feldman 1994:412-13).

[23] Breytenbach provides insights into what he calls the rhythms of the body (1985:150), and the incorporation of the body and bodily actions into prison language (177-8,211). On the body as obsession see Breytenbach 1985:282,300,304, First 1965:71, Lewin 1976:58-61,191-201,216-21, Mohamed in Russell 1991:41-2, Pheto 1985:162,166-7, Sachs 1990:40-3,166-8,221,252-60, Zwelonke 1973:65-7,131. On the body as carer and cared for, see Breytenbach 1985:139-40,176-7,207-8,280,309, N. Mandela 1995:581-3,614-15,625, W. Mandela 1985:85-6,142, also 99; as hiding place and safe place see Brutus, "Letters to Martha", 1973:54-5, Jenkin 1987:49-50,65-6,68-70,81-2, Lewin 1994 and 1976:52-3,120-1; and on the remembered and/or imagined body see Cronin's love poems (1987:73-88, also 97-8).

[24] On Sachs' decision not to go on hunger strike or attempt to escape see, 1990:91,266; while in the case of Ruth First a hunger strike helped to precipitate a suicide attempt (1965:111,122,128-30,135: also on suicide see Niehaus 1994). Hunger strikes were a frequent weapon used by detainees/prisoners. They were used to powerful effect to challenge conditions on Robben Island, particularly during the early years, and to secure the release of hundreds of detainees in the late 1980s (Human Rights Commission 1990:412,424,428). There were two notorious escapes: the first involved Harold Wolpe, Arthur Goldreich, and Jassat and Mosie Moolla (Kantor 1967, First 1965:18-22, Wolpe 1994), and the second, Tim Jenkin, Alex Moumbaris and Stephen Lee (Jenkin 1987). Breytenbach was charged with and acquitted of attempted escape at his second trial (1985:236-42,247; on the many escape plots at Pollsmoor and his involvement in them see 284,286-8,292-6,301; also 137,274,324). The assault of state officials was rare and obviously extremely dangerous (Bookholane in Russell 1991:61). From hunger strikes to fights, Makhoere's resistance was extraordinarily physical: her captors were made to serve the sentence with her (see 1988:76-7, also 45-6, and Makhoere in Bernstein

The detainee, therefore, can reconfigure and subvert the state's bodily design, becoming a participant in the process of somatic de/reconstructed, thereby helping to reassemble the body in an image other than that of the state.[25] One such image is provided by Pitika Ntuli's sculpted figures - from bread that was then eaten; from soap that was then used to wash; from wet toilet paper that was then used for its intended purpose - that can be seen as a continual, inventive un/remaking and resurrection of the body (Ntuli 1980:34, also Breytenbach 1985:209). Through such processes the body retains/regains agency and power, a capacity for self-defence, regeneration, and self-recognition. The evidence of the body can also, therefore, be understood as an indictment of the state and testimony to resistance and survival; in short, as the power of writing in its purest form, as embodied truth, by those in opposition to the repressive state:

> The body with its pain becomes a counter to the endless trials of doubt...
> in South Africa it is not possible to deny the authority of suffering and
> therefore of the body. It is not possible... for political reasons, for reasons
> of power... it is not that one *grants* the authority of the suffering body:
> the suffering body *takes* this authority: that is its power. To use other
> words: its power is undeniable. (Coetzee 1992:248)

> Now he had to believe it. Now he had seen it with his own eyes. But it
> remained ungraspable. He had to force himself, even as he stood there

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1994:122-5). On the powerful sensory/bodily response to release/freedom see Breytenbach 1983:3, 1985:322-34 and Sachs 1990:276-81.

[25] See Feldman 1991:198-217, especially 201,203-4,209. Similar processes were also at work in other contexts. For Albie Sachs, recovery after the bomb blast was "as total an experience as being in jail... only completely the other way round, as fully dedicated towards my recuperation as prison was to my destruction" (1991:48). In a strange way the bomb gave him back his innocence, set him free: "I have something that comes to few people, a chance to reconstruct my life right from scratch. Having lost everything becomes an advantage... The bomb shattered my scheme of things and now I am free" (147, also see 201). What an extraordinarily powerful image this is: having lost everything, he is free. It is a kind of magical realism employed in the service of recovery: "It is realism that tells me that the only way I can solve my practical difficulties is through a magical feeling, a free spirit..." (146).

looking down into the coffin, to accept that this was indeed Gordon... the

memory of Gordon, small and maimed in his coffin in the cool bare

room, his grey claws folded on his narrow chest. The rest seemed

interchangeable, transferable, unessential: but that remained. (Brink

1984:91,99)

The body, therefore, is a weapon available to both sides in the incarcerative encounter.

A terrain where opposing powers of writing meet, it is variously written, the subject of

contestation, a violently collaborative text. The body operates within the arsenal of the

detainee/prisoner in a way that is interactive, that marshals other weapons to its

assistance. An important complementary weapon, of which the body forms a

component, is space.

Transgressing Spatial Boundaries

One of the layers of interaction between inside and outside - to add to the already

discussed interface between prison and society - is that between the body and space.

Torture, interrogation, and in fact detention/imprisonment as a whole, can be seen as a

process of turning and being turned inside out (violent somatic deconstruction, the

evacuation of the truth, body searches (Breytenbach 1985:131,157)), of internalising

and being internalised ("The fan blade turns inside my head... Is the screaming internal

or external?..." (S. Jacobs 1986:99)), of passing through the inner workings of the state

and internalising the state ("The State lives inside you. You are its condition"

(Breytenbach 1985:215)). Cronin outlines some broader parameters of the inside-

outside interaction in a piece entitled "Inside out":

I write now from the outside... I have not stayed at home for many

months. Last August... the security police banged at the front door... The

pounding on the front door and the pounding in my suddenly dry throat...
were all scrambled up in my mind. Several weeks later they missed me
again... As I write... from this outside, there are 5,000 fellow South
Africans... who have disappeared in the last few days... dead... alive...
inside... To write now is to be on the edge of that... South Africa is a
society of these insides, beyond high walls... [the] prison regime is
merely one facet of a countrywide grid of spatial controls... There are
endless spaces inside other spaces... Inside, outside, inside. The spatial
engineering extends to the very micro-places of our segregated land - the
park, toilet and bus-shelter. The poems in this collection were all written
inside (I mean inside prison)... I kept losing poems in cell searches and
body frisks. The surviving poems in this book I finally managed to
smuggle out in what, I decided, was the safest place - here behind my
eyebrows, in memory, this other inside. I kept losing scraps of paper. I
would not, I hoped, entirely lose my head. (1987:9-10, also see 87)

The interaction between body and space invokes not only a sense of multiple insides
and outsides but also of layered bodily, architectural, geographical and political space.
Something of this exfoliative reality is suggested by Naidoo when he refers to prisons
within prisons (1982:8,121,277); apartheid inside apartheid (87); isolation within
isolation (134); punishment within a punishment within a punishment (136). Layered
confinement and oppression coexisted alongside a naked vulnerability as state
manufactured space, like the body, was moulded into a blank incarcerative surface. But
the surfaces, depths and spaces were variously inscribed and inhabited. The body-space
relationship is also not solely repressive.

Internal space (the body) and external space (the cell, the prison, and beyond) can be
mobilised to transgress the repressive spatial design and its central components,

isolation, immobilisation, surveillance. The skin and the wall are limits which guarantee both separation and continuity/contact between the inside and the outside. In the process of spatial transgression not only is the official spatial regime challenged but the body as self regains extension from the total body, in which corporeal and spatial horizons collapse and coincide, to aspects of the self and world previously destroyed by violence and pain. One such mode of transgression, which represents the most important challenge to the spatial confinement of incarceration, is communication, between the incarcerated or linking the prison and outside world.

Between the detainee and the interrogator, and to a lesser degree between the prisoner and prison warder, communication is reduced to the giving and receiving, the infliction and mediation, of violence. Violence on-in-through the body is used as a means of generating knowledge and power. "'There's nothing we don't know about you. We know about every part of your body and every part of your life. And what we don't know we are going to find out'"; "He had known them more intimately... He had felt their hands upon his body and had struggled with them, his body making brutal merciless contact with theirs" (Ebersohn 1984:37,96). Not only has this link between communication and violence to be overcome, but the detainee/prisoner has to re-learn previously taken-for-granted communication skills - "I couldn't actually speak. I had become very withdrawn, incoherent, I couldn't express myself and I couldn't relate at all" (Schlapobersky in Bernstein 1994:86) - and invent new ones in a deliberately obstructive environment.

The engagement of the body and senses is central to the communicative drive, whether through something as apparently straight-forward as talking or shouting to other detainees - "To talk to friends, however briefly, was to feel alive. The whole day...

became focused on those brief minutes in the evening when there might be a chance to talk to the others" (Lewin 1976:48)[26] - or as complicated as a system of signs.

> By holding my mirror out of the window I see... the fingertips of his free hand / Bunch together, as if to make / An object the size of a badge / Which travels up to his forehead / The place of an imaginary cap. / (This means: *A warder*.) / Two fingers are extended in a vee / And wiggled like two antennae. / (He's being watched.) / A finger of his free hand makes a watch-hand's arc / On the wrist of his polishing arm without / Disrupting the slow-slow rhythm of his work. / (*Later*. Maybe, later we can speak.) ... He turns his back to me, now watch / His free hand, the talkative one, / slips quietly behind / - *Strength brother*, it says, / In my mirror, / A black fist. (Cronin, "Motho Ke Motho Ka Batho Babang (A Person is a Person Because of Other People)", 1987:26, also see Breytenbach 1985:137,141,226-7,233,275)

The body can also be read in other contexts, to forge a link with the outside world. Deprived of news for much of the apartheid era, political prisoners became "experts at constructing elaborate (and often entirely inaccurate) versions" of what was happening outside (Cronin 1987:28). Events outside would register on the faces of the captors, in their actions and behaviour. Readings varied from general correlations between hostile behaviour and good news for the incarcerated, while overly-friendly, smug or arrogant actions carried the opposite message, to more precise readings of the Soweto uprisings or the progress of a rugby tour.[27] Visitors could also contributed, consciously and unconsciously, to the construction of greater, if incomplete, knowledge and understanding.

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[26] There are, of course, many other incarcerative communication devices based on sound: tapping messages on/through walls, whistling (Sachs 1990:18-26,284 and 1991:183,187-8), and singing, to detail just three.

[27] See Breytenbach 1985:160-1, Cronin 1987:28-30, Lewin 1976:223, Zwelonke 1973:63,65.

The body as message also moved from inside to outside, in its component parts and as a whole, thereby escaping spatial confinement.[28] More usually, however, escape, was imaginative, as in the following example, in which it takes the form of the flesh made word:

> Tonight is an envelope / Into which I climb, sliding between the folds /
> The letter I, flesh made paper / ... formed on my tongue / My tongue
> turned into paper - tonight perhaps / ... it's just / Possible to consider me
> as flying at last / As three-week-old words, behind the inside flap's /
> Gummed / Touch to reach you. (Cronin, "Tonight is an Envelope...",
> 1987:76, also 13).[29]

In terms of knowledge, information and news, communication for the detainee/prisoner accumulates and arranges fragments into and within a more comprehensive whole. It floods the narrow and sterile container of inside with draughts from the vast, simultaneously evolving outside; it injects absence with a vital and life sustaining presence, provides the present with a past and a future, and enables self-extension into the outside world. In terms of space and time, it suppresses distance. Finally, it provides the outside with valuable information about the normally sealed-off and unknown world of incarceration. Implicit in the transgression of space lies the more radical proposition of redrawing space and remaking the body/self within a variety of spatial terrains.

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[28] Teeth and blood, as evidence of assault, were in/on clothes returned to the family of Gordon Ngubene to wash in Brink's novel *A Dry White Season* (1984:68); also see Bernstein 1989:94-6. The bodies of those who died in custody sometimes returned to the outside bearing a similar message. Released detainees/prisoners and escapees, as living messengers, also breached the divisions between inside and outside.

[29] "How could I be with my people [at Christmas]?", writes Breytenbach, "I put myself in a letter[....]" (1985:305). For detachment from the body in prison as a means of imaginative escape and in anticipation of actual escape, see Jenkin 1987:175-6,192-3.

Redrawing Space

The above discussion of communication and space lays the foundation for a redrawing of space within and beyond the boundaries of physical confinement. In relation to incarcerative time the need is to delimit, to continually establish and erase, horizons and points of reference: "They removed all of his days and left him with / hours. Then they removed all of his hours / and left him with minutes. Then they removed / all of his minutes and left him with silence / that had no line or horizon, and time vanished / into the walls around him" (Reid Skinner, "The Body is a Country of Joy and of Pain", in Bunn et al. eds. 1988:465-6). The indefinite time of detention or the usually finite but often long term time of political imprisonment has to be un/remade in order not to make its passing the focus of life itself. Similarly, the detainee/prisoner is constantly seeking to un/remake spatial boundaries and horizons.

The layered spatial straitjacket of confinement - the body, the cell, the prison - is contested by the fragile counter-inscriptions and re-writings of the incarcerated. Space is another of the continually re-written, never completed texts at the interface between opposing powers of writing. What is being contested is the geography of power and knowledge and the political nature of the un/re-making of space; what is being established is the possibility, within a massively unequal terrain, of an oppressive *and* an emancipatory spatial praxis.[30]

Crucial to the notion of an emancipatory spatial praxis is the elasticity and flexibility of sensate space, within the context of sensory deprivation, over-exposure, and assault. Davies writes of "the interstitial nature of a territoriality which is at once biological, material and political":

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[30] This analysis of space and geography owes a debt to the following sources: Davies 1990:59-68, Foucault 1980, 1986, 1991a, and Soja 1989.

We do not only inherit space, but we live through a space which brings with it its own structuring of use into which we inject our own kinetic sense. To study space is initially to study the eye, the voice, and the hand, and at the same time to conceive of other voices, eyes, hands reworking the space... The language of prison space is therefore one in which eyes, voices, limbs interact in a moving out from the cell with its definite physical contours and back into the cell from the mcre obvious dimensions of the power/ideology that attempts to control. (1990:59-60)

The harsh music of jangling keys was the most ubiquitous of sounds: "Always and always it was the noise of those keys that you heard while washing, while eating, and sometimes while sleeping. You were awakened with those keys, you were locked in with those keys... Keys, keys, keys" (P. Naidoo in Schreiner ed. 1992:86). The gratuitous and jarring violence of the aural regime - of keys, of doors slamming, of instructions shouted - was both hated and feared (see Lewin 1976:57). Awaiting collection for further interrogation, Pheto recalls listening to "voices which ate into my aching flesh and hurt pride... the key's rattling noise gouging my soul" (1985:103,105). But the ears could also be used to steal what was otherwise forbidden, to know people who and things that were otherwise unknowable:

It is your ears, and to a lesser extent your nose, that become sovereign... [to which] you increasingly turn for a sense of place... ribbons of sound... slowly, on the basis of these sounds, you begin to build up an aural picture of this place, its routines, rhythms, personalities and layout. As the picture clarifies, a terrible awareness begins to dawn. You start to hate your ears... they are hanging people in this place... singing...

singing... A short silence[...] followed by the slap of trapdoors.

Falling[...] falling, down the tunnels of your ears. (Cronin 1987:33-4)

The ears become the most important sense organs. You use your ears the

way a bat employs its radar - to situate yourself, to detect danger, to find

some security in this environment you cannot escape from. You learn to

interpret the sounds and the sudden silences, the banging and the

rustling; by listening you unravel the rhythm of daily activity. Voices you

hear repeatedly take on shape and colour, become personalities. There

are some people, like the 'condemns', whom I never saw - and yet I still

have the impression that I knew them intimately. (Breytenbach

1985:220)[31]

The apparently hostile noise regime, therefore, in conjunction with neutral and more

supportive sounds, inside and out, enabled the body to orientate and situate itself in

time and space - "I tried to translate noises into police station geography" (First

1965:16) - facilitating a kind of sensory, or aural, mapping. Again fragments were used

to generate a greater whole. From within this cartography it became possible to

anticipate, to be prepared, to reduce the likelihood of being taken by surprise. "We lived

in a universe of sounds which became our allies", writes Breytenbach (1985:264).

Sensate space extends to the limits of audible sound, detectable smell and a range of

visual horizons, as well as stretching to the outer perimeters of touch and taste. While

sight can be confined behind and within walls, other senses overflow beyond physical

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[31] Also see Breytenbach 1985:145,232,282; Lewin 1976:56-7; First 1965:28-30.
Significantly Breytenbach goes on to say: "(But at other times you wake, you listen, and
the rumours you hear are indecipherable. Your ears lead you up blind alleys - they do
not interpret. The noises confuse you. They are the exteriorization of your confusion.
You want to shout to identify yourself, to pin yourself down... Your silence is sucked
through the bars. You fight for sense..)" (1985:220). Weapons never lose their ambiguous
double-edged nature, their availability to both sides in the contest.

barriers.[32] The traditional hierarchy of the senses is revised in favour of the alternative

sovereignty of sound - "I saw so much. With my ears only, since the eyes are confined

behind bars and walls and steel partitions never more than seven yards away"

(Breytenbach 1985:31) - in a sensory collaboration at once curiously partial, sounds

linking together those who can not be seen and gesture those who are never heard, but

also endlessly creative.

Not only is the sensory hierarchy reordered within the framework of state violence and

incarcerative creativity, but the senses are also subject to accentuation through a kind of

learned or perhaps compensatory clarity and extension, an unpredictable

overstimulation and hyperalertness. After a brutal assault during interrogation, the

senses of Sam Bhengu, in Ebersohn's novel *Store Up the Anger*, take on a "terrible

clarity"; senses which like/with the body had expanded to fill the felt universe: "[his]

senses seemed to have expanded until they reached every corner of the room making

him aware of every sound or movement... even picking up the mood and intentions of

each of the five men in the room with him" (1984:8,37, also Wolpe 1994:162,211). The

final component of this sensory revolution is the development of what might be called

new senses. "My hearing and other responses I did not know I possessed had developed

beyond my expectations", writes Pheto (1985:106). Breytenbach describes developing

"an intense awareness, like a hitherto unexplored sense in yourself, for knowing exactly

when the sun rises and when it sets without ever seeing it" (1985:124). Not surprisingly,

it is writing which most significantly became an extension of other senses and, indeed, a

sense in its own right: "Writing for me is an extension of my senses. It is itself a sense

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[32] Sight comes into its own when its confinement can be breached. The huge significance of the cell window as an eye to the world testifies to this: "every now and then, as I hung from this observation post, part of my world came into view, and then my spirits soared" (First 1965:74); and from Pretoria Central, "the old and the new: / a photo of history sliced up by barred strip windows." (J. Schreiner, "My Second Night in Pretoria Central", in B. Schreiner ed. 1992:20; also, in the same text, Hogan 43, and see Breytenbach 1985:261-4, Lewin, "Behind a Barred Window", in Feinberg ed. 1980:82, Makhoere 1988:83, also 75).

which permits me to grasp, to understand, and to some extent to integrate that which is happening to me" (155).[33]

Ultimately, to transgress, traverse, appropriate, and redraw space, to transcend barriers and redefine boundaries, entails a co-operative collaboration between the body, the senses and the imagination; but it is no less real, no less tangibly inhabited, for being so constructed.

The Space of Breytenbach and Cronin

Two writers in particular, Breyten Breytenbach and Jeremy Cronin, developed spatial frameworks which provide both a summation of and conclusion to the discussion about the transgression and redrawing of incarcerative space. Outlining the parameters of an (auto)biographical arena that is at once a void and dense with voices, Breytenbach describes himself during interrogation as precariously hanging over an abyss, an "opening-up of completely empty space, a space which is at the same time crowded with voices singing their death, intermingled with voices whispering, 'Write'" (1985:37).

> From room to room. Dying so as to be reborn. To die. To be reborn from
> room to room. From womb to space. From space to room. From room to
> coffin. From coffin to the density of space. From space to nothingness.
> From nothingness to seed. From seed to womb. From womb to pain.
> From pain to roomwomb. To wombroom. To another tomb... To another
> room. Into the car. Up the street. Screaming down the corridors of
> darkness. Through the door. Beyond the grills. Careening down the
> passages. Feeling the cement. Touching the steel. Hearing the doors

---

[33] With reference to the rejection of his request to paint, Breytenbach comments: "(Perhaps also because someone, somewhere, had realized that to paint is truly to escape: it is a healing of the hands and the eye.)" (159).

closing. Tasting the salt. Experiencing the shivering. Listening to the chants. Lifting the darkness. Mumbling. Writing. Writing with eyes closed... Waking not knowing whether you're awake or whether you're still a dream feeling the ache of the mind. From room to passage, to bathroom, to corridor, through the grills, through the gate, by car careening down the narrow lanes of darkness... From room. To room. To room. To room[....] (34, also 40,45)

This quotation powerfully evokes the way in which space becomes a weapon in the interrogational encounter, an agent of pain, and of the officially inscribed world of disorientation against which any attempt at self-orientation must take place. It also captures the interpenetration of bodily and architectural spaces, of an exfoliative geography and the senses, in the passage through the space of life and death.

Writing and the word are a space of confinement but also a space of freedom: "The word is a narrow; a slip of land between two dark oceans; a tongue. The word is also a confinement. Yet it is the only way that I know, the only space. I realize now that the preceding document is in itself for me an interstice of freedom" (337). Similarly, while time and space are the primary co-ordinates of incarceration they also collaborate to secure forms of liberation: "I built time itself into my system... by escaping through the walls and walking up the mountain to smell spring..." (304). In this world both the mind and the body roam free. *True Confessions* is laden with imagery relating to birds, flight and escape, and in the imagination at least the walls become porous, the walls come tumbling down. The prison world is so small that it has no limits (237). Breytenbach states that it is important to "search without ever stopping... for the hairline cracks, for the gaps... for that space which is created by alleys and by walls... To realize that you are marginal is of itself a way of making distance your own... It is to come upon an interstice of freedom" (309). The doctrine - deny oppositions, read one in the other, and

go beyond - applies in the spatial domain as in all others. And since no real change

takes place, everything becomes conceivable.

> Breytenbach's space is composed of mirrors, mazes, rooms, corridors, colours,
>
> noises, rhythms, zoos, General Stores, smells, bodies; it has entrances and exits,
>
> it is populated by guards, left- and right-wing terrorists, thieves, murderers,
>
> pimps, coloureds, whites, blacks, drifters, cockroaches, priests, who speak in
>
> many voices or none... the prison is embodied, materialized, sensed,
>
> negotiated... Thus [it] is deterritorialized... so that it ceases to have effective
>
> power. (Davies 1990:73)

Predictably, Breytenbach's reflections on space on/from the outside, after his release,

are equally unconventional and complex. "I have learnt that a wall is a point (and a

joint) of relativity. There is no more freedom outside than inside. Mine is total"

(1985:118, also see 26).

By contrast, Cronin's concern with space is less a means of individual transcendence or

escape than a dimension of engagement. The poems collected in the section entitled

"Venture into the Interior" create a geography of/in the mouth. Under the heading

"Geography of the Mouth", Cronin writes:

> South Africa is a multilingual country; even the English we speak is
>
> many Englishes, layered with occupation, defiance and conquest. To
>
> speak South African is to disturb history, the tongue bumping against
>
> repressed parts... Perhaps my original prison poem was a prayer, the
>
> simple litany of place names... Thrust in the loneliness of solitary
>
> confinement, bounded by four uncooperative walls, I began to recite over
>
> and over that laconic list of place names, repeating the standard SABC

weather forecast. '[...] Port Shepstone to the Tugela Mouth[...] the Tugela
Mouth to Kosi Bay.'... How reassuring it was to be able to gather a sense
of space with the bare resources of tongue, bone, gum, breath, word.
Each one was a shrine. Cooped up, I was able to make geography in the
small theatre of my mouth. (1987:51)

What is striking about this quotation and the subsequent poems is the way in which the
geography of the body, and specifically the mouth, is joined through the word to the
geography of the land. This is a very different kind of turning, and being turned, inside
out. The interior is multiple and layered, the struggle to liberate "is a struggle for every
square inch of terrain, the wide-open veld, and the spaces inside" (73). The mouth, and
body, have their own contours and terrain. They are the machinery or engine of sound
and linguistic production. The tongue is the ark of language ("Litany", 54), the mouth
(and prison?) the cave-site of sedimented word, "shells of meaning / left in our mouths
[and prisons?] / by thousands of years of / human occupation" ("Cave-Site", 53:[]
bracket my own). The language is a South Africanised English, which itself journeys
through the mouth/body, generations, and space: it is the river that flows through the
land and "carries many tongues in its mouth" ("The River that Flows through our Land",
63). Language enables the recovery of places, and a sense of the space and the reality of
South Africa, outside, through naming and invoking (Cronin 1986:20). From inside, to
imagine, remember, and recreate the outside, requires a collaboration of the body, the
senses, and language. Flesh made word and the word made flesh. The difference
between inside and outside, shadowy darkness and daylight, is also the difference
between sounds and the possibility that sounds may grow into words. When words
overcome the barriers to their articulation - a land so parched that words, struggling to
be born, stick in the back of the throat ("Karroo I", 1987:59) - it is hoped they will
germinate in the earth, land, landscape, and the reciprocal struggles they contain. To
attempt to speak/write from prison, in this way, is an act of personal and political

faith/belief, not least in the assertion of a profound connection and continuity between inside and outside. Through this process of multiple mapping - of voices/words/ languages of a diversely peopled land, of the mouth and body, and of the land itself - Cronin finds his own interstice of freedom, a space in which to locate and authenticate himself, his experiences and his beliefs.

> To learn how to speak / With the voices of the land, / To parse the speech in its rivers, / To catch in the inarticulate grunt, / Stammer, call, cry, babble, tongue's knot / A sense of the stoneness of these stones / From which all words are cut. / To trace with the tongue wagon-trails / Saying the suffix of their aches in -kuil, -pan, -fontein, / In watery names that confirm / The dryness of their ways. / To visit the places of occlusion, or the lick / in a vlei-bank dawn. / To bury my mouth in the pit of your arm, / In that planetarium, / Pectoral beginning to the nub of time / Down there close to the water-table, to feel / The full moon as it drums / At the back of my throat / Its cow-skinned vowel. / To write a poem with words like: /... Stompie... Songololo... To understand the least inflections, / To voice without swallowing / Syllables born in tin shacks, or catch / the 5.15 ikwata bust fife / Chwannisberg train, to reach / The low chant of the mine gang's / Mineral glow of our people's unbreakable resolve. / To learn how to speak / With the voices of this land. ("To Learn How to Speak...", 64)

What Cronin illustrates, by way of conclusion to this section on the body and/in space, is a potentially liberatory interdependence of the landscapes/spaces of language, body and country.

The contested un/remaking of the body and/in space, within the incarcerative 'space of death', contributed various textual representations or discourses to the record of detention/imprisonment. The second part of this chapter will analyse two such representations/discourses that return the focus of attention to the issues of torture and in particular custodial death: these being the legal inquest and the fictional narrative. How, then, was the story of the tortured body told through the institutional discourses of the state, law and medicine at the inquest and in the pages of literature?

ii) Legal and Literary Discourses

The Inquest

> Justice pursues the body beyond all possible pain. (Foucault 1991:34)

> there is a difference between arbitrary power and the rule of law. We ought to expose
> the shams and inequities which may be concealed beneath this law. But the rule of law
> itself... seems to me to be an unqualified human good... we feel contempt not because
> we are contemptuous of the notion of a just and equitable law but because this notion
> has been betrayed by its own professors. (Thompson 1975:266-8)

The coexistence of the torture chamber and the court room placed the perpetrators of

custodial violence in the seemingly paradoxical position of being both above the law,

indeed the personification of absolute power and state lawlessness, and, at least in

theory, susceptible to the sanction of law and justice. In the case of custodial death -

which signified that under the guise of an investigation the ultimate punishment had

been inflicted on the basis of inherent and assumed guilt - the judicial process that had

been collapsed into, or perhaps to be more accurate had been eliminated by, brutal

extra-judicial violence, was then resurrected at the inquest to preside over its ultimate

consequence.

The torture chamber and the court room, the administrative world of non-law and the

judicial world of law, are what Adam Ashforth calls "theatres of power", "symbolic

rituals aiding in establishing and reproducing the power of modern states" (1990:7).[34]

Ashforth continues: "Dialogue and silence are both essential parts of the power of

states", and makes the distinction between realms that "both signify and in part establish

a possibility of a dialogue based on reason" - commissions of inquiry are the specific

example, but political trials and inquests map out a similar terrain - and realms of

"silence based on fear" - of which the torture chamber is the obvious example. Such

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[34] On the political trial as ritual see Moss 1981:203-4,208.

realms coexisted, however, not only within the apartheid regime but also within its individual mechanisms and institutions, and they did so in ways that both reinforced and undermined assertions that the court room and the torture chamber could be distinguished by an essential and qualitative difference.[35] Dialogue and silence, reason and fear/violence, truth/knowledge and fiction/ideology, life and death, un/remaking, operated, albeit in different ways, across judicial and non-judicial spheres, thereby facilitating the court room and torture chamber, justice and terror, good guy/bad guy, as both divergent and the same, facets of a two-faced regime.

On the one hand the court room and the torture chamber were moments in the same encounter, locations within the same institutional space, mutually dependent: the system. For example: the law and judicial system were profoundly alienating, marked by exclusion, white (Dingake 1987:130-3,220, Pheto 1985:176-7,199), while legal proceedings provided another example of Scarry's 'false motive syndrome'.[36] The court room was able to complement the designs of torture and fulfil the aims of the state when it reproduced the procedures, techniques and discourses of the torture chamber in its production and verification of truth. In other words when it operated within the same regime of truth and power, when the rule of law was a facade resting on the shifting sands of absolute power and lawlessness. This situation could be variously manufactured, for example, through the manipulation and loading of rules and

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[35] It is also important to acknowledge, if only in passing, that this pattern of significant, if sometimes subtle and often inconsistent, difference and continuity, permeated a range of sub-worlds occupied by the detainee, the awaiting-trial prisoner and the prisoner, and presided over by the Security Police, the conventional police and the Prisons Department, and by different components of the judiciary.

[36] The stated aims of legal proceedings rarely coincided with the real aims, which were usually fourfold: to repress/silence, reconstruct, legitimise and to secure complicity. While the opposition was served by vocality and publicity, the state was often best served by the shadow of silence. The repression of information both superseded and complemented the aim of reconstruction. The state sought to reconstruct and rewrite events as they were perceived by the government. It reproduced for the public the image of a just society threatened by people and organisations seeking its violent destruction and the person/act abstracted from broader context or motive. By providing a symbolic reassertion of the values/vision of officialdom and its support base, the state sought to achieve its third aim, that of legitimising its own version of truth and power, thereby also legitimising the exercise and preservation of that truth and power through various mechanisms of repression. And, finally, the ritual of the court room sought the complicity of others, thereby creating a situation in which everyone and no-one was culpable and responsible (Davis 1985, Suttner 1984).

procedures: in political trials these included the appointment of conservative presiding magistrates/judges, incommunicado pre-trial detention for both the accused and state witnesses, summary proceedings, offences that were broadly and vaguely defined, prescribed minimum sentences, and other procedural advantages for the prosecution such as presumptions, including the presumption of guilt, in their favour. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the political trial was a site where (auto)biographical narratives converged: a locus of rewriting, of manipulated truth and lies, and of the conversion of individual pain into state power. Iain Edwards writes the following in relation to the sabotage and treason trials of the early 1960s:

> The trials were often absurdist events packed full of rituals, drama and power struggles... even the strong struggle amidst the shifting sands of judicial power. There were multiple accused and multiple charges, all requiring devious legal arrangements and strategies. There were discordant layers of remembered and created spoken evidence from both accused and the state. These could clash with submitted documents which often, despite their obvious falsity could acquire a primary legal status. In their spoken cross examination of accused, state lawyers could use documents to deadly effect. Although guilt can be privately accepted, court room scenes where lies and truths intermingle and where lies can convict and true human agency go unrecognised lead to considerable mental confusion. Fact, fantasy, oral examination and the seemingly clear writing of a legal code intermingled constantly in almost uncontrollable and perverse fashions. The court room was a warped place. (Edwards in Babenia 1995:xx-xxi, footnote omitted)[37]

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[37] For one perspective on the truth in the context of a (political) trial, see Hirson 1995:332,334.

Apartheid justice, therefore, was a very overt form of political justice, political justice

being "the utilization of judicial proceedings for political ends" (Kirchheimer 1969:408):

politics by other means (Abel 1995).[38]

While the influence of the judiciary in South Africa was diminished by parliamentary

sovereignty - what does the rule of law mean when the government can change the law

at will? - and by the erosion of its authority and jurisdiction during the apartheid era, it

stands accused of complicity in apartheid due to the way in which that discretion which it

retained - "there is almost always some residue of jurisdiction which the courts can

exercise" (Mathews 1985:201) - was exercised, invariably, in the interests of the state.

In the field of custodial pain and death, the 'residue of jurisdiction' could have been used

to comment on the zone of judicial exclusion, to withdraw its implicit approval of such a

zone and the purposes it served. It was not. The courts failed to intervene effectively on

a whole range of issues from the conditions of detention to shortcomings in the basic

needs of procedural justice. An enormously significant failure was that by generally

accepting the reliability of detainee evidence the judiciary condoned, and may even

have induced, both mental and physical torture.[39] The reasons behind judicial

complicity were complex. Personality, background, and an ideological sympathy with

apartheid combined with executive-mindedness, an often uncritical trust of figures in

authority, and a failure to understand the nature of the repressive regime, especially

solitary confinement. Many rationalised their actions - for example, by hiding behind

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[38] Joe Slovo, as lawyer, trialist and detainee, captures a sense cf a legal system and profession being remoulded in the image of apartheid (1996: especially 53,58,104,122-3).

[39] One of the most extraordinary examples of judicial complicity was the Rabie Commission. It was initiated due largely to the public outcry after the inquest into the death of Steve Biko and was published two days before the death cf Neil Aggett. The aims of the commission, which comprised lawyers and academics and was presided over by a Judge of Appeal, Mr Justice P. J. Rabie, were "to enquire into and report and make recommendations on, the necessity, adequacy, fairness and efficacy of legislation pertaining to the internal security of the Republic of South Africa". Its catalogue of shortcomings - which included the failure to hear evidence from former detainees or to investigate methods of interrogation - were remarkable. The commission's recommendations led to the enactment of the Internal Security Act, No 74 of 1982. At the hands of a judicial commission the security laws were rationalised and judicial exclusion approved.

the mask of legal positivism (see Richards 1983) - sought professional and/or financial rewards, and/or, in time, simply became accustomed to their politicised role.

This process of legal manipulation and capitulation, however, was not, nor could it ever be, complete and absolute. The scenario of the judicial apparatus as a weapon of state power raises the following question: if the law was exclusively and blatantly an agent of repression, what advantages would it provide for the state that could not be obtained through extra-judicial terror? Why not simply dispense with the pretence of the rule of law altogether? The answer is that the law, while in many ways complementing extra-judicial violence, also served the different but not unrelated aim of a more embracing legitimation. If the state totally excluded the judicial system or used it simply as an adjunct to its domain of naked repression it surrendered the battle for a broader legitimacy that lies at the heart of political justice. The judicial system provided a bridge, albeit a retractable draw-bridge, to greater acceptability both inside and outside South Africa.

Ideally, from the viewpoint of the state, a difficult and precarious balance had to be maintained as it sought to manage an institution and a process that, if it was to serve its encompassing legitimising function, was intrinsically beyond total control. The judiciary needed to be independent enough to retain its credibility but not so independent that it significantly hampered or interfered with the repressive designs of the state. The law had to at least offer some possibility of being fair and just, and on occasions had to actually be fair and just. The legitimacy of the courts and the legitimacy of the state were irrevocably intertwined.[40] Having availed itself of pain and terror, the regime took a risk by allowing space for and making itself vulnerable to the

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[40] For example: the extent to which successive National Party governments sought credibility and legitimacy, as opposed to or in conjunction with a variety of other goals, can be traced through the balance and evolution between ordinary legal/criminal proceedings, and emergency and extraordinary legal measures, as ways of dealing with political opposition (Davis 1990). The former predominated in eras of supposed 'reform', the latter in times of emergency or crisis. Another facet of a two-faced regime. On the balance/evolution between common law and statutory charges, also see Rayner 1986. On state "'reckoning schemes of legitimation'", see Ashforth 1990:8-9,252-4.

reinclusion of the judiciary - and with it the outside world - and empowering it to preside over a network of institutional violence. One side of the coin of risk was the potential benefits of heightened legitimacy for the apartheid regime, the other side was that for this desired benefit there was, on occasion, a price to pay.

As a result of this calculated gamble the court room and the torture chamber were characterised not only by similarity but also by difference. Among the sources of difference were that the court room was usually a public forum that, while compromised, nevertheless procedurally ran to a minimum set of rules and regulations. At the Biko inquest, Kentridge, lead counsel for the Biko family, stated that there were few countries in the world where members of the security police would appear in court and be subjected to what amounted to hostile cross examination and that South Africa had every right to be proud of that possibility (Woods 1979:359). Furthermore, the judicial forum could be exploited by the opposition as a platform for alternative views and visions of society, notably through the use of defence witnesses and political statements from the dock by the accused.[41] Inevitably, over time, testimony and information about the operation of the apartheid system and resistance entered the public realm. A small band of lawyers used the ambiguities, inconsistencies, loopholes, and lacunae within the law to resist the state and empower the oppressed. While acknowledging the dominant structural characteristics of the judicial system it is imperative to acknowledge, therefore, those positive moments and judgements the system enabled: there were extraordinary disclosures, lawyers and decisions.[42] The

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[41] Steve Biko, for example, appeared as a defence witness in the 1975-6 trial of the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) Nine (see Arnold 1979, Woods 1979:161-225, also Buntman 1996:151). For statements by the accused in this and other trials, see Benson 1981, and mention of statements are contained in, among others, the following autobiographical accounts: Hirson 1995:333-4, Jenkin 1987:62-3, Lewin 1976:11-13, Shityuwete 1990:173-6; also see Niehaus 1994:113-16.

[42] There is obviously a significant difference between a legal system that on occasion allowed individual access to justice and a system that is itself equitable and fair. Lawyers prepared to take on cases for the opposition, often prominent advocates, and the decisions they facilitated, may have been a crucial legitimising factor for the politico-legal system in a situation where, in most cases, no legal defence was ever going to be good enough. Such occasions may have served to bring power further under the control of the law, but also "paradoxically, to consolidate power, to enhance

highest price exacted from the state's judicial gamble was that of judicial defeat

inflicted upon the government. "We owned the court", Pheto states in relation to the

celebrations that followed his acquittal (1985:201). While within the inter-related

framework of repression and legitimacy the state, arguably, was vindicated whether it

won or lost in court - in relation to allegations of torture, for example, when the state

was defeated the system could be depicted as denouncing malpractice, whereas when it

was victorious it could claim to have been unjustly accused (Lelyveld 1987:201) - the

court room, nevertheless, harboured the potential to serve a different, sometimes

radically contradictory, 'regime of truth' to that of the torture chamber.[43]

In summary, the courts were another weapon in the profoundly unequal struggle

between state and opposition, a weapon characterised by an uncertainty and complexity

of meaning, a weapon available to both sides. The judicial system was an unpredictable

agent that resisted, and indeed whose purpose was negated by, absolute control by the

state. While some within the anti-apartheid movement forthrightly challenged/rejected

the jurisdiction, independence and legitimacy of the courts, and the legal apparatus was

treated with suspicion, contempt and heavily criticised by both state and opposition,

neither abandoned the legal arena altogether.

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legitimacy, and to inhibit revolutionary movements" (Thompson 1975:265, also J. Slovo 1996:58: for a differently nuanced argument, see Abel 1995:549). What, however, was the alternative for the lawyer when people wanted to be defended, so as to be released or get the minimum possible sentence? (see Kentridge in Davis 1985:45, Bizos unpublished:10). There are a number of relevant literary representations of the dilemma facing the lawyer in such a context: they include Coetzee 1982, Gordimer 1988 - Joe, a lawyer, is challenged at one point by his wife: "What will you be at our Nuremburg?... The one who tried to serve justice through the rule of law, or the one who betrayed justice by trying to serve it through the rule of unjust laws?" (83) - and in the international arena, Klima 1992.

For a disaggregated perspective on the nature/role of the legal profession and political trial, the record of the South African courts and judiciary, and the force of law as a constraint on and form of resistance/challenge to state power, as well as references already detailed, see Abel 1995, Dugard 1978, Ellmann 1992, Foster et al. 1987:30-56,165-7, Lawyers for Human Rights 1983, Lobban 1996, Mathews 1985, Mathews and Albino 1966, Merrett 1994, Riekert 1985, 1985a, Rudolph 1984, and West 1985.

[43] The complex and ambiguous interplay between the torture chamber and the court room is illuminatingly discussed in Lelyveld 1987:185-216.

Torture and the law were bound together by the interpenetration of institutions, personnel, procedures and discourses, by an organic circulation of information and ideology, knowledge and power. Techniques for the production, verification and contestation of truth were both complementary and contradictory. As a result the torture chamber and the court room spoke with one and with discordant voices, articulating a single regime and irreconcilable regimes of truth and power. Of paramount importance in this process was the fact that they were traversed and united by the primary products of interrogation. The extra-legal permeated the court room (see Foster et al. 1987:44); but in doing so it enabled the extension of influence, at least on some occasions and to some degree, to operate in the reverse direction. At the inquest the primary products of interrogation consisted of the tortured body and/as interrogational text(s). They were supplemented by the documents of the police investigation. Overlapping layers of similarity and difference were un/remade on-in-through these texts in the process of their production, transmission and interpretation/reception, in the process of converting pain into power. Again, lives/deaths were variously and irreconcilably told, circulated and superimposed, violently collaborative; again both sides were seeking to inscribe lives/deaths in writing and there was no monopoly over the function of texts, somatic or written. It was, in part, the textual and discursive congregation at the inquest that provided this legal arena with its particular set of limitations and possibilities.

As conceived by the Inquest Act 58 of 1959, the inquest was not a trial but an official investigation into deaths arising from unnatural causes where there was insufficient evidence to go straight to a criminal prosecution. Section 16 (2)(d) of the Inquest Act provided the inquest with its most important task, to determine "[a]s to whether the death was brought about by any act or omission involving or amounting to an offence on the part of any person". Crucially, the inquest took two forms. The formal inquest was a public inquiry and in addition to written submissions, witnesses could be called and cross examined. Evidence, therefore, was both oral and written. Section 13(1) of

the Act, however, permitted the presiding officer to forsake oral evidence in limited circumstances. The informal inquest, which was not held in open court, could make a finding based solely upon documentary evidence/affidavits, and necessarily resulted in a more cursory and superficial investigation, owed its existence to this provision.

The inquest could have preserved/restored confidence in the state and judicial system and clearly demarcated the boundary between torture and the law, by investigating/documenting allegations of torture, identifying those deemed responsible, and suggesting preventive measures. It could have reconstructed and reclaimed the voice, self and world of the deceased from the writings and readings of/on/in/about the body, thereby liberating them from the torturer/state and restored them to the body enveloped in silence; it could have given voice to the body's cry of pain, transforming the body in pain into the voice of a subversive power; it could have become part of the multi-dimensional process of anti-repressive, liberatory remaking. Again, the dynamics of torture and interrogation could have been reversed within its representation. Through a number of possible reversals, of body into voice, silence into speech, passivity into agency, private into public, death into life, the inquest, by making audible/visible the body in pain eclipsing the multi-tongued state, could have facilitated a reversal of the structure of torture - extending to the security police answering rather than asking the questions, their conduct and lives being the subject of inquiry, and parallels between the discursive techniques of interrogation and cross-examination - and a kind of state confession. Through the appropriation of the scene and circumstances of torture in representation, the state could have been forced to speak from within discourses that were not entirely its own. Had this been achieved the dynamics of torture would have been both reversed and unmasked by the law.

That the inquest rarely achieved even a portion of this potential was due to the fact that it operated as an extremely overt form of political justice. Political manipulation took

many forms. Whether an inquest took place at all was the subject of contestation as it was by no means the state's first or preferred line of defence in the event of a custodial death. The institutionalised culture of (dis)information ensured that the initial reaction to reports or rumours was often characterised by secrecy and/or silence, lies, denials and/or obfuscation. Frequently the body was absent or had disappeared having been hurriedly buried or otherwise disposed of.[44] If a custodial death became public knowledge the easiest response was to ascribe it to natural causes or suicide. More state manufactured magical realism:

> He fell from the ninth floor
>
> He hanged himself
>
> He slipped on a piece of soap while washing
>
> He hanged himself
>
> He slipped on a piece of soap while washing
>
> He fell from the ninth floor
>
> He hanged himself while washing
>
> He slipped from the ninth floor
>
> He hung from the ninth floor
>
> He slipped on the ninth floor while washing
>
> He fell on a piece of soap while slipping
>
> He hung from the ninth floor
>
> He washed from the ninth floor while slipping
>
> He hung from a piece of soap while washing
>
> (van Wyk, "In Detention", 1979:45)[45]

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[44] On the importance of the body/burial see Kuzwayo 1985:46, Mashinini 1989:133-4, also Brink 1984:46-51,56,227, Desai and Marney 1978:126-7, Gottschalk, "For Ashley Kriel whom they Killed by Hazendal", in Oliphant ed. 1992:446-7, Serote, "Time has Run Out", 1982:126-7. On the significance of the body/funeral in a different context of political repression, that of Guatemala, see Zur 1995.

[45] Also see Breytenbach, "Letter from Foreign Parts to Butcher" (a version of which appears in Cronyn et al. eds. 1995:198-200), Cronin, "Lullaby", 1987:102, Gottschalk ("Petition to my Interrogators") and Siphiwe Ka Ngwenya ("To Celebrate is a Must") in Oliphant ed. 1992:456-8,543-70 (see 556-7). What J.M. Coetzee has written about

When an inquest took place, two central figures in the translation of body into word and pain into power, as writers and interpreters of texts within the network of official (re)writing, were the doctor and the magistrate. Their roles within and traversing the torture chamber and court room were central to the resulting patterns of similarity and difference that characterised the relationship between the two.

The Doctor and the Magistrate

Scarry argues that it is in the nature of torture that the two institutions "ubiquitously present should be medicine and law, health and justice, for they are the institutional elaborations of body and state" (1985:42, also see 41,44). They are constantly alluded to during torture, made agents of pain, unmade by being made weapons, present by inversion. Scarry argues: "In its basic outlines, torture is the inversion of the trial, a reversal of cause and effect. While the one studies evidence that may lead to punishment, the other uses punishment to generate the evidence" (41). Medicine is also inverted by being made complicit in pain and wounding rather than healing. Kate Millett talks of torture as "becoming more and more a 'branch of medicine'" and of the "medicalization of torture" (1995:312). Torturers become the "doctors of interrogation", the "doctors of pain" (Coetzee 1982:9,47), and perhaps, within the legal paradigm, the advocates of a particular kind of justice.

Under apartheid, the bearers of the body as it passed from the torture chamber to the court room were representatives from the institutions of health and justice, the district

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Breytenbach's "Letter from Foreign Parts to Butcher" applies to all these poems. They appropriate the language of the state "at its most shameless and cynical when it presents lies as lies in arrogant certainty that, while no one will believe them, no one dare repudiate them". Coetzee continues: "It is one of the linguistic practices of totalitarianism to send out coded messages whose meaning is known to all parties, but to enforce... a literal interpretation of them, at least in the public arena" (1991:59-60). Through the writer's linguistic and rhetorical superiority, the poem becomes an arena in which the codes can be unmasked, parodied, denounced.

surgeon - a general practitioner employed by the Department of Health (and Welfare) whose duties could include providing medical care for detainees and prisoners - and the executive magistrate. Doctors and magistrates - latterly alongside inspectors of detainees - presided over the complaints and safeguard mechanisms for detainees.[46] Both the magistrate and the doctor were in an unenviable position. On the one hand, as employees of the state, they were treated with suspicion and distrust by detainees who were reluctant to impart information or register complaints due to concerns about confidentiality - inquiries and examinations were carried out in the presence of the security police and other state personnel (see Rayner 1987:49,51) or complaints were transmitted back to them - and fears of reprisals. Abel writes: "[Dr. Wendy Orr] was troubled from the outset that prisoners regarded her as 'a government employee,' 'on the other side,' 'not as a doctor dealing with her patients.'" (1995:219). Detainees were threatened and intimidated into silence, into retracting complaints, and revealing what had been disclosed to the magistrate/doctor, and/or suffered the feared reprisals for registering a complaint. Most believed that the mechanisms for complaints and safeguards were, at best, an irrelevance to their conditions and prospects. Those that did register complaints or lay charges did so in an attempt to reclaim a sense of agency and empowerment.

Doctors and magistrates also operated under the intimidatory shadow of the state and its agents for whom the visits/procedures were both an inconvenience and a cover or insurance policy that sanctioned their behaviour. Both professions found themselves ignored and treated with contempt, out of their depth professionally and politically, lacking complete autonomy. Doctors lacked control over the context of treatment and the conditions of detention/imprisonment from which complaints originated and to which the person concerned would return. Medical professionals sympathetic and co-

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[46] On the nature and shortcomings of the various systems of safeguards, see Abel 1995:231-8,242,257-8, Foster et al. 1987:24-5,36-41,189, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law 1983:17-18,20-3,181, Lawyers for Human Rights 1983, Motala 1987:2,4-10,11-16,85-7, Rudolph 1984:36-52, Strauss 1985, Tucker 1985; also Lelyveld 1987:204.

operative in relation to the state were specifically selected; access to a doctor was used as a bargaining chip within interrogation; proposed medical treatment could be over-ruled, ignored, delayed or selectively implemented. Furthermore, neither doctors nor magistrates enjoyed the right of access. The security police could, and frequently did as for example in the Neil Aggett case, simply reject and/or obstruct detainee requests for medical care (Rayner 1987:49-51).[47] Similarly access to magistrates could be thwarted and/or manipulated (see Lewin 1976:63). Magisterial and medical visits also imposed their own structure on interrogation - a visit would be followed by an intensification of interrogation, including possibly torture, with a period then allowed for recovery before the next visit - and a routine, which like all routines, could be disrupted to unsettle the detainee (see Desai and Marney 1978: especially 102-3).

Conscientious doctors and magistrates were, therefore, confronted with starkly conflicting loyalties to their employer, the state, and to those they were intended, in theory at least, to serve. Caught in-between, they faced the danger of being ostracised by both, isolated and vulnerable. The task of the doctor was inherently ambiguous: did the provision of treatment automatically imply co-operation with and approval for the system? what were the implications of not providing treatment? what if the detainee or prisoner him/herself desperately wanted medical care?[48] Similar questions could be asked with regard to magistrates. However, these arguments should not obscure the essential fact that it was the detainee/prisoner who was in the most invidious position: would a complaint lead to positive action or violent reprisals? would it simply provide

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[47] Wessel Ebersohn, in his novel *Store up the Anger*, captures the dynamic. The doctor: "He was one small weak man who doubted his own authority among five strong ones who were sure of theirs" (1984:36). The interrogator: "'Patient? He's not a patient. He's my prisoner, not your patient'" (105). The interaction between the two: "'It sounds like you have already decided what my diagnosis is to be'" (101, also 159,179). And, finally, the detainee: "Their dealings were with each other. They had no dealings with him" (102).

[48] The clinical and ethical issues facing mental health workers in the treatment of detainees are discussed in Levin 1986. He states that: "The ethical position of the mental health professional working within the context of detention is hopelessly compromised" (183).

the authorities with a record in advance of allegations that might later be made in court (Sachs 1968:258)? would the absence of a complaint imply a level of content which might weaken any court case relating to assault or claims that a statement/confession was illegally extracted? In this state of radical uncertainty, the potential benefits of this system often seemed negligible, remote and/or irrelevant while the risks were substantial and immediate. The complaints and safeguard mechanisms for detainees were another weapon that could operate both for or against the detainee. The doctor and the magistrate were more often part of the problem than part of the solution.

The difficulties inherent in the monitoring function were not sufficient to explain the rampant misconduct, negligence and incompetence of which both doctors and magistrates were guilty.[49] This was illustrated by the few notable exceptions to the norm. One such exception was the action taken by Dr. Wendy Orr, a district surgeon, who, several months after the government declared a State of Emergency in July 1985,

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[49] The medical community in South Africa, for example, stands accused of participating in a range of abuses of their professional and ethical responsibilities. There are many ways in which doctors can inflict, collaborate with, or otherwise condone, torture (see Bernstein 1972:2-3, British Medical Association 1992, and Stover and Nightingale eds. 1985). Sub-standard medical treatment for detainees and prisoners was the rule (see Rayner 1987:48-54,64-6, also the Human Rights Commission 1990:419-20,430, and Motala 1987:73-4, also 88: specifically in relation to women, see CIIR 1988:11-23) and, predictably, provision was consistently and deliberately worse for blacks than for whites. Overt participation in torture and harassment did take place - examples included sexual harassment: "I found this traumatic because a doctor is someone I normally trust" (Mohamed in Russell 1991:39) - but more usually medical misconduct was characterised by supervisory and regulatory malpractices. These ranged from the exercise of corporal punishment and the death penalty in the presence of a medical official to dietary/ medical officials reputedly devising inadequate and racially differentiated diets as well as 'spare diet' (enforced semi-starvation as a form of punishment), and the provision of the formality of a medical examination to declare a prisoner fit for such punishment (Breytenbach 1985:146-7,281-2, Dingake 1987:152, Jenkin 1987:46,177-8, Makhoere 1988:29, Naidoo 1982:123-5). Drug related abuse and poisoning would also presumably have required medical expertise (see Ames 1985:87, Foster et al. 1987:105-6,126, Appendix I, Jenkin 1987:237, Kasrils 1993:203-4, Pauw 1991:51,56-7,118-20).

Breytenbach is particularly dismissive of psychologists: "the parasites living off our twisted souls", "[t]heir task, very clearly, is to be the psychological component of the general strategy of unbalancing and disorientating the political prisoner. Their learning is at the disposal of the investigators and the interrogators" (1985:188,190, see 188-92; also Sachs 1968:233-5, Shityuwete 1990:239-40, and see Ebersohn 1990:95). The process of observation/classification that followed conviction and preceded normal imprisonment was sometimes supervised by psychologists (Niehaus 1994:119-21). It is likely that, as elsewhere, behavioural psychology played an important role within the regime of imprisonment: specifically, the careful management of prisoner classification, privileges and conditions in general, to reward and punish, to manipulate, behaviour, and to break the prisoner, through rules and regulations that were secret, subject to unpredictable and arbitrary changes and interpretation, and yet stringently and harshly enforced (Weschler 1990:131-8,147 - which in addition contains information on psychiatrists, also see 163 - Millett 1995:310). For allegations of psychiatric incompetence/abuse see Blumberg 1962:124-5, Makhoere 1988:105-7, Stover and Nightingale eds. 1985:17, also First 1965:130).

made an urgent application to the Supreme Court to stop the police from ill-treating hundreds of detainees under her care in the Port Elizabeth prisons. Her action, which secured immediate protection for the detainees concerned and focused public attention on torture, remained the only one of its kind. Although Dr. Orr received individual and some institutional support from the medical community she was also victimised and harassed until she left her post (Rayner 1987:67-79).[50]

By way of summation, autobiographical accounts are littered with indictments of both doctors and magistrates and the system within which they operated. Breytenbach refers to doctors "whose professional consciences, when working for the State the way they do, do not seem to suffer too many qualms", claiming that they have become "rubber stamps for the penal system" (1985:185, see 185-8) and groups judges and magistrates together as "part of the system" (1985:179, see 199-200). Schlapobersky refers explicitly to his "terrible rage" at "medical complicity and collusion in torture" (in Bernstein 1994:85).[51] Inquests following the deaths in custody of Neil Aggett and Steve Biko substantiated such allegations and experiences.[52]

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[50] Also see Abel 1995:211-58 (especially 255-6), which situates Dr. Orr's conduct and application within the generally lamentable conduct of fellow medical professionals around her. Autobiographical accounts provide some positive reflections on medical care. Sachs' first disillusioning encounter with the medical profession in fact led to a much more positive experience: "I feel elated. Thank you doctor, for being a doctor. You have reasserted for me the norms of civilised society, where a doctor is a man who tries to heal, and not someone who condones torture" (Sachs 1990:259-60 (see 252-60); also see Grace Cele in Bernstein 1994:204-5, First 1965:127, Hirson 1995:183-4,288, Mashinini 1989:85,88). Similar reflections are also registered in relation to magistrates: at times detainees attributed improvements in conditions to magisterial intervention (see First 1965:44-5, Pheto 1985:167,170, Sachs 1968:262, and contrast Dingake's negative experience (1987:109-10), with a much more positive experience that followed (113-14): also see P. Naidoo in Bernstein 1994:227). Despite significant shortcomings in the process, magistrates appear to have taken action on complaints of assault by Lewin (1976:37,63-5) and Pheto (1985:107-9,115-17,121,137,139,150); in an out of court settlement, Stephanie Kemp received damages after registering a similar complaint (Sachs 1968:56-64,83,162-4,168,199,274-7,283).

[51] Among the many other similar expressions of disappointment and disgust see, in relation to medical care in detention, Chikane 1988:56, First 1965:130, W. Mandela 1985:104, Mofokeng in Russell 1991:51, Pheto 1985:77-8, Sachs 1990:256. For comment on magistrates and inspectors of detainees, see First 1965:43, Mashinini 1989:64,77, Makhoere 1988:10, Niehaus 1994:110, Wolpe 1994:197-8,200, and more generally with reference to complaints, see Sachs 1968:254-8,263-4,273-5. Also on doctors/medical care, magistrates and inspectors of detainees, see Foster et al. 1987:97-8,100-2,125,142-6,156-7,159,187, and Appendices E and G. The white lawyer as detainee was subjected to the unnerving experience of seeing the legal system from the other-/in-side (see Kantor 1967:56,102-4,110,114,128,200,217 - also on Kantor, see Wolpe 1994: especially 152,199-201,225 - Sachs 1990:146-59,285, 1968:62, J. Slovo 1996:119-43, also 93-104, Wolpe 1994:107-8,124,180); on occasion there was a recognition that they shared certain skills, characteristics, knowledge with the interrogator/torturer (Sachs 1968:252, also S. Jacobs 1986:128, Wolpe 1994:136,159-60).

The Aggett inquest flagrantly revealed shortcomings in the system of detainee protection. On several occasions a magistrate and an inspector of detainees had tried to see Aggett only to be told that he was "unavailable". On 4 January, for example, the day Aggett alleged that he was first assaulted, the inspector of detainees was denied access to him on the grounds that he was "out on investigation". At the inquest it was established that he was, in fact, undergoing interrogation on the 10th floor of John Vorster Square. On 1 February, the day after a 62 hour period of interrogation during which Aggett complained he had been ill-treated, the magistrate again tried to see him but was denied access. Brigadier Muller, the officer in charge of the security police in Johannesburg, testified that he had never met a magistrate or an inspector of detainees (or a doctor) visiting a detainee on the 10th floor of John Vorster Square, where interrogations took place, during the six years he had been stationed there. In his judgement the presiding magistrate found that there was substance in the suggestion that Aggett had been kept away from the inspector of detainees and the magistrate (inquest 139/1982:3691).

Perhaps the most powerful example of medical collaboration in torture and custodial death relates to the death of Steve Biko. The inquest into Biko's death, caused by head injuries after a blow or blows to the head, provided detailed insight into medical provision for detainees. Between the morning of 7 September and 11 September 1977, Biko was seen on several occasions by Dr. Lang, a district surgeon, and Dr. Tucker, the chief district surgeon, Port Elizabeth. A specialist physician, Dr. Hersch, and a neuro-

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On medical care for political prisoners on Robben Island, see Dingake 1987:158-9, N. Mandela 1995:482,565,600-2, Dlomo in Cook 1974:73, Naidoo 1982:99,102-4,110,132,137-8,153-4,162-3,199-201,204,212-13,217-18,244, Shityuwete 1990:184-5,187,194-8,205,213-6,224,229-31,244, and for the white male political prisoners, see Hirson 1995:183-7, Jenkin 1987:179-80, Niehaus 1994:124-5; also see Makhoere 1988:30-3,36,52-3,62-3,69,85,93-4,114-15. On the visits of judges to Robben Island see Dingake 1987:220, N. Mandela 1995:518-9,547-8, Naidoo 1982:210-11, Shityuwete 1990:203-4, and to the white politicals, see Jenkin 1987:150; also Makhoere 1988:109-10.

[52] The account below draws in particular on the following sources: Bernstein 1978, Lawyers for Human Rights 1983, Woods 1979.

surgeon, Dr. Keeley, were also consulted. Despite clear indications of brain damage the doctors all thought Biko was shamming and his condition was neither properly diagnosed nor treated.[53]

The inquest revealed a catalogue of medical misconduct: the unquestioning acceptance of security police versions of events and subservience to their wishes, indifference to the conditions in which the detainee was held, unasked and unanswered questions, unseen injuries and inadequate examinations - Sydney Kentridge in his submission on behalf of the Biko family referred to a "studied lack of curiosity" (inquest 573/1977:75) - misdirected assumptions, and undiagnosed and untreated illness. Negligence and incompetence were compounded, at the inquest, by contradictory and inexplicable evidence. Although the conduct of the other doctors was also subjected to criticism the main allegations were directed against Drs. Lang and Tucker (Rayner 1987:25-34).

It was in the issuing of false medical reports that Dr. Lang's conduct was most lamentable. He was asked by Colonel Goosen to issue a medical certificate on 7 September after his initial examination of Biko. In it, Lang gave as the reason for the medical examination the fact that Biko would not speak. However, in a later report to the pathologist conducting the post-mortem, Lang wrote: "The detainee had refused water and food and displayed a weakness of all four limbs and it was feared that he had suffered a stroke". When asked at the inquest to explain the discrepancy between the two statements, he replied, "I cannot explain it. It is inexplicable". In the second part of the certificate he stated that he had found no evidence of any abnormality or pathology.

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[53] The security police and the doctors conspired to mislead each other about Biko's condition. The doctors were consistently misinformed by members of the security police, particularly but not exclusively by Colonel Goosen, Chief of the Security Police in the Eastern Cape. They were variously told that Biko had been a medical student for four years, that he was shamming and had behaved similarly during a previous detention, that they feared that Biko had suffered a stroke, that he was on hunger strike and that previous medical examinations had failed to find anything wrong with him. Obviously, such a misleading medical history, designed specifically to direct attention away from head injuries, was bound to prejudice the examination and possibly the diagnosis. Doctors were generally vulnerable to security police misinformation about the detainee and the causes and nature of his/her condition or the circumstances of death.

At the inquest he admitted that this was "highly inaccurate" as he had found, and recorded in the above-mentioned report to the pathologist, evidence of bruising, a lip injury, and swellings of the hands, feet and ankles. In an entry in the bed letter (medical record) at Sydenham prison hospital, on 10 September, Lang recorded that there was no evidence of pathology and that the lumbar puncture test was normal. At the inquest he acknowledged that this statement too was inaccurate. Dr. Lang claimed that the error was the result of the inadvertent omission of the word "gross" in front of "pathology".

The evidence of Dr. Tucker was also riddled with inconsistencies. After an examination on 11 September, Tucker deferred to Colonel Goosen's refusal to allow Biko to be admitted to a local provincial hospital and consented to the alternative proposal that he be sent to Pretoria. Tucker did not see it as his responsibility to check the vehicle and the conditions in which Biko would travel nor to insist that Biko be accompanied by a medical attendant or his medical records. This was typical of Tucker's extraordinarily limited interpretation of his responsibilities towards the patient. When pressed as to why he had not asked the patient or the security police about the possible existence or causes of a head injury, he stated: "Where persons are brought to me for examination, my report is completed on a special form. That is all I am required to do... if I am called to see a patient and he has a cut on his head, then I am interested in treating him and not in how he got the cut".

Both of the state doctors admitted at the inquest that the interests of the patient had been subordinate to interests of security. In his final submission to the court, Kentridge stated that the conduct of the medical personnel had a significance that spread beyond the case at hand, that Drs. Lang and Tucker "joined with the security police in [a] conspiracy of silence", and that at the very best "they turned a blind eye" (inquest 573:1977:57). The relationship between district surgeon and security police "was one of subservience, bordering on collusion. Their obvious neglect of their patient's interests,

and their deference to the requirements of the security police, was a breach of their professional duty, which may have contributed to the final result" (74). He went on to state that their conduct was of a piece with Colonel Goosen's disregard for rules and regulations. "The police felt confident they could rely upon the doctors to support them. And their confidence was justified" (76).[54]

An irreparable and quite deliberate paradox, therefore, lay at the heart of the role of the district surgeon and the magistrate, and the mechanisms in which they participated. The violence of the security police and others was not aberrational or the fault of isolated individuals, it was structural and institutional; there was in effect only one complaint - 'I am at the mercy of those whose job it is to have no mercy' - about which the magistrate and the doctor could do nothing at all; for a complaint to be effective the perpetrators had to be informed, if the perpetrators were informed the complaint could be used to further punish and undermine. Even a conscientious magistrate or doctor could be little more than an irritant. When the oppressive state, as the agent of both the violation and its remedy, essentially two-faced, claims to police/heal itself, oppression, justice and healing, torturer, magistrate and doctor, become one. Responses such as this were understandable and commonplace:

> But the police know... So why do I need to tell them about the kind of
>
> treatment they're giving to me? The whole thing is farcical. It's got a kind

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[54] A fictional reworking and in-filling of this doctor-detainee scenario is contained in Ebersohn's *Store up the Anger* (1984: especially 30-6,100-8,153-60,167-9,176,179-83). Magistrate Prins made an implicit judgement on the conduct of the doctors by sending relevant sections of the inquest record to the South African Medical and Dental Council (SAMDC), South Africa's principal regulatory body controlling the medical and dental professions. The failure of the South Africa's primary medical institutions to respond swiftly and effectively divided the medical community and did considerable damage to the reputation of the South African medical profession both at home and abroad (see Baxter 1985, Motala 1987:53-61, Rayner 1987:23-46, British Medical Association 1992:139,173-5,177-8). On the complicity of doctors, and their relationship with the security police, in relation to the death of Abdulla Haron see Desai and Marney 1978:90-6,103,118-25,131-6. As Rayner (1987) illustrates polarisation and institutional weakness were enduring characteristics of the medical profession in this field. Dr. Lang appeared to have learnt only a narrow attitude of self-defence from Biko's death when, in 1985, he was Dr. Orr's superior at the time when she filed her application. She summarised his attitude as follows: "'let's just do our job, and that was keep our noses clean, and cover our backsides. So that if anyone ever does bring a civil claim the Department of Health can say we did our job.'" (Abel 1995:232).

of legality - but it's really weird. You complain to the magistrate so he

can tell the police exactly what they already know - because they're

doing it. (Levitan in Bernstein 1994:276)

Any complaints, Bhengu wondered. I'm a dead man. Is that a cause for

complaint? And if it is, what will you do about it? Complete a form?

Four copies - one for the Justice Department, one for the security police,

one for the district surgeon and one to file. But I'll still be a dead man.

No complaints, Bhengu thought. No complaints at all. Thanks for

coming. (Ebersohn 1984:160)

The circulation of documents and participants within a state cabal sought to maintain

the fiction of an inspection and complaints machinery while in fact merely contributing

to the state archive and a facade of legitimacy. But the paradox runs deeper still.

The doctor and the magistrate, and the institutional practices of medicine and law,

having been unmade by becoming weapons used against the detainee, annihilated in the

very process by which they were made to annihilate, were resurrected after a custodial

death at the inquest. Having failed to play their part in preventing, and perhaps even

played a part in facilitating, the death, they were assigned the task of revealing its

causes: it was either a district surgeon or a state pathologist who conducted the official

post-mortem to determine the cause of death, while an executive magistrate invariably

presided over the inquest proceedings.[55]

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[55] There are various ways, some of which have already been mentioned, in which medicine can be more genuinely resurrected in the aftermath of torture. Elements within the medical community who were not in the employ of the state, for example, used a variety of methods - the courts, documentation and publicity, the provision of post-detention medical care - to address some of the issues arising from torture and obstructed or inadequate medical care in the context of state repression (Rayner 1987:66,79-85,87-91, also the Human Rights Commission 1990:430 - on similarly motivated psychological work, see Chabani Manganyi and du Toit eds. 1990 and Foster et al. 1987). Some such initiatives are themselves accompanied by difficulties and ambiguities resulting from the nature of torture and its medical/scientific component. During therapy and treatment, for example, the tortured may be terrified of touch and/or the discourse of therapy, sessions of questions and answers, may be too evocative of the structure of interrogation and confession (see Weschler 1990:269-70, Swartz et al. 1990:253). Treatment, therefore, may unintentionally reproduce the violation and violence while

As with Lewin's experience of capital punishment, blacks who died in custody entered the white world in the form of death, black death at the hands of the white state. It is particularly appropriate in a South African context that for Foucault (1976) the opaque body is black - "the black stone of the body", "the black coffer of the body" - while knowledge of it is white - the "great white eye that unties the knot of life", "the white brightness of death". The official post-mortem, conducted by a district surgeon or state pathologist, provided a reading of the dead body, a perspective on and a window between, life and death. From the point of view of death, torture could be seen as a living and mappable terrain that linked life and death:

> From the point of view of death, disease [read torture] has a land, a
> mappable territory, a subterranean, but secure place where its kinships
> and its consequences are formed... Paradoxically, the presence of the
> corpse enables us to see it living - living with a life... that has its own
> roles and its own laws. (Foucault 1976:149, [] bracket my own)

Like torture the post-mortem, which determined the cause of death, read the truth as inscribed in-on-through the body, in its depths and surfaces. It did not necessarily reproduce the procedures and discourses of torture: the post-mortem could be a component of a cover-up or provide dissenting evidence, including evidence of abuse; it was a documentary form that could contribute to either the state or oppositional archives.[56] Certain factors, such as the political context and personnel involved, often

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attempting to heal. Other ways in which it can do this include the following: by duplicating the structure of the political trial and abstracting the person/act from the broader context or motive - "the political has been psychiatrized, privatized, personalized into marginality; the social reality of dictatorship, the politics of cruelty have been banalized into a 'case'" (Millett 1995:313) - by overlooking the fact that the social/political and considerations of justice are as important to healing and rehabilitation as medicine. These debates about torture, medicine and hurting/healing have an important North-South dimension (also see Weschler 1990:238-42).

[56] There were occasions when medical examinations/reports caste doubt on police/state versions of events and, more rarely, when doctors, even sometimes district surgeons/ government pathologists, gave evidence in court which corroborated allegations of assault and, thereby, contradicted police evidence. Doctors suggested that medical

served to undermine the post-mortem's more subversive possibilities. There were occasions, for example, when attempts were made to suppress post-mortem findings (Amnesty International 1978:76-7). Among the factors contributing to a more radical potential was that the official post-mortem, while sometimes performed without consultation with or the knowledge of the deceased's family and in the absence of an independent pathologist, could also be attended by, or complemented by a separate post-mortem conducted by, a pathologist representing the family. Where two such examinations took place they could produce significantly different medical readings of the body (see Motala 1987:88). Like the formal inquest, an independent or independently monitored post-mortem, although still subject to manipulation, was the best available route to justice.

In André Brink's novel, *A Dry White Season*, a detainee, Gordon Ngubene, dies in custody allegedly having committed suicide by hanging himself with strips torn from a blanket. A district surgeon is implicated in the cover up and a state pathologist conducts the official post-mortem. An independent pathologist, Dr. Suliman Hassiem, who attends the post-mortem on behalf of the family is subsequently detained and banned. Because his signature is said to be on the post-mortem report, the inquest goes ahead in his absence. The state pathologist, Dr. Jansen, asserts that death had been caused by the application of force to the neck consistent with hanging. He confirms that Dr. Hassiem had been present at the inquest and that "as far as he knew, Dr. Hassiem's report had been identical to his in most respects" (1984:106). The inquest delivers a verdict of suicide. It transpires during the course of Ben du Toit's own investigations that Dr. Hassiem had not signed the official post-mortem report but had prepared his own

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evidence could not prove conclusively that the detainee had taken his own life, acknowledged that injuries could have been caused by assault and/or other ill-treatment, stated that injuries had not all been sustained at the same time and that it was difficult to distinguish between those sustained at, and immediately before, death, identified injuries and wounds that were not the cause of death and found that the physical damage could not all have been the result of the officially sanctioned cause of death (see Bernstein 1972:32-3, Dugard 1985:49, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law 1983:4,8-9,147-70, Motala 1987:84-5,88, also 23-5,27,44-5,47,49,62,77,98,100, 105, Rayner 1987:49, and Riekert 1985:125-8).

report: "'We didn't differ much on the facts... After all, we were examining the same body at the same time. But there were differences in interpretation" (205). The differences were between suicide by hanging and manual strangulation.

The executive magistrate played an even more important role at the inquest than the doctor, particularly in exercising his interpretive discretion within the state-imposed legislative framework. The magistrate made the decision, crucial to the procedural loading of the inquest, as to whether it should be formal or informal, on the basis of a reading of the evidence contained in the inquest docket. For the composition of the docket the magistrate was entirely dependent upon the good faith and competence of the police investigation; he was confined to the evidence before him which not infrequently extended only to police affidavits and the official post-mortem report.[57] The magistrate, however, had effective control, within the bounds set by the written record, over the inquiry's scope and rigour. This control to a large extent determined the information revealed by the inquest.[58] Inevitably, in this context, discretion led to bias.

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[57] In his summation at the Biko inquest, Kentridge stated that those representing the family had been hampered by an inadequate police investigation – described by one observer as "perfunctory in the extreme" (Napley in Pollak 1978:16) – by General Kleinhans. The investigation officer arrived in Port Elizabeth a month or more after Biko's death, failed to subject those involved to any real examination, churned out inadequate self-serving affidavits, many on duplicated forms – a kind of highly suggestive multiple choice – failed to locate necessary documents, made no search of the security branch office, and so on. Poor quality police investigations posed a major problem for the criminal justice system more generally.

[58] This control extended, to, for example, deciding whether a medical examination should take place or not and who should be present at the post-mortem besides the district surgeon/state pathologist and the police; which documents were admissible as evidence and access to documentation; which witnesses were called to give evidence in a formal inquest and what questions could be put to them by the interested parties; and the magistrate could exclude from the inquest proceedings any person whose presence he deemed unnecessary or undesirable (Motala 1987:10-11,89, also on magisterial discretion, see Akerson 1989, Bernstein 1972:30-2,43). In his final submission at the Biko inquest, Kentridge pointed out the limitations within which the representatives of the family were forced to operate. They could not produce any eye-witnesses to the event – a custodial death is, by definition, an event without an independent witness – and were hampered by the above-mentioned woefully inadequate police investigation. They were also tied to the record made by the state prosecutor for the magistrate. All the other legal representatives present played the part of defenders of the state rather than participants in a genuine inquiry. They could not subpoena witnesses and would have like to have cross-examined persons whom the court felt it unnecessary to call (also see Woods 1979:371-2). On the rights of interested parties at the inquest, see Motala 1987:11.

Considerable discretion was also enjoyed by the state-appointed Attorney-General who, for example, decided, on the basis of the inquest docket, whether a death was due to unnatural causes and therefore whether an inquest took place at all; whether it was presided over by a magistrate or a judge; and on receipt of the inquest findings, whether there was sufficient evidence to institute criminal proceedings.

The outcome was predictable enough: the informal inquest was used to circumvent and replace the formal inquest with its potentially more far-reaching inquiry and findings (on occasion even if a version of events was contested within the documentation: see Gauntlett 1989:88); magistrates invariably accepted police evidence at the expense of other dissenting accounts; judgements almost always exonerated the police and found that no-one was to blame for the custodial death: the security police and the judiciary had conspired to produce a culture of impunity.

> Magistrates do not allocate blame to the torturers when they preside over an inquest. How could they? Whom should they believe? Dead men don't talk, and survivors - being 'terrorists' - are *ipso facto* 'unreliable witnesses'. Magistrates normally conclude that death must be ascribed to this or to that accident for which nobody can reasonably be held responsible. (Breytenbach 1985:351)[59]

From the writings and readings of the body, the inquest judgement synthesised a single version and attempted to provide a form of closure. James Boyd White describes law as "a way of telling a story about what has happened in the world and claiming a meaning for it by writing an ending to it" (1985:36, also see 41-2). The inquest, like the confession/statement, attempted to fix, to capture officially in writing, a form of state

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[59] On magisterial bias, see Akerson 1989, Motala 1987:88-9. In the cases of Paris Malatji and Joseph Mdluli, prosecutions were initiated and inquests superseded. With regards to the former, a member of the security police, Sergeant J. H. van As, was convicted of culpable homicide in 1984, and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment for shooting the detainee through the head at point blank range during his interrogation in 1983. He served only six years. This was the only such successful prosecution and the only case in which there was an acknowledgement by the police - after the Attorney-General had instituted a prosecution - of criminal wrongdoing. Four policemen brought to trial after the death of Mdluli in 1976, were acquitted, even though the judge expressed severe doubts over the veracity of their testimony. Only one inquest into a death in detention resulted in a finding of police culpability. Two policemen were found responsible by a magistrate for the death of Tshifhiwa Muofhe in Venda in 1981. They were also later acquitted. Inquests did, however, on occasion lay the basis for civil actions against the government for damages. Rather than face an investigation into police interrogation methods, the government often chose, as in the cases of Biko, Imam Abdulla Haron, Mdluli, and Muofhe, to settle these claims out of court (see Amnesty International 1978:76-7, Foster et al. 1987:38, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law 1983:8-9,12,45-7,72-4,84, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights 1986:5,53-8, Motala 1987:88,90,110-13, Riekert 1985:125-8,138).

sanctioned life/death story. The magistrate's concluding remarks in the Biko inquest are typical: apart from the non-controversial aspects of the judgement - the identity of the deceased, the date of death and the cause of death - they were, in their entirety, as follows: "The available evidence does not prove that the death was brought about by any act or omission involving or amounting to an offence on the part of any person. That completes the inquest." This was the judgement of an inquest that had lasted for 15 days and which stretched to a 2000 page record. Magistrate Prins did not deal with any of the arguments presented by the counsel for the Biko family. As one commentator claims, the verdict is wholly conclusory, devoid of any explanation or rationale. It is not that it fails to be persuasive, to provide some understanding of what happened to Biko, but that it does not undertake to do these things (Pollak 1978:26-7). He goes on to state: "A likely reason for delivering findings unsupported by reasons is that a reasoned opinion would not write - or, to be more exact, would have yielded very different findings". This is a narrative undone by the accusations of its resounding internal silences: "The manifest discourse... is really no more that the repressive presence of what it does not say; and this 'not-said' is a hollow that undermines from within all that is said" (Foucault 1972:25). The life and death of the deceased, cursorily dismissed as without value - Keith Gottschalk describes the post-mortem and inquest procedure as a "problem of garbage disposal" ("Petition to my Interrogators", in Oliphant and Vladislavic eds. 1988:176) - was consigned to a permanent state of limbo rather than being provided with any sense of judicial closure.[60] But there was a price to pay for such discursive and judicial violence: "In death, Stephen Bantu Biko is even larger than he was in life" (Pollak 1978:1).

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[60] The official attitude surrounding the Biko judgement is epitomised by two further comments, the first, by the presiding magistrate - "'To me, it was just another death. It was a job, like any other'" (Pollak 1978:25-6, also 29) - and the second, the much quoted response to Biko's death from the then Minister of Justice, James Kruger: "'I am not glad and I am not sorry about Mr. Biko. It leaves me cold'" (in Essa and Pillai nd:91). On custodial death and the inquest seen through the prism of censorship, see Merrett 1994:48-9,71,97-8.

Detention without trial was a world of non-law created and sanctioned by the law and on many occasions the inquest functioned as part of the same world, belonged to the same regime of truth and power. The law was inverted to the extent that it became lawless and criminal. The structure of the inquest held within it the same fundamental contradiction as the inspection and complaints mechanism: it was the state supposedly policing/healing itself. It was all those agents complicit in the death itself - the security police, the doctor, the executive magistrate - who presided over all forms of investigation and inquiry. An interpretive chain, comprising the interpenetration of procedures, institutions, personnel, and discourses, linked the torture chamber and the court room within narrow, repressive margins;[61] employees of the state inscribed the body and then deciphered their own inscriptions within a closed system; the security police, the medical profession and the judiciary collaborated in a series of state narratives of truth and power, in forms of official discursive tyranny; absolute power and lawlessness reduced the court room to a form of bureaucratic violence. Not only the possibility of death itself but also the inquest and its ineffectuality became a weapon to be used against the detainee during interrogation. In such a context the body was beyond healing and justice as it passed from the torture chamber permeated by medicine and the law to the court room permeated by medicine and torture. The inquest was a 'space of death' in which the parallels with torture are clear.

Legitimacy and Loopholes

But what of the precarious balance between repression and legitimacy at the heart of political justice, and the risk/price that this implies? The way in which the tortured body

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[61] Ronald Dworkin has likened legal interpretation to "a complex chain enterprise of which... innumerable decisions, structures, conventions, and practices are the history" and it is the presiding official's job "to continue that history into the future" (1982:193). Such a chain structures the interpretive legal terrain, it establishes a world by the distribution of authority and power within it. Dworkin likens this exercise to a co-authored novel in which each writer is responsible for a separate chapter and thereby given the dual function of interpreting and creating. This provides a more benign example of the experience of being written whilst writing.

was reintegrated into the judicial world was emblematic of this broader process, in that it was carefully structured to predominantly serve the interests of the state while also providing loopholes and opportunities which enabled the opposition to utilise and manipulate the inquest for its own ends. This allowed court proceedings and the meaning(s) of custodial death to be contested. On occasion, usually due to public outrage following a custodial death, the state was pressurised into holding a formal inquest, thereby forcing the collaborative embrace of torture, law and medicine into the uncomfortable glare of the public domain. Those who operated above the law were brought back within its ambit. Breytenbach talks of the extraordinary power of the security police in South Africa (1985:44-5,53,185,312,350), who thrive in dark and secret places and are made uncomfortable - "with their short hair, their dark glasses and their tight smiles" (351, also 45,215) - by the probative glare of daylight (also Woods 1979:253-4). As Abel writes, "[s]unlight was the real deterrent" (1995:257).

The court room, therefore, also made available a range of very different possibilities and potentials that distinguished it from the torture chamber. It could operate within an alternative regime of truth and power. At the inquest, the ability to uncover certain kinds of evidence and information was invariably of greater significance than the magistrate's findings: notably in relation to the conduct of the security police, magistrates and doctors and the functioning of the state security apparatus in general (see Woods 1979:127,248,372). The result was an alternative life/death story to that synthesised by the judgement. At the interface of the inquest where opposing powers of writing met lives/deaths again were variously written. Lawyers became skilled at pursuing this alternative, violently collaborative, narrative within/against the confines set by the law, magisterial discretion, police incompetence and lack of co-operation, and the more general machinations of the state. They engaged with the writing-being written matrix on behalf of the deceased. In doing so, the links between the various personnel/institutions and the state could be questioned, and divisions within and

between different branches of the state exploited. As a consequence of these possibilities, insight emerged into the treatment and ill-treatment of detainees: "Bit by bit the information about Biko's last days began to emerge. But more than that. Day after day South Africa revealed itself through the evidence and the men who gave it" (Bernstein 1978:30). The Biko and Aggett inquests, along with other court cases, exposed the brutal reality of detention thereby contributing to the opposition archive on incarceration under apartheid.

In his final submission, Kentridge argued that the manner in which Biko was treated and the callous disregard for his rights was relevant in assessing the evidence of his captors. Whatever the regulations in relation to detainees may have been in theory, in practice it was clear that Biko had no rights. Between 19 August and 6 September, while at Walmer police station, he was kept naked, denied exercise, proper washing facilities and the ability to buy food. The interrogation then commenced and for the majority of the next two and a half days Biko was handcuffed and shackled by leg irons, manacled to an iron grille: even after his hands, feet and ankles became swollen and cut, even after he had been seriously assaulted and it became clear that he was seriously ill and he had been seen by two doctors, even after it was found that his trousers, blankets and mat were soaked in urine.

On the evening of 8 September, Biko was taken to Sydenham prison hospital. During the night he was twice found lying in a bath, once clothed in a bath full of water. On the second occasion the bath was empty. Despite growing evidence indicating serious brain damage, on 11 September Biko was returned to a cell at Walmer police station with the doctors' agreement. Again he was left naked on a mat on the floor. Later he was found in a state of collapse and transported 740 miles to Pretoria Prison hospital, lying naked in the back of a landrover, without medical supervision or medical records, with nothing more than a bottle of water. After an 11 hour drive through the night, the

supposedly outstanding medical facilities that Colonel Goosen claimed were available in Pretoria consisted of a mat in the corner of a cell, the attendance of a newly-qualified doctor six hours after his arrival at the prison, a diagnosis based on false information, an intravenous drip and a vitamin injection. At no time were Biko's next of kin informed. He died on the night of 12 September, unattended. In the words of Kentridge, "He died a miserable and lonely death on a mat on a stone floor in a prison cell. It is difficult to comment on these facts in measured terms" (inquest 573:1977:16-17).

The Neil Aggett inquest, the longest in South African legal history, lasted 44 days. Aggett was detained for 70 days. Again a detainee was denied even the limited rights and safeguards to which he was entitled: his cell was not visited hourly; he was denied access to a magistrate and inspector of detainees; and he was not allowed to exercise. Between 28 and 31 January 1982, he was under interrogation for 62 hours, by eight security police officers. During this time he was denied even the most basic hygiene facilities and exercise. He remained in the interrogation room for the whole period, rather than returning at any stage to his cell, and he took what sleep he was allowed on a camp bed. Major Cronwright testified that he was quite happy to detain Aggett for more than a year in order to extract a statement from him. The security police had no knowledge of nor had they shown any concern for the effects of long and intensive interrogation.

An application by the counsel for the defence to have an in loco inspection of Aggett's cell in John Vorster Square and to have a number of ex-detainees give evidence was upheld by a Supreme Court judgement. Evidence from ex-detainees held at John Vorster Square or who were interrogated and tortured at other police stations by personnel from the same interrogation team was corroborative in many respects. It was used to try and establish that there was a pattern of interrogation used by the security police, a system of interrogation characterised by official insensitivity and cruelty.

Counsel for the family argued that the allegations of ill-treatment were sufficiently consistent to enable the court to draw an inference that Aggett was similarly treated.[62] Furthermore, some of the ex-detainees had also seen him and had witnessed a steady deterioration in his condition. Maurice Smithers, for example, stated that he saw Aggett through a frosted glass panel doing strenuous exercise and being beaten while naked. As a result of the inquest, the care and treatment of detainees in general and Aggett in particular gained publicity. This fact could not be reversed by the magistrate's judgement which completely exonerated the police from any blame whatsoever by accepting their version of events to the occlusion of all others. Information obtained from such court proceedings enabled custodial deaths and the inquest to become a weapon that could also be used against the state.

Distinctions and inter-relationships between the oral and the written were crucial at the inquest for both the state and its opponents, firstly in relation to the decision as to whether it was to be formal or informal in nature. In the latter the official written record was read in private by the state as self-evident and self-exculpatory truth. In the former, however, the written record could be challenged by other evidence and by oral cross-examination, in a public arena where its meaning was open to interrogation and contestation. The power of writing could be complemented, and on occasion superseded, by the power of the spoken word.[63] The layers of evidence at the Biko inquest - affidavits, an occurrence book, telexes, oral testimony - contained numerous contradictions and slippages: between the written and the oral; between the various

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[62] A similar strategy had been used, or attempted, before: see First 1965:87-100, Motala 1987:19,25,89, also Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law 1983:3.

[63] Abel makes the following important point about the power of the oral in the context of a discussion of the Wendy Orr application: "The application revealed the enormous disparity in the power of South African voices. Black victims (sometimes surrogates for whites protected by their skin) have loudly denounced police violence for decades. They have little access to media or courts, however, and less credibility with white audiences. Torture doubly silenced them: police turned them into ventriloquist's dummies, and whites disregarded their complaints - the archetypal nightmare of the unheard scream. This application succeeded because it was brought to a white judge by white lawyers based on the affidavit of a white doctor and publicized in the white press" (1995:257: footnote omitted).

branches and officials of the state; between state and independent accounts; between evidence given at the time of Biko's death and evidence given later at the inquest.[64] Among the most blatant discrepancies was that while in court the security police witnesses claimed that Biko probably sustained his injuries by banging his head/falling against a wall during a scuffle which he himself provoked, this fact was not mentioned in any of the original 28 affidavits, nor in statements to the investigating officer where their attention was specifically drawn to the question of brain injury, nor were the doctors informed of this alleged incident. A second example is provided by a telex sent to the Security Police headquarters in Pretoria, which Colonel Goosen denied having sent and tried to conceal. In it he referred to injuries "inflicted" on Biko - when asked to account for this phrase Goosen explained "inflicted" as "a play on words" - and the telex, unlike an affidavit completed by Goosen the following day, made no mention of shamming but stated that Biko was in a semi-coma and that the situation was urgent. The inter-textuality of meaning could be the undoing of the state as well as of its opponents. The juxtaposition of different forms of evidence reveals the way in which agents of the state moved unevenly, and in a way that left many issues unresolved, towards a state sanctioned version of events to be presented in court, thereby illuminating the inner workings of the regime and its use of judicial procedure (see Brink 1984:104-14).

As Gutiérrez-Jones states, "[t]he law, especially as it is played out in the courts, offers a detailed register of how 'official' history functions within a society, revealing what evidence and rhetorics will be deemed admissible in judging a contested event" (1990:58-9). This, in summary and essence, was the dominant characteristic of the apartheid inquest:

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[64] On similar inconsistencies with regard to other custodial deaths, see Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law 1983:4, Motala 1987:88-9. Police evidence, official versions of events, inquests and trials invariably failed to satisfactorily explain custodial deaths and left inconsistencies unresolved. Also, with regards to Dr. Orr's application, see Abel 1995:239-41,253.

... the state speaking the 'truth' about itself; a 'truth' which frequently

reveals the limits of the possible within a particular structure of state.

Part of the process of authorizing an official way of speaking about

social realities ('problems'), while silencing unauthorized political voices

emerging as popular expressions of those realities... (Ashforth 1990:6,

footnote omitted)[65]

The inquest was part of a process whereby the state investigated and passed judgement

on itself - it was "a story they [told] themselves about themselves" (Geertz 1973:448) -

to affirm a view they had of themselves. An interpretive chain bound the torture

chamber and the court room, torturers, the judiciary, and the state-employed medical

profession, within the whole that was oppression and terror. While it is important to

acknowledge that the similarities between these domains/personnel outweighed the

differences, it is equally important to stress that there were chinks in the chain which

meant that the process could be manipulated to serve other ends. Equally, it is necessary

to try to understand how the differences were established and maintained. The aim of

this chapter segment has been to illustrate the way in which political justice in the form

of the inquest overlapped with and deviated from the practice and discourse of torture

and as a result availed itself of a range of limitations and possibilities, and the way in

which these in turn impacted upon the narration of life/death stories.

Needless to say, literary analyses of custodial deaths provide a very different kind of

insight into custodial violence and death. Legal judgements usually share several of the

properties of literary texts. They are narratives that operate through the simultaneous

processes of construction and interpretation; they adopt techniques of persuasion and

literary devices of style and rhetoric; neither textual form is transparent or fixed in

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[65] Also see 3,8. On ways of reading state documents in South Africa see Ashforth 11-13.

meaning: as the chair of a Commission of Inquiry told Ashforth, "You must read more in a report than just the words" (1990:13). But there are also fundamental differences between legal and literary discourse. The presiding legal official must decide on a single meaning from the available documentation while literary interpretation can applaud ambiguity; legal authors speak on behalf of a range of wider authorities while literary authors speak only for themselves; legal judgements are uniquely authoritative in a material sense due to their institutional power to legitimate the use of force and secure compliance. Placed alongside one another, legal and literary discourses, as overlapping but also distinct modes of writing, outline a terrain of textual commentary on custodial death. While they might both be said to construct and give meaning to a/the world, they do so in profoundly different ways, utilising profoundly different techniques for the production, verification and contestation of truth and power.[66] What does literature interrogate and provide access to that the legal/state archive(s) do(es) not?

The Novel

> Tales... Information in this country has ceased to be objective and has become pure fantasy... 'To report' among us now means either to interpret reality according to our desires or fears, or to say simply what is convenient... Since it is impossible to know what's really happening, we... lie, invent, dream, and take refuge in illusion... life, a life in which so few actually do read, has become literary... I, in this case, am history... 'I've written a novel'... In a novel there are always more lies than truths, a novel is never a faithful account of events. This investigation, these interviews, I didn't do it all so I could relate what really happened... but so I could lie and know what I'm lying about. (Vargos Llosa 1987:246,252,287)

> The novelist's opportunity to do his work today is increased by the power of the regime to which he finds himself in opposition... we have it in us to compose false documents more valid, more real, more truthful than the 'true' documents of the politicians or the journalists or the psychologists. Novelists know explicitly that... reality is amenable to any construction that is placed upon it. It is a world made for liars and we are born liars.

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[66] Much work has been done on the relationship and linkages between law and literature by the likes of Richard Posner 1988, James Boyd White 1984,1985,1985a, Richard Weisberg 1984, and by such scholars as Ronald Dworkin and Stanley Fish. Introductions/overviews include those to be found in special issues of the *Georgia Law Review* 20,4 (1986), *Mercer Law Review* 39,3 (1988), *Michigan Law Review* 85, 5 and 6 (1987), *Representations* 30 (1990), and in Thomas 1991, Weisberg and Barricelli 1982, and Ziolkowski 1991.

> But we are to be trusted because ours is the only profession forced to admit that it lies - and that bestows upon us the mantle of honesty... we are a valuable resource and an instrument of survival. (Doctorow 1977:232)

J. M. Coetzee, in an article entitled "Into the Dark Chamber: The Novelist and South Africa" (1986), has written that torture has exerted a "dark fascination" on many South African writers because "relations in the torture room provide a metaphor, bare and extreme, for relations between authoritarianism and its victims", and because through the combination of obscenity, exclusion, mystery and fascination it provides a metaphor for the creative act: "[t]he dark, forbidden chamber is the origin of novelistic fantasy per se" through which "the state creates the preconditions for the novel to set about its work of representation". This combination of compulsion and repulsion, however, generates two particular dilemmas. "[T]here is something tawdry", writes Coetzee, "about *following* the state in this way, making its vile mysteries the occasion of fantasy". The "true challenge" is how not to be impaled on the dilemma proposed by the state - "namely, either to ignore its obscenities or else to produce representations of them" - but rather "to establish one's own authority... to imagine torture and death on one's own terms". The challenge, as he sees it, therefore, is to write without being written. The second dilemma is how, beyond a range of clichés, the writer should represent the torturer. Coetzee goes on to criticise several South African writers for their fictionalisation of torture. He states that Sipho Sepamla's *A Ride on the Whirlwind* (1981) succumbs to "erotic fascination" and caricatures its torturers, while Mongane Serote's *To Every Birth its Blood* (1983) and Alex La Guma's *In the Fog of the Season's End* (1972) display "a questionable dark lyricism".

Coetzee's own fictional companion to these theoretical and aesthetic dilemmas is *Waiting for the Barbarians*, a novel "about the impact of the torture chamber on the life of a man of conscience". The central character and narrator, known only as the magistrate, is a servant of Empire in a outpost on the frontier, whose range of administrative and judicial responsibilities and powers closely mirror those of the

magistrate in apartheid South Africa (1982:8, Gallagher 1991:120). In a time of emergency, with power in the hands of the Third Bureau, the magistrate expresses a desire not to get involved, to look away and block his ears, to shut out the atrocities taking place around him. But, simultaneously, he is drawn compulsively to the site of torture. A combination of imagination and investigation are marshalled in an attempt to compensate for that which cannot otherwise be known. Impaled on the dilemma established by the state, the magistrate seeks to both ignore and represent. A dangerous knowledge, composed of fragments and obliquely gained, while never complete (1982:79-80) is nevertheless enough, even too much: "I know somewhat too much; and from this knowledge, once one has been infected, there seems to be no recovering... The knot loops in upon itself; I cannot find the end" (21). Having been to the site of torture and seen, there is no way back. In the end the magistrate is detained and occupies the site himself.

Circled around and passed through, sites of torture/'spaces of death' are not only architectural but also corporeal. A barbarian woman, partially blinded and with broken ankles, is left behind, discarded by both torturer and tortured/barbarian. Hers is a body that is incomplete, "maimed, scarred, harmed" (56), a body that heals over and grows into its irreparable deficiencies. She lies at the heart of the magistrate's inquiring and imagining: "'Nothing is worse than what we can imagine'... 'Tell me,' I want to say, 'don't make a mystery of it, pain is only pain'; but words elude me" (31-2). The magistrate describes the woman's body, in a manner that he acknowledges echoes the torturer, as closed, a blank surface across which he hunts seeking entry (42-3, also 49,86). He washes and massages her broken body, losing himself in the rhythm, entering a sleep like oblivion between death and enchantment, experiencing rapture and veneration. In the grip of a perverted and obscure passion, a "stupefied eroticism" (56,73), through his "inexplicable attentions" (33) to her body, the magistrate approaches what he describes as "strange ecstasies" (47). Although acknowledging a complex of motives - protection,

reparation, penance, expiation, responsibility, envy, pity, cruelty - the magistrate is essentially, ultimately, unable to understand the origin or nature of his desire or need for the woman, to whom he is enslaved and yet of whom he is free to make whatever he likes.[67] Even after her departure he continues to "swoop and circle" around her, "casting one net of meaning after another over her" (81).

Under the gaze of both torturer and magistrate the woman is reduced to a body, a site of torture; both torturer and magistrate privilege the body as text, as the means to and origin of the truth; both wish to mark her, to engrave themselves and their desire on her. The latter, while attempting a reading of the traces of torture that seeks to access the truth of their infliction, nevertheless re-enacts and perpetuates the violence of the former: the total body, stripped of self and world, remains voiceless and has external meanings imposed upon it. Other than and in the absence of her tortured body, the barbarian woman is nothing, featureless, forgotten, blankness radiates from her in space and time. But there is no reciprocity or penetration. The body, while broken and violated, remains inaccessible, obstinately resisting all attempts at violent comprehension. This is not to say that its authority is in question (6-7), it is simply variously misread, somehow beyond understanding. The woman and her body are the key to the labyrinth of meaning, a dilemma of which the magistrate is aware - "It has been growing more and more clear to me that until the marks on this girl's body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her" (31) - but unable to resolve. Of her "there is nothing" the magistrate "can say with certainty" (43).

At the heart of the novel, therefore, lies a radical uncertainty. The magistrate struggles with his multiple impotencies, with an encompassing failure of authority - political, sexual, interpretive, authorial, linguistic (57-8,64-5,154-5) - and is, ultimately, simply

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[67] The magistrate's continual interrogation of his desire/need can be traced through the following references: 30,33-4,40-4,47,55-6,63-4,66,71,73,75,86,135,149-50.

lost. "I think: 'I have lived through an eventful year, yet understand no more of it than a babe in arms'... I think: 'There has been something staring me in the face, and still I do not see it'" (155, also 136,143,156). Coetzee characterises this complexity and elusiveness of meaning in a positive light. Against the truth imperative of Empire the novel counterposes uncertainty, arbitrariness, indecipherability, indeterminacy, the absence of resolution or closure. In a defining incident, the magistrate is interrogated about his collection of poplar slips found in excavated ruins and inscribed in an indecipherable script. Asked to interpret these supposedly secret messages, he delivers an invented but strategic reading of the slips that, from an imaginary barbarian viewpoint, is an attack on Empire, as well as being an assertion of textual indeterminacy:

> 'They form an allegory. They can be read in many orders. Further, each single slip can be read in many ways. Together they can be read as a domestic journal, or they can be read as a plan of war, or they can be turned on their sides and read as a history of the last years of the Empire - the old Empire, I mean. There is no agreement among scholars about how to interpret these relics of the ancient barbarians. Allegorical sets like this one can be found buried all over the desert'. (112)

Waiting for the Barbarians can be and has been read as an allegory. Yet, the non-specific setting of the novel in both time and space, the clash between Empire and barbarian, resonates with and critiques a very particular time and place: apartheid South Africa in the late 1970s, at the height of a controversy over the treatment of detainees. Under emergency powers the administration of justice has passed from the hands of civilians into those of the Third Bureau. The Third Bureau operate through incommunicado detention and closed trials, with contempt for the ordinary police and the due process of law. As the magistrate reflects: "They will use the law against me as

far as it serves them, then they will turn to other methods... To people who do not operate under statute, legal process is simply one instrument among many" (84, also 123,125). In addition to the echoes of language, practice, and structure/institution, other details resonate quite specifically: official explanations given for a custodial death, for example, closely mirror those given in relation to the death of Steve Biko (6, also 36,84).

The novel represents a complex and layered response to the first of Coetzee's dilemmas, that the writer go beyond the desire to ignore and/or represent to establish his/her own authority and imaginative terms. From without, circling around the sites of torture, Coetzee's magistrate seeks both to ignore and to represent. However, in part as the result of a desire to imagine/investigate implicit in the latter strategy, the potential is created for an altogether different authority when the magistrate himself passes through the various physical sites of torture/'spaces of death'. Coetzee's own authority, somewhat paradoxically, is based on indeterminacy and ambiguity, and invested in an allegorical reading of the novel's layered textuality. By writing a novel whose relationship to South Africa is that of an allegory, and placing at its centre the magistrate and a tortured female body beyond the available means of comprehension, Coetzee has devised a creative strategy in relation to torture that simultaneously seeks to ignore and represent *and* to neither ignore nor represent. He does not, can not, completely escape the collaborative hand of the oppressive state, and therefore is unable unequivocally to write without being written.

The fictional treatment of torture from South African literature which Coetzee applauds in "Into the Dark Chamber" is the episode in Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* in which Rosa Burger encounters a old black man mercilessly flogging a donkey. This central moment in the/her story is an abstraction, sign, essence, summation, culmination:

Not seeing the whip, I saw the infliction of pain broken away from the will that creates it; broken loose, a force existing of itself... torture without the torturer... pure cruelty gone beyond control of the humans who have spent thousands of years devising it. The entire ingenuity from thumbscrew and rack to electric shock, the infinite variety and gradation of suffering, by lash, by fear, by hunger, by solitary confinement - the camps, concentration, labour, resettlement, the Siberias of snow or sun, the lives of Mandela, Sisulu, Mbeki, Kathrada, Kgosana, gull-picked on the Island... the deaths by questioning, bodies fallen from the height of John Vorster Square, deaths by dehydration, babies degutted by enteritis in 'places' of banishment, the lights beating all night on the faces of those in cells... (1980:208)

Rosa Burger, like the magistrate, has arrived at a situation of self-induced helplessness and incoherence, at a recognition of complicity, in which meaningful intervention has become impossible. She drives on, turns her back on the scene and on South Africa with the words: "After the donkey I couldn't stop myself. I don't know how to live in [this] country" (210). But while her immediate response is flight, Rosa Burger ultimately returns to South Africa and to a deeper engagement with the country and its problems. That the magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* does not take this extra step is indicative of the fact that Coetzee's primary interest lies in a range of often quite intrusive theoretical concerns, in the realm of the aesthetics of violence and representation, rather than the particularities and practice of politics and place. Turning to the dilemma of how to represent the torturer provides further evidence in support of this hypothesis.

Coetzee's dominant narrative investment in this regard is in the task of deconstructing a dichotomous vision that separates self and 'other', Empire and barbarian, torturer and magistrate. The magistrate is a man of the law, who believes in civilised behaviour, decency, decorum, in the old Empire for the return of which he retains a nostalgia; he is opposed to spectacle, abasement, degradation, savagery. The magistrate continually interrogates his own relationship to and complicity with torturer and Empire - mainly through the prism of the barbarian woman and their respective intimate attentions to her body - acknowledging proximity *and* asserting his distance (1982:5-6,27,43-4, also 81). Through the co-existence of proximity and distance, that are both embraced and rejected, the magistrate and the torturer can be seen as the two faces of the interrogator - good guy/bad guy (7) - and of Empire. The magistrate describes himself as "a jackal of Empire in sheep's clothing!" (72):

> For I was not, as I liked to think, the indulgent pleasure-loving opposite
> of the cold rigid Colonel. I was the lie that Empire tells itself when times
> are easy, he the truth that Empire tells when harsh winds blow. Two
> sides of imperial rule, no more, no less. (135)

The implications of the ambiguous, uneasy self-positioning are profound. The magistrate is alienated from both sides, unsustainably in-between, an unsolicited go-between. He possesses a self-consciousness that never becomes (self-)knowledge, an unease, frustration, anger, shame and defiance, that lacks direction and consequently neither seriously impedes the Empire nor actively supports the barbarians. His is an opposition to Empire and a gesturing towards the barbarians that is partial, incomplete, always, even in its most determined acts of defiance, isolated, plagued and undermined by doubt (52,77-8,95-6,108,135,143,154-5). Colonel Joll mocks the magistrate's self-perception as the "One Just Man" (113-14, also 104).

The magistrate's selective assault on dichotomous thinking - in which the law and terror, the magistrate and the torturer, co-exist in a relationship of uneasy complicity - includes a resistance to demonising the perpetrators of violence, a resistance, in other words, to the creation of an alternative 'otherness' (84,104,146). But, in a contradictory move, the Empire becomes the enemy, the Third Guard the new barbarians (77-8,114). Furthermore, Coetzee employs a number of clichés about the torturer - dark glasses, clear blue eyes, black carriage - and wraps the 'dark chamber' and its practitioners in a cloak of theatre and mystery. The magistrate's attempts to understand the zone in which the torturer lives are not only unsuccessful but also similarly stereotyped (12,84,118, 125-6). In relation to the second dilemma as to the first, Coetzee both reproduces and seeks to transcend the responses he criticises. In truth, what is achieved in the novel is less a negotiation or synthesis of oppositions, a middle way through exclusionary poles of experience, belief and power, than a collapse of Empire into barbarism and degradation, a descent into hell. A sense of impending apocalypse pervades the narrative, gathering pace towards its uncertain end.

With reference to the torturer, Coetzee states that the novelist has to solve the following problem: "how to justify a concern with morally dubious people involved in a contemptible activity; how to find an appropriately minor place for the petty secrets of the security system; how to treat something that, in truth, because it is offered... to terrorize the populace and paralyze resistance, deserves to be ignored". Those complicit in such activity and the shadow cast by the activity itself, however, lie at the very heart of *Waiting for the Barbarians*. It is unclear why the representation of the torturer rather than the tortured should be the dilemma. Similarly unclear is why within the complex set of alienations and affiliations - racially with oppressor, politically with the oppressed - experienced by white writers such as Coetzee, it is easier or morally more responsible to imaginatively bridge the experiential void with the former. Coetzee's deliberate and self-conscious refusal to give (his) voice to, to take upon himself the

authority to speak for and on behalf of, the 'other', in this instance the torture victim, while in some ways both understandable and admirable, also has more negative consequences. How can the chasm between self and 'other' be bridged when the latter has no voice? Through the attentions of torturer and magistrate, *Waiting for the Barbarians* reproduces the violent silencing of torture: a body deprived of self, world, and voice is variously violated, inscribed and read, by others. This is the act of violence internal to the novel itself.

Where does this leave the torture victim? As a programme for change during a period of political turmoil, the blurring of distinctions between self and 'other' as a gesture from the precariously and uncomfortably powerful suggests tentative reform driven by guilt and fear rather than meaningful change; it suggests self-defence, -interest and -preservation. It is not a strategy for resistance; it would do nothing for the detainee facing the torturer other than undermine his/her defences. For the 'other', deprived of voice and with the capacity for agency and, therefore, resistance curtailed/removed, change must come from within the realm of those in power. Using the strategies made available by Coetzee the torture victim must wait, not for the barbarians, but for the Empire to self-destruct.

Coetzee appears to conclude "Into the Dark Chamber" by asserting the existence of a parallel world - of the torture chamber, of the donkey being whipped, of pure violence and suffering, beneath good and evil - existing somehow outside morality and humanity. There is only suffering and waiting in furtherance and anticipation of the time when humanity will be restored to all and, therefore, all human acts will be returned to the ambit of moral judgement:

> In such a society it will once again be *meaningful* for the gaze of the
> author, the gaze of authority and authoritative judgement, to be turned

upon scenes of torture. When the choice is no longer limited to *either*

looking on in horrified fascination as the blows fall *or* turning one's eyes

away, then the novel can once again take as its province the whole of

life, and even the torture chamber can be accorded a place in the design.

These are extraordinary claims. Coetzee seems to both offer a strategy and an argument

for the fictionalisation of torture and to preclude, at the time of writing, its realisation.

Contradictions abound: the writer should not allow his/her agenda to be set by the state,

but, provided with no opportunity for narrative/political intervention, must simply await

the restoration of morality and humanity before torture can be meaningfully addressed.

Thus torture can only be fictionalised when it is no longer taking place. Characteristic-

ally, Coetzee consistently elevates aesthetic and theoretical considerations over the

practical/political.[68] Nowhere is this clearer than in the ludicrously inflated authority -

"the gaze of authority and authoritative judgement" - that he ascribes to the writer.

Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* is the bastard child within a family of novels -

which include Mzamane's *The Children of Soweto* (1987), Sepamla's *A Ride on the*

Whirlwind (1981) and *Third Generation* (1986), Serote's *To Every Birth its Blood*

(1983), and Tlali's *Amandla* (1980) - that were written in the aftermath of and in

response to the events that began in Soweto in June 1976. Following the detentions of

this period, trials, custodial deaths and inquests, notably of Biko and Aggett, much more

became known about the nature of interrogation and torture in South Africa. While the

law attempted to provide a form of narrative closure, literature fought to keep the

narrative, with all its latent and unresolved issues and questions, open. In general, it

operated within a different, oppositional, regime of truth and power that sought to

provide an alternative perspective on the 'space of death'. But writers of fiction also

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[68] This can be seen in the unhelpful blurring of important distinctions in Coetzee's treatment of torture that serve only to obfuscate. Such blurrings include those between desire, perversion, sadism, and power, and voyeurism, fantasy, pornography and imagination.

operated in very different ways and with profoundly different aims from one another. Coetzee's dilemmas are those of oppositional white South African writers and, more specifically, his own preserve. Black writers, some of whom had been detained and tortured themselves, identified alternative dilemmas and agendas; they subjected custodial violence/death to a very different set of inscriptions and interpretations than either the inquest or that proposed/practised by Coetzee.

Such writers wrote novels as others wrote autobiographies: as realist, self-conscious acts of documentation, managed in accordance with a strategic political purpose, designed to take their place on a particular narrative and political battlefield. Their aim was to restore voice, self and world to the body wrapped in silence; to inflict reversals, and record/inspire resistance; to see through the official written record, broadcast its silences and unveil its hypocrisies. The issues interrogated included those more generally overlooked, obfuscated or misrepresented by the courts such as queries about the validity of detainee testimony. Novels of combative realism, that sometimes seemed to embrace the dilemma of writing the oppressive state while being written by it, generated their own range of problems and questions: What are the implications and responsibilities of making violation the subject of the imagination? Do such novels disclose more about particular kinds of narratives of survival and resistance than they do about life under apartheid itself? What purpose is served by the caricatured representations of the enemy that such works invariably contain? Do they confront, or in fact evade, the dilemma faced so starkly by Albie Sachs of whether the need was for idealistic stories of heroism or realistic preparation for capture? What will be the fate of such novels beyond the moment of their intervention? Finally, and most importantly for the analysis which follows, what truths are available to those who approach truth through realist fiction?

Realist fiction uncovers a series of very subversive questions about custodial

violence/death and control. Within the interrogational encounter the interrogator and the detainee constitute for one another a kind of permanent limit, a point of possible reversal. While the former's power is virtually absolute it is flawed by the proximity of total control to its opposite, the total loss of control. By facilitating one, detention also facilitates the other. Usually, it is the detainee who is broken, and whose loss of control is objectified through the making of a statement/confession. While the detainee may try to control or 'manage' this process, while the product may be a chaos of fact and fiction, the detainee is inevitably fighting against losing control. There are circumstances, however, in which the detainee's capacity, mentally and physically, to resist, frustrate and provoke, may result in the interrogator losing control and the detainee losing his/her life. The torturer's task is to brutalise and maim, not to kill.[69]

> They're dangerous. One always had the feeling that one had to placate
> them... One was not so much afraid of the harm they might do you on
> purpose, but that they may lose control of themselves and maim or
> exterminate you, as it were, by accident... in a paroxysm of unresolved
> frustrations... when in their hands one must learn to become an expert in
> killer control. (Breytenbach 1985:48,50)

> It's a fight... my idea is to make them go beyond what they wanted to
> give me and to give back as much as I can give so that it becomes an
> uncontrollable thing... So I said to them, '... If you allow me to respond,
> I'm certainly going to respond. And I'm afraid you may have to kill me in
> the process even if it's not your intention'. (Biko 1979:153)

How should such a death be interpreted? Could it have been a moment, perhaps the supreme moment, of triumph for the detainee? Can such a violent death conceivably be

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[69] See Dingake 1987:102; on Biko's death see Woods 1979:264,358.

termed a triumph? Is death the horizon towards which the detachment of self from body ultimately journeys? Does such a death, perhaps, represent the survival and triumph of a self and world preserved in silence even in the face of life-destroying pain; does it finally set the detainee free? Foucault argues that "death is power's limit, the moment that escapes it" (1991a:261). Again death can be seen as a weapon available to both torturer and detainee (see Abel 1995:254-5).

This chapter will conclude with an examination of some of these issues in Wessel Ebersohn's novel, *Store Up The Anger*.[70] The protagonist, Sam Bhengu, detained many times, seven times in three years, has on this occasion been kept naked and in solitary confinement for 20 days. While the last hours of Bhengu's life in the hands of the security police in many ways resemble what is known of the similar period in Biko's life/death, Bhengu's past is entirely invented. Ebersohn himself has made clear that *Store up the Anger* is not a biography of Biko. But at the heart of this fictional life is an attempt to imaginatively represent and recreate, on the basis of the available evidence, the manner of Biko's death, the way in which his fatal injuries were sustained, the cause of death that the inquest failed to establish. The result is a fictional truth more persuasive and penetrating than the truthful fictions of the state archive (Green 1994:100-1,105-6, also 108-9).

The novel opens with an acceptance of imminent and inevitable death - "Sam Bhengu knew that he was dying" (Ebersohn 1984:7) - and the temporal present of the narrative follows the last hours of Bhengu's life beyond this realisation. As Bhengu passes through the 'space of death' flashbacks accumulate his life history that has led to this particular violent present. The flashbacks culminate in the moment during the assault when Bhengu realises that he is going to die - "*Something gave inside his head,*

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[70] For other fictional depictions of custodial death, see La Guma 1972:169-75, Sepamla 1981:179-83,212-17,228,234-41, Serote 1983:172-5,193,192-7,200.

stopping the pain immediately. It was then that Sam Bhengu knew he was dying" (205) - thereby casting the reader back to the novel's opening line (Green 1994:104-5,108). As the narrative present unravels, a brutalised Bhengu comes to terms with the knowledge that he is dying and eventually he feels ready for death. The juxtaposition of going to die/ready to die is symptomatic of a shift in the balance of power that accompanies the process of dying.

The first component of this shift relates to time. Detention without trial is specifically designed so that the interrogator has as much time as he wants and needs; all the time in the world. When Bhengu is told that he can be kept there for as long as they like, until he tells them what they want to know, he thinks: "No, you can't... You can't keep me here. You can keep me for the moment, but you can't keep me for as long as you like. You can keep me until it's time, but you can't keep me any longer than that" (1984:15). Now that the security police have a finite, and diminishing, period of time to work on him, time is on his side and they are disempowered (37,161, also 70). Furthermore, Bhengu no longer feels any pain - "They must have broken whatever it is that feels the pain... Perhaps a nerve had been severed, cutting off the damaged part from the part that feels the pain" (8) - and fights, and eventually comes to terms with, his fear:

> Bhengu hated his fear... He hated even more that they might see the fear
>
> on his face. And he hated it because he knew it to be unnecessary.
>
> Rationally, Bhengu knew that he had nothing to fear. Everything they
>
> could do to him had already been done. But, in spite of what he knew to
>
> be true, he still feared them. He feared the loss of control he could see in
>
> Strydom's eyes and the traces of pleasure he could see in Engelbrecht's
>
> otherwise expressionless face. They held absolute power over their
>
> prisoners[...] No, it was not true. Their power over him was no longer
>
> absolute. He had no reason to fear them. (117, also 53-4,101-2,197)

There is nothing more they can do to him, they can not harm him any more, therefore there is no further reason to fear them (11). As Bhengu gains control of his fear, they lose control of theirs which grows cumulatively: fear that he will successfully resist them, fear that orders were being/had been disobeyed, fear of what they had done, fear of being disciplined (196,201-3,205-6).

Initially Bhengu does not want to die and feels that his life and death have been for nothing (11,142,152-3, also 186). But in the end he is ready:

> It was all right. Before it had been very bad, but now it was all right. He would be able to do it now... He knew that he was ready. It had taken a time to get there, but he had done it and he was ready... it was over now. Only one thing remained and he was able to do it... He knew he could do it now. It was going to be all right. (205-6)

Colonel Lategan tells Bhengu that he is complicit, indeed responsible, for his own death:

> '...You're dying, aren't you? You're dying and you're blaming us. But we didn't kill you. You killed yourself. Where did you think this would all end? Did you think we'd allow it indefinitely? You've been at it for nearly twenty years. Did you think you could go on forever? It wasn't van Rooyen and Fourie who killed you, Sam. You did it yourself. Any time in those twenty years you could have stopped and you would have saved yourself... You made your own choice... You killed yourself as surely as if you'd taken a knife and slit your own throat.' (186-7)

Bhengu ferociously focuses his energy to reply, "'You also'". But such a responsibility can be construed in an altogether different light. Bhengu is shown to have secured a measure of personal control during a past life constructed through a series of deliberate choices and commitments and a present in which the relationship between death, choice, and control casts Bhengu as the victor (Green 1994:105,108):

> For the first time in his dealings with Lategan Bhengu felt a true moral
> superiority, a sense that matters were now in his control, not in the
> control of his adversary. Bhengu sensed that there was nothing Lategan
> could do now. And he sensed that Lategan shared the knowledge. His
> men had played all his cards and they had played them too fast. Whereas
> he still had his last card and he was busy playing it. His death would give
> him the game. (1984:127-8)[71]

The following lengthy quote about the actual assault on Bhengu brings together several of the themes in this section: voluntary and involuntary distancing; the tortured self as sensate body in pain; the transformation of pain into voice; the precise and arbitrary nature of violence and terror. Having provoked and attacked van Rooyen, Sam Bhengu is rendered defenceless (194-5,199):

> *Bhengu had heard of the sand bag. Van Rooyen was crouching next to*
> *his face and holding it up for him to see... The first blow fell just below*
> *the base of Bhengu's skull... It was a jarring shock that seemed to travel*
> *the length of his spinal column, shuddering into his brain... Van Rooyen*
> *paused... The pause told Bhengu that that was the first one. Consider*
> *what ten such will do to you. Consider what a hundred will do. A*
> *thousand... To Bhengu it seemed that the assault was directed at every*

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[71] Also on custodial death as victory/triumph, see Bernstein 1986:352-3.

part of him. The blows... vibrated through the length of his body... There was only a moment's hesitation now when the next one fell, then the next and the next and the next... Bhengu had been through many forms of interrogation... and one particular style had always been the worst. There was nothing worse than having them work on you but asking no questions; inflicting pain but giving you no way by which to relieve it. With no questions asked you could give no answers. You could only endure. You were not even granted the pleasure of resisting something. There was only pain. And Bhengu knew that van Rooyen understood this... Slowly the sense of vibration grew... eventually reaching every nerve end of his body. A heavy pain was spreading, slow moving, first filling his head in the back of his skull and seeping gradually upwards and forwards, each blow helping it on, moving it a little further... in his head and now flooding his body... He was retreating from the pain into a private place where he could do nothing but wait... The mumbling started when the pain was filling the whole case of his skull so that there was no room for thoughts, only the thoughts that the pain itself forced on him. It was low in tone, the words indistinct, starting hesitantly in small bursts, but the bursts growing in frequency until the mumbling was not wavering for a moment, running on like a long murmured prayer. Bhengu listened to his own voice carefully, trying to catch the words... The mumbling was filling the whole room... The pain was everywhere now... The pain and the mumbling were all one, running into each other. The pain had become the mumbling and the mumbling had become the pain... He wished there was some way he could stop [the mumbling], but his voice was operating independently of his will, the sound running on freely... It's not me. It's my voice. Someone else is using my voice... There was no hesitation in the pattern of the blows... working their inevitable

destruction on the cells of the brain... Van Rooyen's voice was far away,

heard distantly against the thunder of his own voice... I can hold out... I

know what to expect now... Bhengu did not expect the scream. It was a

single long-drawn hoarse note. It was worse than the mumbling, very

much worse. Something gave inside his head, stopping the pain

immediately. It was then that Sam Bhengu knew he was dying. (200-5)

Writings and readings of pain and power are derived from and situated within the difficult and often deliberately suppressed and falsified translations between body and voice, between the body in pain and the manner in which pain is made visible and 'objective' in language. This is the realm, as Molefe Pheto writes with reference to his prison memoirs, of documents written by fists (1985:218). At the inquest following a custodial death the body was again fixed in a mass of documents, situated in a network of writing. Its story was told through various realist narrative forms: the police investigation, the post-mortem, the judgement. The story of the body has also been very differently told through the alternative truths of fiction.[72] The body passing through the 'space of death' was variously inscribed, represented and interpreted: various modes of discourse, including the legal and the literary, sought to (un)mask and appropriate the body's secrets and the scene of its death.

The Body and Memory

The body emerges from interrogation, and to a lesser extent imprisonment, as the site on/in which divergent discourses meet. It represents a further arena where constructions of truth and power are played out, the irrefutable and infinitely contestable evidence of a battle not only over truth and power, but also over life itself. The body, accumulating

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[72] On the realist narrative forms that emerged together during the empiricist revolution of the seventeenth century, see Laqueur 1989.

political (auto)biographies, is violently (de/re)constructed and staged as a collaborative text. The body - "the most inherently political of all subjects" (Scarry 1994:40) - takes its place alongside the confession/statement at the heart of interrogation's layered textuality.

As the primary textual representations from the scene of torture the body and the statement/confession share certain characteristics - both are violently collaborative texts; the body and the word are weapons in the interrogational encounter that can inflict pain and/or confer power; and no authority exerts a sovereignty over their meaning or political function - but they can also be made to represent fundamentally different readings of pain and power. The translation of pain into state power is a transformation of body into voice, the body of the detainee into the voice of the state. Through the making of a statement/confession, the danger is that the body in pain is silenced, it lends its pain to the state by making it vocal, visible and 'objective' in a manner that can be misread as (self-)betrayal and state power. Pain, potentially, is neither acknowledged nor addressed and the body is effectively erased. Without, and sometimes in spite of, the superimposition of the written word, however, and also in the case of custodial death, it is the material reality and language of the body that becomes paramount. Those who die in custody are subject to the ultimate in silencing and erasure while simultaneously harbouring a discourse that inscribes the body as world. The 'voices' of the detainee and the state, and an account of interrogation itself, are sealed on/in the body, its interiors and surfaces. The tortured body has a story to tell; it is a sealed envelope of pain and power.

Memory is inscribed on/in the body and its memory is long: de Certeau writes with reference to Latin America that a "history of resistance punctuated by cruel repression is *marked on the Indian's body* as much as it is recorded in transmitted accounts - or more so". The result is the "inscribing of an identity built upon pain" and the scarred body as

"the index of a *history* yet to be made" (de Certeau 1986:227).[73] Embodied memory is singular, idiosyncratic and radical, "the site for surrogate codes, for censored and excess experience" (Feldman 1991:15), for the otherwise unsaid and unsayable. Where the capacity to communicate is destroyed by pain and/or oppression, the body becomes an expression of injustice and suffering, a form of social and political criticism, and a repository of dangerous/unwanted knowledge and secret histories.[74] The body, its language and memory, combines an investment and/or corrective against conventional silences and avenues of forgetting with its own pathways of silencing and forgetting. If, as is often stated in South Africa, memory is a weapon, how is the contested memory of the body to be articulated and understood?[75]

It is appropriate to conclude with an image from the end of Gordimer's novel, *The Conservationist*, of a black body rising from its ill-considered and inadequate burial, to the surface of the earth, reclaiming and being reclaimed.

> The one whom the farm received had no name. He had no family but
>
> their women wept a little for him. There was no child of his present but
>
> their children were there to live after him. They had put him away to

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[73] Many commentators have argued a similar point. Scarry states: "What is remembered in the body is well remembered" (1985:108-21,152), while Foucault notes that the body embodies history, descent, memory: "The body is the inscribed surface of events... totally imprinted by history..." (1991a:83, also 82,87-8; see Cronin, "A Tale of Why Tortoise Carries his Hut Upon his Back", 1987:103-4, Mohamed and Mofokeng in Russell 1991:43-4,53).

[74] It is important to note that memory is created through pain, and the body, in different ways. While in some cases pain destroys a sense of community by destroying the capacity to communicate, in others it leads to the possibility of new relationships. Pain, for example in rites of passage such as initiation, creates a moral community out of those who have suffered. It is the means through which society integrates individuals into such a community and establishes the ties and responsibilities of membership and ownership. While in the case of torture it is through pain that the individual resists complete incorporation into society, here pain guarantees belonging and the body as memory is a sign of this belonging. Of course these two processes can coexist, as a form of unity in opposition and a mark of exclusion in relation to the 'other' within a repressive design, in situations of occupation, colonisation and oppression.

[75] The arguments of this paragraph owe a considerable debt to Das 1995:175-96, and to de Certeau 1986:227. Also on the relationship between the body and memory see Culbertson 1995, Khare 1995, and Kleinman and Kleinman 1994.

rest, at last; he had come back. He took possession of this earth, theirs;
one of them. (1978:267)

There is a dead body buried beneath the surface of South African life, beneath the
surface of its psyche, its earth, its body-politic. The surface has formed a non-healing
scab: a torturer-third force-dirty tricks-hit squad scab, an impunity-amnesty-forgive and
forget scab. It is a scab that has never healed over a body that has never decomposed.
The body was beaten to its death and buried in haste to be forgotten. But the scars and
blood are still fresh and angry. It is a body with a memory and a story to tell. It needs to
break through the sealed lips of the earth, to tell its story, once and for all, to have its
say, to be healed and to die. There is a dead body.

SECTION 2 - EXILE AND HOMECOMING

Chapter 3: Exile as a 'Space of Death'

i) Exile, Postcolonialism, Globalisation, Nationalism: and the case of Bloke Modisane

> All social marginals, all exiles, are splayed between these two poles or extremes - one a tendency towards death, the other a positive movement towards self-production, critical resistance and transformative struggle. (Grosz 1993:57)

Apartheid South Africa was the homeland of both imprisonment and exile. They constituted two foundational dimensions of the apartheid 'space of death', linked within the framework of repression and resistance by the co-ordinates of time and space.[1] The exile like the prisoner serves time, and the sentence of exile like that of detention/life imprisonment is indefinite. Both develop their own routine and evolve "according to a different calendar" (Said 1984:172) in which landmarks and horizons are needed to inhabit what is otherwise a vast undifferentiated temporal landscape. Time within these "discrepant temporalities" is infinite and yet somehow lost, stacked and stopped, intense and empty (Clifford 1994:317-18). To navigate time is to both erect and/then erase landmarks to ease the pain of passage. Because otherwise, these are realms characterised by "a sameness of time", denying "full citizenship of the present", of "no-time... whose inhabitants are strung between the rejected past and a future fashioned like a paper aeroplane out of manifestos and declarations" (Gordimer 1988:147,211, 302, also 286). If the exile/prisoner is unable or unwilling to impose a present and presence on a context that constitutes their categorical denial - "the alien present... becomes the least relevant, most distant, most insubstantial of tenses" (Nixon 1994:116)

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[1] The commonalities between incarceration and exile were many and varied. For example: the whereabouts of those affected was often unknown to family/friends, and both involved the fragmentation of families and the harassment of activist's relatives/friends; communication, particularly between inside and outside, was of crucial importance; new arrivals renewed/maintained/reinforced contact between inside and outside and enabled prison and exile communities to combat stagnation; and, neither population was the result of a single definitive defeat or calamity but rather was formed by successive waves of political resistance and oppression.

- life is lived in terms of memory and anticipation, in a nostalgic past and an idealised future which block out the present almost completely, and which through the continual and repetitive movement between the two become fused, melded in a realm outside time, often virtually indistinguishable. The present continues elsewhere in the exile's/ prisoner's absence.

Dislocation and disorientation are not only temporal but also spatial. Neither the prison nor exile occupies an absolute location. Both are forms of confinement, displacement and exclusion. In both, resistance attempts to un/remake space, the empty space of the prison cell and the one-dimensional landscape of exile, with the particularities of place; attempts to un/remake space, as it un/remakes time, so as not to be enveloped in its radiating blankness. The body, the senses, memory, the imagination, the spoken and written word, political activism and community, are among the weapons of inscription. The previous chapter mapped out the terrain of transgressing and remaking for the prisoner. For the exile, however, spatial inscription - transgression and remaking - lays bare the dilemma of the exilic condition. Exile is a realm of "no-place"; "'no place that belongs even to the dead. That is the greatest dispossession there is. Even to be in prison in your own country is to have a place there'" (Gordimer 1988:211,260 also 286,288,291,314). To transform exilic space into place, to create a new home and belong, is both an essential human need and an act of personal redefinition. The rift, upon which the exile's identity is forged and depends, is between the monolithic, undifferentiated space of exile and what Mphahlele brands "the tyranny of place" (1984), or/as home. For the exile, the space/place interaction is forged most importantly in the distinction between the two, not, in the absence of return, in the transformation of one into the other. There is only one border:

There's a strange feeling once you are out of your home that you're in the world. This thin line between inside and outside; once you are not inside,

you are outside. It just didn't occur to me that there was any other border

in the world... (Ngcobo in Bernstein 1994:351)

The national border is wrapped around the exile as a cloak of security and belonging to prevent exile becoming a prison without boundaries, borders or frontiers. It is the border that is crossed without being erased; the frontier along which the battle is fought, its deepest scar and ultimate prize. And so the blank space of exile that is inevitably, if provisionally, inscribed as place, and even as home, is also marked and criss-crossed with landmarks and borders that have been erased in order to keep the space of exile blank, in order to keep open the promise of return. The exile's journey through space, like that of the prisoner, inscribes and erases boundaries, ultimately attempting to erase all but the single border that delimits home, and thereby transgresses and un/remakes the space that is traversed.

For both the prisoner and the exile now and then, here and there, are experienced simultaneously but differently. The territories of fragmented, multiple and juxtaposed times and spaces/places are infused with an oppositional politics which contests the un/re-making of time and space/place at the hands of the state. Linkages forged between inside and outside, for example, continually undermine and rearticulate the state's repressive design. The prisoner and the exile stand with arms locked over the discontinuities of time and space.

The topography of exile included a further dimension: exile as a 'space of death'. The many deaths of exile were both symbolic and terribly real. They included the death of solidarity, idealism and hope, the tragic self-destruction of drink and suicide, the loss of innocence and childhood - notably through violence and pregnancy - and the similarly incalculable loss and waste of creative death. The pain of isolation and severance from people and places at home was exemplified by the deaths of the people and places.

Such deaths were marked for the exile by enforced absence, by partial and delayed

information, and by the deprivation of the sense of closure provided by rituals of grief

and mourning.

> There are things that can never be finished in exile, like when my mother
> died. It's an open wound to me. It doesn't close. You see, those who were
> there they had a chance to mourn - and then they can start to live again.
> But me, I feel I haven't mourned. I am traditional inside still. There are
> certain rituals that we believe in, and I need to take part in them.
> (Katleho Moloi in Bernstein 1994:186, also Kasrils 1993:79)

Perhaps the greatest fear of the exile is that s/he will die in exile. "[M]ust I then be

separated from my grave?" writes Breytenbach (1985a:209). To die in exile is to be

separated from ancestors and a "world without end / of the dead" (268). It is to have the

umbilical chord severed, to be cut adrift. Fearing death in exile Mphahlele wanted to

return home to die on ancestral ground: "*I want to go home to die... I am dead*"

(Chabani Manganyi 1983:289).[2] To be in exile is to be constantly diminished by death,

to be variously dead. In essence, the rift between exile and home is "like death but

without death's ultimate mercy" (Said 1984:160).

One of the most important parallels between exile and imprisonment is that as

multifaceted 'spaces of death' they both harbour the potential for a counter-discourse

which can remake shattered times and places, identities and histories, within narratives

of resistance, and thereby transform variously inflicted death into forms of life. This

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[2] There was, inevitably, a "procession of death" in exile: "How far away from home, and how far away from one another, they have died!... Everywhere, in the foreign lands there is a little bit of South Africa where they lie buried" (Kathrada in Resha 1991:242-3).On the death of family members in exile, see Ntantala 1993:217-23,227-9,234 and Resha 1991:227-64.

chapter will explore some of the dimensions and transformations of this exilic space of life and death, but first it is necessary to situate the dynamics of exile within, and to an extent rescue it from, current discourses on displacement and migration.

Exile and the Postcolonial Blur[3]

The pervasive metanarrative of migration dominates postcolonial discourse. The migrant becomes "perhaps, the central or defining figure of the twentieth century". Migration as metaphor "is everywhere around us". "We all cross frontiers", continues Salman Rushdie, "in that sense, we are all migrant peoples" (1991:277-9). The figure of the migrant is at once unsettled and unsettling, decentred and in-between, hybrid/ polyglot and continually engaged in cultural translation and mediation. The transgression/transcendence of border and boundary and the embrace of a pot-pourri pollution is depicted as pervasive and all but universal as reality and preferable as prescription. This package of characteristics is seen as encompassing the construction of individual and collective identity; cultural form and content, theory and criticism; the work of author, critic and academic; their inter-relationships, and more. A major shortcoming of this scenario is that the new dictatorship of difference has/will become as universalising as the paradigms it seeks to contest. Anne McClintock is not alone in being struck by how seldom the term postcolonialism is used to denote multiplicity (1992:86,97). This homogenous heterogeneity and the paradoxical obfuscation of difference constitute the postcolonial blur. Postcolonial brokers variously negotiate binaries and blur distinctions: between the forms, stages and specificities of postcolonial conditions; between North and South, centre and periphery, elite and majority; between the powerful and the powerless, oppressor and oppressed, tyranny

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[3] The following critique of postcolonialism owes a debt to previous analyses and discussions. See, in particular, Ahmad 1992, Appiah 1992, Frankenberg and Mani 1993, McClintock 1992, Shohat 1992. For analyses of postcolonialism in the context of South Africa, see a special issue of *Current Writing* 5/2 1993, and Carusi 1993, Thornton 1996.

and resistance; between sameness and difference, continuity and rupture/rift; and, most crucially for the purposes of this chapter, between forms of displacement and mobility. Intrinsic to the latter example is the tendency to equate the conditions and characteristics of all displaced and mobile people, be they exiles, refugees, migrants, expatriates or simply travellers, within the umbrella of migrancy or diaspora, or, as in the example cited below, in scatterings and gatherings:

> I have lived that moment of the scattering of the people that in other
> times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of
> gathering. Gatherings of exiles and emigrés and refugees, gatherings on
> the edge of 'foreign' cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the
> ghettos or cafés of city centres; gathering in the half-life, half-light of
> foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another's language...
> gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present. Also the
> gathering of the people in the diaspora: indentured, migrant, interned...
> the genealogy of that lonely figure that John Berger named the seventh
> man. (Bhabha 1990:291)

What is affected by this definitional vagueness, by the elision of difference within the mapping of migrancy/displacement, and indeed by other similar elisions, is a false alignment of the elite migrant writer/intellectual. This alignment enables the writer/ intellectual to claim a constituency and an audience, and the right to speak in an authoritative way for and on behalf of variously defined others.[4] Aijaz Ahmad has voiced relevant criticisms of what he calls "an opportunistic kind of Third-Worldism" and the "incredibly inflationary rhetoric" of exile: "[e]xile, immigration and professional preference become synonymous and, indeed, mutually indistinguishable" (1992:86).

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[4] Also see Rob Nixon's critical discussion of what he calls the "license of exile" in relation to V. S. Naipaul (1992:17-43).

From the perspective of the exile, loose talk of exile and homelessness as postcolonial metaphor, existentialist dilemma and/or universal condition, is mere posturing. "Anyone who is really homeless", writes Said, "regards the habit of seeing estrangement in everything modern as an affectation, a display of modish attitudes" (1984:167).[5]

Postcolonial writers and intellectuals occupy a very particular position. As a generalisation, but one that does not degenerate to the level of caricature, the high priests and priestesses of postcolonialism are from the South but are based in the Western metropolis. They are members of a migrant elite which straddles North and South in such a way as to reject national affiliation. The focus of their work is the world of empire and its contemporary traces, the colonial-postcolonial axis, rather than the complex intersection of this axis with other axes of historical explanation or domination and resistance. Similarly, many disciples of postcolonialism provide a fractured but linear historical reading in which an era of colonialism/decolonisation/nationalism has been overtaken by postcolonialism, exile by migrancy, rather than studying the complex of similarities, continuities *and* differences between the two (Ranger 1996) and/or the processes as taking place simultaneously within an overlapping, even circular, historical matrix. The valorisation of a migrant hybridity embraces contradiction, ambiguity and ambivalence, irony and scepticism, the exotic and the fantastic, in preference to the certainties, unities, and necessary choices and sacrifices of allegiance/affiliation and resistance. The chosen theoretical framework of the postcolonial is similarly post -modern/structuralist[6] - accompanied by a movement away from a concern with material reality to its construction and representation in discourse. Categories of movement and displacement are appropriated and used, at least in part, on the basis of aesthetic or

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[5] On the distinctions between different forms of displacement and migration, see McCarthy 1971 and Nixon 1992:21-8.

[6] The specificities of convergence and difference between the postcolonial and the postmodern, both of which come in various guises and resist easy definition, require further interrogation (see Appiah 1992:221-54 and During 1993).

theoretical preference. Exile, with its supposedly old fashioned and negative connotations of political fixity and fundamentalism, is replaced by migrancy as a framework of analysis because it has more positive or diverse associations.

Postcolonialism sheds a dangerously partial and selective light on contemporary relations of power. It establishes no unequivocal structures or forces of domination and, equally, no unequivocal grounds for or means of opposition. It has no political or ideological core, provides no unifying common ground, around which to forge alliances or mobilise constituencies. It is not an ideology of resistance. It is a theory that can be persuasively applied to areas of identity construction, certain trends in cultural production and criticism, and the position defined and occupied by some intellectuals, artists and academics. Postcolonialism is perhaps best summed up as a method and/or style, articulated by a small intellectual elite whose condition and predicament it defines.[7] The work of postcolonial novelists or critics is profoundly autobiographical. An emergent but still selective and exclusive world is written into being as the norm, with the postcolonial as it model, at its centre. The world becomes one through them and in their image. This scenario ignores the fact that the polyglot traveller is the exception, even, and still, an aberration, within the present world order, not the rule. It enshrines a world-view that resonates very selectively with the politics, movements/ displacements, nationalisms, and culture of South Africa.

One aim of this chapter is to reclaim the particularities of exile, especially the South African experience of exile, and its insistence on politics and place, from the postcolonial blur. South Africa has experienced many forms of population movement

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[7] Appiah's attempt to define ways in which postcoloniality both is and is not a meaningful way of understanding African literature/culture leads him to describe postcoloniality as "the condition of what we might ungenerously call a *comprador* intelligentsia: of a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained, group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery" (1992:240, also 250). The definition outlined above differs only in that it would close the quotation with "centre" or "metropolitan centre", rather than periphery.

and displacement. As diasporic source and sanctuary it has been, at specific times and places, part of the flow of migrants "specialising in the cross-country" (Sher, 1992:14) as starting point, way-station and destination. The specificities of apartheid politics and history, however, meant that forced displacement, that was both internal and external, predominated over more voluntary movement, as both experience and metaphor, and that at the heart of a range of displacements was the rift of exile. As a result, understanding the distinctiveness of exile is enormously important. Ahmad stresses the difference between personal convenience and/or professional choice and forced exclusion by the state or fear of annihilation. "I mean not privilege but impossibility, not profession but pain" (1992:85-6). Exile is primarily an experience that speaks of violence and pain, of principle, politics and place, of resistance to a regime and to the enforced displacement that takes place in its name.[8]

It is, furthermore, the exile's intention to return. In the meantime, while Breytenbach admits that the exile is ultimately marginal, he maintains that s/he retains the capacity to be a producer of dissonance and awareness - "I consciously try to shape my work... as contributing to the awareness of Africa" - "an underground activist for Africa". He argues the exile should be an interpreter abroad, an envoy, even if s/he has no mandate, constantly trying to focus attention on the nature of reality back home; must maintain a dialogue with the inside, be a conduit to filter back subversive ideas, "bark all along the borders"; and s/he may have to try and save that which is menaced by extinction on the inside (Breytenbach 1986:75-6,1996:47).

The universalising tendency of postcolonialism is based in part on the increasing interconnectedness of the contemporary world. Strikingly parallel elements within the

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[8]
Categories of movement and displacement are not only different from each other but vastly internally heterogeneous. The South African experience of exile, for example, was diverse, differentiated, among other things, by race, class, gender, and geography.

process of globalisation include transnational capitalism and culture, the internationalisation of information, communication and technology flows, and global relations of force. In an essay by Masao Miyoshi (1993), transnational corporatism, seen as a form of colonialism/imperialism, is defined in a manner that in several ways is similar to the generalised definition given above of the postcolonial intellectual: as no longer tied to a nation of origin but adrift and mobile, with no respect for borders or frontiers; as self-serving, representing neither home nor the host nation but only (a new constituency centred around) themselves. Pursuing this line of argument a stage further it can be argued that postcolonialism, with its often uncritical embrace of hybridity and syncretism, represents and advocates a 'free' market of the word and mind, with both the advantages and inherent shortcomings that such a 'free' global market implies.

Aspects of contemporary culture can be global, however, without it being the culture of every person in the world (Appiah 1992:232). South Africa is a particularly stark example of the fact that access to the resources of globalisation, and it can be argued of postcolonialism, is characterised by massive inter- and intra-national inequality. Large parts of this particular revolution relating to information, knowledge, wealth and power, with their attendant revolutions in identity and spatial organisation, have bypassed equally large parts of (South) Africa. It is important to understand the way in which globalisation works: as a complex of resources and strategies predicated upon the dynamics of power, oppression and resistance, exclusion and inclusion. Nkosi's observations from an earlier era still, to a significant degree, apply: he states that while white South African writers could become indigenised as, for example, English writers, or 'international' writers, black writers, not purely as a matter of political choice, remained South African (or African), 'national', and on the margins of foreign cultures and life (1983:94-5). Globalisation operates as a dynamic of both choice and force; as a system facilitating, and indeed dependent upon, levels of participation that differ in degree, scale, composition and purpose; as an exercise that erases some borders and

boundaries only to redraw and establish others; and as a surface that is continually ruptured, and thereby transformed, by the particularities of politics and place.

At the level of culture, the relationship between the local and the international takes the form of an exchange that, although fundamentally unequal, operates in both directions. Local culture is transformed by a process that encompasses submission, mimicry, adaptation, syncretism, appropriation, and resistance. As a result the particularities of place are un/remade with the complicity of the locality, re-placed, not simply erased. Ulf Hannerz, drawing on the example of Nigeria and writing about a cultural spectrum or continuum of creolisation operating at national and international levels, writes the following: "The world system, rather than creating massive cultural homogeneity on a global scale, is replacing one diversity with another; and the new diversity is based relatively more on interrelations and less on autonomy" (1987:555). The exchange between the local and the global, like the related interaction between dwelling and mobility/displacement, is characterised by uneven connection, convergence, homogenisation and the creation, invention, emergence of new kinds of difference alongside forms of continuity and recovery (see Clifford 1988:1-17).[9]

Apartheid South Africa occupied a particular position within the world system - as a state which produced two conditions of exile, the exile of South Africa itself as an international pariah state and the exile of those forced to leave their homeland (Rieff 1994:111) - a position which led to a unique matrix of global isolation and linkage, difference and similarity. This matrix is thrown into sharp profile when seeking to apply aspects of the theoretical terrain outlined above.

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[9] The debate surrounding the construction of cosmopolitanism forms a relevant tangent to this discussion. While Tim Brennan (1989), for example, has rigorously critiqued those he calls "Third World cosmopolitan celebrities", in another strand of this debate, attempts have been made to encompass, negotiate in-between, bind together, transcend, the local/global divide in relation to conceptions of cosmopolitanism. See Clifford's "discrepant cosmopolitanisms" (1992:108) and Rabinow's "critical cosmopolitanism" (1986:258). A general overview is contained in Robbins 1992.

Purity, Difference, Hybridity: Exile and the Nation/Nationalism

> APARTHEID: by itself the word occupies the terrain like a concentration camp. System of partition, barbed wire, crowds of mapped out solitudes... the glaring harshness of abstract essence (*heid*) seems to speculate in another regime of abstraction, that of confined separation. The word concentrates separation, raises it to another power and sets separation itself *apart*... By isolating being apart in some sort of essence or hypostasis, the word corrupts it into a quasi-ontological segregation. At every point, like all racisms, it tends to pass segregation off as natural - and as the very law of the origin... It institutes, declares, writes, inscribes, prescribes... it outlines space in order to assign forced residence or to close off borders. It does not discern, it discriminates. (Derrida 1985:292)

> South Africa belongs to all who live in it. (Preamble to the Freedom Charter)

Apartheid's essence was separation and segregation, the attempt to violently forge multiple racial/national purities from a plural populace. Hybridity and syncretism were outlawed. The chosen (re-)constructions of identity were projected and engraved onto the mapping of space. The lines of societal division were not, however, unitary and clear-cut but multiple, shifting and often contradictory to apartheid's design. They included differences of race but also of class, gender, language, religion, political affiliation, and generation, differences contingent upon and feeding into a changing economy, differences between the literate and the non-literate, urban and rural, the First World and the Third. Diversity and hybridity were the reality; purity, even in the context of enforced segregation, the myth. Stark, state imposed, boundaries between insider and outsider were blurred and became the subject of economic negotiation and political contestation. Ideological and spatial borders were rendered flexible, mobile and porous - as suggested by the advent of cross border initiatives and commuting, and by the notion of 'soft borders' - characterised by increasingly complex, incoherent and unmanageable, strategies of inclusion and exclusion. These developments, concentrated in the 1980s, articulated a profound challenge to apartheid. It was confronted by internal contradictions, by ambiguous and indeterminate elements that resisted

categorisation, and by unambiguous resistance. The logic of apartheid, and apartheid itself, was under attack (see Norval 1994).

And yet politically, hybridity was often an explosive and hazardous commodity. The status of the 'coloured' community is one case in point. Frontiers on both sides were often clearly, if usually differently, drawn; it was important to know whose side one was on; the ground in-between was a battle ground. To take a political stance in the pursuit of societal change involved making choices. Certain possibilities were affirmed while others were renounced, options were chosen at the inevitable expense of others. There were detrimental factors - ambivalence, contradiction, incapacitation with reference to political action - attached to being inside too many things.[10] The penchant for purity was not a monopoly of the state. Terry Eagleton has demolished with lovely irony the notion that difference and plurality - of fascist parties? of social classes? of categories of oppression? - are unquestionably good in themselves regardless of their political substance and context. The ANC are one of the organisations cited who obviously do not subscribe to the relevant academic journals, and who, as a result, "obtusely continue to strive to achieve the maximum degree of agreement and solidarity among the people of the townships in order to bring the apartheid regime to its knees" (1990:87). Discourses predicated on the intrinsic desirability of hybridity and difference are often fundamentally undermined when applied to politically riven situations.

Grant Farred, for example, in the context of South Africa just prior to majority rule, outlines a scenario in which an alliance between the ANC and the National Party government and the growing hegemony of the ANC within black communities, has marginalised and silenced the left. He proposes "that the policy of divide and rule be stood on its head and utilised imaginatively by South Africans serious about their

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[10] See Ahmad's discussion of the work of Edward Said (1992:159-219).

commitment to a radical restructuring of their society" (1992:227), and that a space, violently established by the differences and divisions forged by apartheid oppression and resistance to it, be used to give voice to other forms of difference, in particular the dissenting voice of leftist politics. At one important juncture between violence and difference stand the IFP. The 'killing fields' of South Africa, Farred argues, "seem to have unleashed a set of political energies that can be used in the struggle against ANC hegemony in the black community: the staging of difference gives some shape to the ideological battles that are being waged elsewhere between the ANC and its opponents", battles taking place, he claims, in labour unions, sports and community organisations, and religious groupings. In this increasingly oppressive environment "it appears", apparently, "that the only site that continually stages acts of dissent is that of cultural difference" which has "therefore made available the political space in which to rethink political alliances" (231). Farred advocates a counter-hegemonic power bloc of the left, an "organizational hybrid... steeped in difference" (231).

As political analysis this is seriously flawed; as a political programme it is simply nonsense. It is important to stress that the society being described is one in the process of transition, albeit an imperfect one, from apartheid to majority rule and democracy. Farred's proposals overlook the enormous dangers and contradictions of using apartheid's violent mapping of difference to serve his avowedly leftist ends, and the imperative to go beyond the tainted residue of apartheid's imprint on South African identities and social fabric, as both a means and an end, to mobilise and create communities and the nation anew. What are the dynamics of this reversal-in-continuity of difference? Is violence to be condoned and perpetuated? It is unclear how the practice of 'divide and rule' can be turned on its head; how the divisions of apartheid society or the space they supposedly created or the political energies unleashed by carnage can serve the politics of the left against the ANC, particularly as much of the left remains within the ANC; or how the staging of difference between the IFP and the

ANC gives shape to the ideological battles between the ANC and groups that are or were its allies. It is patently untrue that cultural difference constitutes or has ever constituted the only site continually staging acts of political dissent. Insufficient attention is given to the relationship between the many forms of difference in South Africa - how is one form of difference transformed into another? - or to the power relations relating to difference in a country where, as Farred acknowledges in passing, to be different is often to be dead. It is not contradictory to claim both that South Africa needs to nurture a greater tolerance for difference while at the same time insisting that there are certain kinds of difference that it could easily, and productively, do without.

In another context, that of border discourses, the notion of hybridity, while arguably more suggestive and offering more interesting possibilities, is still highly problematic.

> The concept of the border is a crucial metaphor in South African fiction. Whether it is a cutting edge or a neutral space, a dividing line or an intermediate phase in between opposites, a condition of the soul or a physiographical region, it represents an ambiguous and unavoidable trope in novels which... deal with literal and metaphorical boundaries. The border is a point both in space and in time which separates and juxtaposes, a field of action that centres upon the encounter and/or separation between known territory and unexplored ground, Europe and Africa, North and South, British and Afrikaner, white and black, civilization and savagery, law and lawlessness, Christian and pagan, gun and assegai, settled... and nomadic... (Oboe 1994:37)

The border conjures up the related spectres of the frontier, colonialism, exploration, travel, and conquest. It is perilous terrain for both oppressor and oppressed. Breytenbach writes: "I have a mind crisscrossed by borders, the knife edges between safety and death" (1985:115, bracket omitted). The SADF's 1975 invasion of Angola

and the subsequent deployment of the army to fight on the borders of South Africa and Namibia can be seen within this context and history. But the border was to tighten like a noose around and within South Africa. The border was brought back home by returning soldiers: "'It's the border... We bring it back with us'" (Wilhelm, "Veterans", 1987:25). From the mid-1980s, and the deployment of the army in South Africa's violence-racked townships, the border/frontier and its violence was relocated/returned to the metropole, as a component of and commentary upon apartheid's decline (Haarhoff 1991:193-223). The border, and therefore the enemy, was both within and without; everywhere.

From this context came a particular narrative of the border: a largely Afrikaans 'border literature'.[11] It is, on the one hand, a literature of immediacy, experience and documentation, but as Koornhof additionally argues, it is also a literature written by those who have no experience of the army or the border (1989:275,277-8,281-2). It is a literature of internalisation and projection: a sense of the pervasive violence, permanent tension, and constant conflict and insecurity of everyday life in South Africa, were both internalised/personalised and transposed/projected on to a war setting and the border. Although the setting is one of war, therefore, the issues explored have greater applicability and relevance. Significantly, border fiction contains/implies a rejection of the politics of apartheid and a questioning of previous values and beliefs. Works explore and communicate the fracturing and disintegration of Afrikaner identity, unity and hegemony; the "erosion of ideas" (279), the grand ideas of apartheid; the loss of certainty; the first encounter with black South Africans on an equal footing, in an equalising context; and, the context enables the exploration of shifting power relations and changing group dynamics amongst whites, the depiction of new alliances, identities, strategies. The result is a tangible sense of fragmentation, incoherence,

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[11] Among border literature's most notable exponents are Etienne van Heerden, Alexander Strachan, Louis Kruger, George Weideman, and Koos Prinsloos. While predominantly an Afrikaans genre, some work written originally in English, and some translated into English, is available.

confusion, disorientation, of displacement and alienation, of the need and possible means to survive, and the search for the familiar, meaning, belonging, security. The vision is often apocalyptic.

The overtly and specifically political, however, is subsumed by the personal and by more existential, psychological and philosophical concerns. Rebellion is individualised and often eccentric. Borders are geographical, racial, political, cultural, sexual, personal; metaphors for division, but also potential transformation, in a context of conflict: "all the borders are now fronts and firelines" (Breytenbach, "destination", 1988:8). The border is less a geographical or cartographical demarcation than a way of seeing and narrating the world; it, also, is variously internalised and projected. In a manner that resembles the blank space of exile the geographical setting of these works is simply hostile terrain, anonymous, the border and enemy unnamed, the conflict non-specific. A political and historical reality becomes metaphor and myth.[12]

The border contains the potential for an outcome other than polarisation and violence. If one such outcome is an isolation and estrangement as neither one thing nor the other, on neither one side nor the other, another is a related meeting place in-between worlds, a translational position between the self and the 'other'. Du Plessis writes, in relation to the post-Soweto novels written when the dominant oppositional political paradigm was Black Consciousness, that "[t]he white antagonist of these novels, the racial *other*, is drawn very differently from blacks in recent Afrikaans writing" (1987:39). In a manner shared by some English writers, Afrikaners are caricatured as oppressors. "In recent Afrikaans writing, however, with its more phenomenological approach, subject and object interpenetrate... share the same emotion, they almost mirror each other", whereas in the aforementioned black novels "the subject and object of violence are construed as

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[12] The above two paragraphs draw extensively on Koornhof 1989. For the impact of the border on interrogation/torture, see van Heerden's stories "My Cuban" and "My Afrikaner" (1992:74-83,84-95).

polar opposites, not sharing the same human reality at all... the guilt for suffering is never owned, it is always attributed to the *other*" (39-40). These were the two main approaches of the time to violent change: "One is the 'border literature' in Afrikaans which explores the horror of violence brought home to roost in sometimes rather vague liberal-existential terms. The other paradigm is that of Black Consciousness and nationalism, though in the most recent works there is also a strong socialist and populist rhetoric underpinning the descriptions of violence" (40-1). Du Plessis concludes by advocating a form of hybridity, "the alchemical paradigm" (41). These divergent constructions of identity are no coincidence: at its most stark resistance, like oppression, is forged on absolute unity and polarisation, while, in the midst of ideological decline and bankruptcy, some tainted by association with the oppressor - the magistrate in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* is a powerful example - attempt to forge new, if often self-interested, understandings of the relationship between self and 'other', of the past, present, and ways to survive in the future.[13]

As the above examples illustrate, the embrace of hybridity and difference as political strategy and mode of analysis has complicated and frequently negative connotations and consequences in politically fraught situations, particularly for the oppressed. Proponents of postcolonialism have, however, raised important questions about the nature of solidarity and resistance. For example: are they necessarily the result of a totalising discourse and practice? is it possible, and indeed preferable, to mobilise resistance on the basis of an identity that is multiple and heterogeneous? Homi Bhabha talks of the fragmentation of identity not as "a kind of pure anarchic liberalism or voluntarism" but

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[13] In a way that echoes Coetzee's concerns about the narrativisation of torture - about the state setting the terms of engagement, about clichéd characterisation - Ndebele has voiced criticisms of South African writing, notably a number of post-Soweto novels: of a literature of stereotype, caricature, and stark polarities; of surface, symbol, slogan and spectacle rather than of process, interiority and the ordinary; of a literature which engages the state/apartheid on its own terms (1994:17-74).

as "a recognition of the importance of the alienation of the self in the construction of forms of solidarity".

> It is only by losing the sovereignty of the self that you can gain the freedom of a politics that is open to the non-assimilationist claims of cultural difference. The crucial feature of this new awareness is that it doesn't need to totalise in order to legitimate political action or cultural practice. (1990a:213)

And yet such a construction of political agency remains at the level of abstract theorising. Which emancipatory projects can be said to have successfully based themselves on such a strategy? It is no coincidence that 'divide and rule' is a slogan of oppression and not of resistance. To further interrogate the nature of liberatory discourse and practice it is helpful to consider the characteristics of and relationship between exile and the nation/nationalism.

Contemporary globalisation is being accompanied and countered by various forms of localisation, of which perhaps the most visible is often narrow, fundamentalist, ethnic nationalisms. The surface skim of postcolonial politics is a trademark of the migrant. In contrast, the politics of exile are obsessively rooted in the politics and place of home. Dennis Brutus asks, "How then do I justify / this stubborn single-track anxiety / for this one place? / this mad, silly, pitiable concern?" ("In Teheran", 1978:62). By way of explanation Rian Malan states, "South Africa holds the souls of its sons and daughters in an almost inescapable grasp. History cast all of us in a strange and gripping drama..." (1991:102). To paraphrase Keorapetse Kgositsile, the exile crosses innumerable borders without leaving home (1991). The exile is separated from home precisely because of a deep love for and commitment to his/her country:

the worst things about it [exile] is that you are just separated from your

country. It's, you know, you didn't want to leave, you left your country to

come back to liberate it... you loved your country enough in the first

place to actually make that type of sacrifice, you know, to commit

yourself in that manner. And to be separated from that very country and

the peoples that you love so much is a very wrenching... I suppose it's

always best described by Dennis Brutus's poems... like a simple lust, the

title of one of Dennis Brutus's anthologies, and that's what it is, it's a

simple lust. (Williams interview)

The exiled writer, therefore, does not share the postcolonial preoccupation with or

tendency to re-write the metropolitan nation, the west, or the colonial experience from

its margins, but reclaims and reconstitutes a vision of home from an engaged and

engaging distance.

Home is the nation and the ideology for its reclamation and reformulation is

nationalism. Exile is a "'nationalizing' moment", a threshold of nationalist emergence

(Anderson 1994:315; see Balibar in Balibar and Wallerstein 1991:92). Nationalism

asserts a belonging and claims a home, exile is a condition of isolation and loss: and the

"essential association" between the two is of "opposites informing and constituting each

other" (Said 1984:162). Sceptical and dismissive postcolonial readings of liberation

struggles and independence are a dangerous irrelevance to the methods and aims of the

exile. Exile, in the tenacity of its territorial identification and the passion of its

nationalist ideology, can and often has, with the catalysts of long distance and lengthy

absence, fostered a form of politics without responsibility, menacing, extreme and

fanatical. The rise of nationalist movements and their culminations in nation-states can

be viewed as "a project for coming home from exile, for the resolution of hybridity, for

a positive printed from a negative in the dark-room of political struggle" (Anderson 1994:319). But it need not necessarily be so.

Identity, of the individual and the collective alike, is a form of strategic alliance, a mobilisation of available components, a management of centripetal and centrifugal forces, in the service of an evolving purpose. Particular manifestations of this phenomenon form the basis of emancipatory politics. For the exile, multiple and overlapping similarities and differences cohere around the fundamental organising unity of banishment and political opposition, and around the goals of liberation and return. If the crisis of the contemporary nation-state and the ideology of postcolonialism are both, in part, symptoms of the post-independence collapse of such alliances, they should not be interpreted as evidence that similar alliances are no longer possible or relevant (see Fanon 1967:119-65). In many places and circumstances they remain of inestimable importance. While nationalism is an ambiguous example of the merits of solidarity, the understanding of identity construction outlined above can incorporate and encourage more inclusive forms of nationalism:

> Nationalism... gathers into its fold the dispersed historical narratives of diverse, and often unrelated, communities. On the other hand, nationalist narratives also acknowledge, and sometimes celebrate, difference. It needs to be emphasised that shaping union through difference is also a mode of creating subject positions for subordinate narratives. As a reinscription of narratives of community, nationalism does not so much erase existing narratives as *recast* their difference. The recognition that different ethnic groups, different locales, different communities and religions each have their own role to play in the national project underlines their difference at the same time that it homogenizes and incorporates them. (Gupta 1992:72)

Again the local is un/remade in its interaction with broader, more powerful, political and narrative forces. The specificities of locality puncture the generalisations and homogeneity of nationalism as they do those of postcolonialism and globalisation. On the whole the rainbow nationalism of the ANC has been, like the organisation itself, broad in composition, acknowledging and welcoming unity-in-diversity, to a degree that if not unique was at least very unusual for a liberation movement. It was far from being all-inclusive, however, because there were conscious and unconscious omissions and repressions, choices were made that affirmed certain identities while rejecting others. But neither was it a narrow fundamentalism, and the ANC has consistently defined itself against, and contested, narrower nationalisms in South Africa. During the apartheid era, the ANC's conception of the South African nation acquired a reality in exile on a scale that was not possible, even within the confines of the political prison (see Naidoo 1982:56-7), at home.

> I think for me as a white South African, going to MK, to the camps...
> made a big difference. I've grown up in the ANC, for the better part of
> my time with black comrades, and that has wedded me to a South Africa
> which I didn't know when I was there. So that I've discovered my South
> Africanism - if I can call it that - outside. It's only through coming out
> that I was able to find a South Africa that I do really love. In a sense I'm
> scared of going back into a South Africa which still retains so much of
> the things I hated. (Gilder in Bernstein 1994:197)[14]

Both unity and difference were important in the construction of oppositional identity and remain important in at least the rhetoric of nation-building. With many multi-ethnic

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[14] Also, in the same text, Baskind 321, Lapsley 376-7, Dennis 430; and Kasrils 1993:153.

nations in a state of disintegration, constituent parts contending for the right to statehood, and academic and other commentators overwhelmingly hostile to nationalism, South Africa perhaps illustrates the existence of alternative possibilities.

Under apartheid, the forces of both oppression and resistance utilised discourses and practices inspired by the desire for purity/unity and for hybridity/diversity/difference, albeit in different ways and to divergent ends. In conclusion it is perhaps possible to propose that an unquestioning allegiance to either trajectory, in isolation, serves to undermine resistance and facilitate oppression and that resistance will always require a strategic and context/place specific mobilisation encompassing aspects of both strategies in harness together.

The lives and deaths of the ANC nation in exile will be addressed in the second part of this chapter. Firstly, the section which follows applies some of the ideas outlined so far in this chapter, to the place of Sophiatown, Johannesburg, in the 1950s, and the person of William 'Bloke' Modisane, beginning with an analysis of a distinctive example of the way in which the local and the global, purity, difference and hybridity, impacted upon one another under apartheid.

Bloke Modisane and the 'Situation' as Alienated Cosmopolitan

Sophiatown was "a complex paradox which attracted opposites... joy... laughter... the growl and the smell of insult; we sang our sad happy songs, were carried away by our erotic dances, we whistled and shouted, got drunk and killed each other" (Modisane 1990:9); it was "a kaleidoscope of variable moods and passions" (70).[15] Sophiatown was home to Modisane, the place where he was born, with which he had grown up, and

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[15] For cultural and political background to Sophiatown and the life of Modisane, see Chapman 1989 and Gready 1990.

where he had lived all his life. It is striking how similar Modisane's descriptions of Sophiatown are to his descriptions of himself (see 117-19). The self as/in place: "we did not live in it, we were Sophiatown" (9).

Hannerz (1994) has argued that Sophiatown was a forerunner and exemplar of the way in which culture is made in the contemporary world. Both the global and the city-local were characterised by diversity and heterogeneity, linked through, albeit unequal, cultural networks and flows, imports and exports. Sophiatown was positioned at a midway point of a global cultural continuum, "where crosscurrents are strongest, and where the interactive processes of creolization bring the most strikingly new results"; and Hannerz continues: "But the cultural forms coming out of such midway points are often not only original, being neither wholly of the centre nor entirely of the periphery. Being midway, they are also in a way more accessible from either end" (193). Such was the position of Sophiatown.

In the 1950s Sophiatown's distant horizons were formed by an increasingly American-dominated post-war global order and a pre-independence Africa. The combined efforts of the apartheid state and the international community had not yet closed the door on/to the outside world. Sophiatown's immediate setting, meanwhile, was provided by an emergent black urban culture coexisting with apartheid's growing resolve, implemented through a battery of repressive legislation, to deny and destroy such a phenomenon. Sophiatown was located four miles to the west of the centre of Johannesburg and surrounded by white residential areas. Freehold tenure implied permanence while the relative absence of regimentation and control which characterised state owned locations proclaimed a kind of freedom. The majority of its population was black and working-class, but it was also relatively cosmopolitan, socially fluid, promiscuous and ambitious. Sophiatown was both a community and an overcrowded, violent slum. Modisane

describes it as "a political corn inside the apartheid boot" (1990:14). From the perspective of apartheid's ideologues it was quite simply an aberration.

A particular cultural intensity and dynamism characterised Sophiatown. If there was an alienation from aspects of local culture - things rural and 'traditional', indigenous literature and languages - the outside world was embraced in an attempt to fill the void. Cultural influences and institutions included the cinema, 'anything American' from food to fashion, the shebeen and alcohol to the backdrop of jazz and the penny whistle, gangs and violence, inter-racial cultural initiatives, a hybrid and bastardised English, the literature of comic magazines, detective novels and black America, and the magazine *Drum*.[16] An extraordinarily vibrant urban culture, predicated on seething heterogeneity and violent and creative cosmopolitanism, was produced by a combination of eclectic borrowing, inventive synthesis, illegal flaunting, superficial mimicry, and desperate escapism. The *Drum* writers - Modisane, Themba, Maimane, Matshikiza, Motsisi, Nakasa, Nkosi and Mphahlele - were all self-consciously cosmopolitan people and writers, "voices of creolization" in the vocabulary of Hannerz (1994:188): none more so than Modisane.

Modisane, as the personification of a particular form of cosmopolitanism, attracted a specific label in the context of Sophiatown: that of the 'situation':

> In him [Modisane] can be seen all the tensions and conflicts of those
> years. He was a walking embodiment of all the contradictions, all the
> paradoxes, all the ironies, all the hurt of being a 'situation'... (Nicol
> 1991:288)

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[16] For a discussion of the influence of American culture on Sophiatown, see Nixon 1994a:11-41.

The label 'situation' was a term of abuse for those who differed in education and aspiration from the majority of blacks, and were seen to be trying to situate themselves above them, and yet were refused entry into the white world. It was a painfully isolated and alienating condition.[17]

At no stage did Modisane learn to live with his blackness. To be black was an ugliness and a handicap, something he wanted to hide, a burden and a confinement. Self-hate and hate for a collective blackness, often expressed through straightforward prejudice and arrogance, became one. This is Modisane reflecting on his marriage:

> I was essentially concerned with the problems of living with my colour,
> and at the time I behaved as though I were the only black person in South
> Africa; I persecuted Fiki for her colour as viciously as the white men
> did... I am able to admit that my marriage decomposed because Fiki is
> black... (1990:219-20)

White, meanwhile, was the colour of state authority, violence and the law, of prohibition and exclusion, wealth and capital. Modisane's attitude to white South Africa included harsh criticisms, of its apathy, ignorance and hypocrisy, but can be summed up as one of "complicated ambivalence" (76): a complex of envy, admiration, mimicry, hatred, fear, anger, and shame. Modisane was torn between his revolt against being a black South African and the illusory promise of a worldly-white cosmopolitanism. But he lived within this ambiguous complex in such a way as to make a narrow white domain the creator of his values and horizons and the gatekeeper of his dreams. For

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[17] Modisane himself describes the 'situation' as someone resented by both black and white, as "not belonging to either, but tactfully situated between white oppression and black rebellion" (1990:94). For another, related, explanation for the term, see Nicol 1991:288. Also see Modisane's short story entitled "The Situation" (1962). Chapman states: "*Blame Me on History* is probably the most disturbing extended study of the alienated black writer-intellectual of the fifties" (1989:221, also 206).

Modisane, white came to represent status and success, civilisation and culture, while black constituted ignorance and barbarism. The result was a cosmopolitanism that was extended to pretentious and superficial extremes - in the midst of great poverty, Modisane delighted in classical music, fine food and champagne, and called his one roomed shack 'Sunset Boulevard' - and a quest for a universalising art that would transcend rather than incorporate the local.

Modisane sought a place for himself in an idealised white liberal world: "I want acceptance in the country of my birth, and in some corner of the darkened room I whisper the real desire: I want to be accepted into white society" (218). He went in pursuit of white women - "black... [was] not good enough; only the state of being white could satisfy me, and in a tedious succession I thought myself to be... lyrically in love with every white woman I met" (220) - and confesses a "mania" for white friends (254) and to surrounding himself with symbols of the world to which he aspired. "And all was done for the pleasure of hearing them say, Bloke you're a white man; why not, if I could not be white physically and legally, I could pretend a white existence" (254). The yearning for acceptance amongst whites, the desire to be white, and the pretence of actually being white, became blurred. Modisane was offered a "shadow passport" to the contradictory and unreal reality of the inter-racial frontier, which he could taste but not make his own (Berman 1983:284-6; also Gready 1990:148-51). He sought to bridge the gap between the black and white worlds - "My little room in Sophiatown was a fly-over which connected the two worlds" (1990:254, also 252) - but in the process encountered the archetypal dilemma of the 'situation': rejected by both, belonging to neither. "I am the eternal alien between two worlds" (218, also 229). Furthermore, Modisane was rejected by the black middle class (87-8). Thus, his alienation was complete.

A schizophrenic, tortured sense of self was forged between implausible aspirations and the reality of prohibition and rejection. Modisane's descriptions of himself - as hollow, a

collective 'thing', "a failure, a used-up, left-over man" (260), as less than a man - return

repeatedly to a sense of inferiority and incompleteness. For this was a life characterised

by confinement and exclusion, frustration and a sense of being emasculated, trapped

and manipulated, in which the attempt to "live too many lives" (218) meant that none

were lived fully. Against the backdrop of repressive identity imposition and denial,

Modisane attempted to acquire and shed identities like garments, subjecting them to his

own manipulation and the play of illusion; he wore them like a mask. One such mask

came from the detective stories of Leslie Charteris whose character, 'The Saint', fought

on the side of the good Blokes against the bad Blokes. The depersonalisation appealed

to Modisane:

> I have no face, I have no name, my whole existence slithers behind a
>
> mask called Bloke... people around us began to assume the label for my
>
> name, and gradually this label became a part of me I could not
>
> discourage; it began to overwhelm me, to become a piece of me, to
>
> impose a life of its own upon me; finally I was to accept it for a far
>
> deeper significance than I at the time realised... the invasion has been so
>
> successful and complete that today my name is Bloke Modisane.
>
> (75,167)

The mask is a dominant metaphor and symbol in Modisane's story, playing its most

prominent role in relationships between black, specifically Modisane himself, and

white. The violence of such relationships was negotiated through the masks of

submission and obsequiousness, chicanery and flattery - what Modisane describes as

"the canvas smile and the yes-baas mentality" (91) - of political innocence and of a

suppressed or subtle articulation of resistance. Modisane describes his relationship with

white liberal friends as a masquerade and a charade, "a relationship of masks, in which

every response is carefully selected and rehearsed", and he continues: "I could wear a

mask, be the eternal actor in a make-believe world of tinsel reality, revealing the face, the profile which photographed best...". As one of a small circle of 'eligible' Africans, Modisane was "a piece of rare Africana", "a curiosity, a main attraction" (73,158-60). The mask also played an active role in other arenas: the avalanche of racial hatred was projected onto a faceless, dehumanised, collective mask; white prejudice, guilt and embarrassment found sanctuary behind the ubiquitous mask; violence and death paraded in many masks as did the drive to escape the reality of South Africa through self-destruction.

These examples illustrate that the mask is itself two-faced, double-edged. It simultaneously inhabits the worlds of fantasy and reality, and is a weapon of both repression and resistance, dehumanisation and anonymity, erasure and sanctuary. Modisane's dependence upon masks meant that he equated being unmasked, and thereby himself, with being naked, incomplete, vulnerable, thereby failing to see that it could in fact be a means/form of liberation. He became a mask without a face, with the mask, like so much else, serving more as an agent of self-deception than as a tool of disguised irony or subversion. This was a treacherous world for even the most self-conscious participant. Flattery, as Modisane acknowledges, was a "weapon" used "with vicious enthusiasm to express... sincerest contempt", but there was "always present the danger of not knowing where to draw the line" (90-1). Jean Coste's questions are pertinent: "Where does the game end? Where does it begin? Which of the two roles - the acted... the real... - is authentic?" (1971:47, also 48). In summary, the mask played an ambiguous part within Modisane's ideology of accommodation, laced with cynicism and detachment, as a means of securing his own ends: recognition, respect, even acceptance; a place in the white world.[18] This facet of Modisane's life, however, stood in stark opposition to his professed political views.

18
    For Modisane's defence of accommodation see 1990:88-91,123-4,133,230; on cowardice,
see 224-8. On the role of the mask also see Nixon 1994a:24-5.

Modisane's critique of African and oppositional politics is scathing. He condemned

organised political resistance in the 1950s for addressing symptoms not causes, as a

succession of failures, as immature and more spectacle than substance: misadventures

in "the political game played by amateurs" (1990:152). In a state of disillusionment and

disgust, Modisane withdrew from the ANC and entered a period of transition -

described as "a political wilderness" and "the age of bewilderment" - assuming a mask

of political innocence/disinterest while searching for an ideology (139,165-6).

Significantly, however, there is the acknowledgement that being black, on occasion,

meant being trapped by the colour of one's skin into the cycle of oppression and

resistance: "I wanted to be both black and unconcerned with the games at politics, but a

non-committed African is the same black as a committed Native" (140, also 149-51).

Modisane ultimately aligned his African nationalism intellectually with the PAC.

Characteristically it fell short of any form of more substantial commitment and enabled

him to nurture what he calls his "political alienation" (249). The schism within

Modisane's social/racial world was replicated, albeit with a slightly different slant, in

the realm of politics. With one foot in the camp of a (white) bourgeois individualism/

liberalism and the other in a kind of black consciousness he attempted to uphold

mutually exclusive ideologies; again he was rejected by both, belonged to neither.

When Modisane could neither join the world to which he aspired nor change the world

in which he lived, he sought the destruction of all available selves and worlds. He tried

to lose himself primarily in sex, but also in drink, music, dance and the noise of the

nice-time parties, in the cinema and detective stories (see 166-71,206-12,229,262-4).

Creative writing was also a sanctuary from isolation and political disillusionment, a

form of escape devoid of self-conscious commitment and protest.[19] Modisane perceived

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[19] Modisane talks of writing "innocuous short stories, escapist trash" about "cardboard images of romanticism", but goes on to qualify his own damning critique: "and yet even against this background my escapist hero was seldom, if ever, on the side of formal law and order. Like me, my characters were invested with a contempt for the law, their efforts were directed towards a flaunting of the law: my heroes were social maladjusts in a society where heroism is measured by acts of defiance against law and order. I did

and used the word, like the mask, as a "weapon for gate-crashing" and scorning the worlds which had rejected him (88, also 139,167). Through (self-)annihilation, the components of which often included violence and death, many black South Africans sought to live with and through the pain of their lives, but in the process turned in/on themselves and each other (see 9,39-40,102,117-18,262). Modisane's particular concentration on what he calls his "sex pilgrimage" (220) was due to a typically paradoxical desire for both erasure/forgetfulness and achievement/identity: "Through sex I proved myself to myself. I am a man" (212, also see 210-11). In the conquest of white women there was also an insidious element of revenge. Women were categorised as whores or virgins: whores were the receptacles of his annihilating lust while virgins were the objects of a hopelessly idealised notion of a pure and cleansing beauty and love.

Excess and escape, release and erasure, were part of a search for a moment without past or future, an eternal present of forgetting where time would stop: "I am enervated by this hunger... to submerge and annihilate myself in every pleasure... to live only in the abandonment of each moment of every day... contemptuously disregardful of tomorrow..." (206). Self-annihilation provided a refuge from the chaos of life. However, the cycle of drowning in, followed by resurrection from, an ocean of excess became an end in itself, self-destructive, demeaning, vacuous, mechanical. In the wake of this profoundly unsatisfying emotional carnage there was no resolution, only the desire to be cleansed, accentuated loneliness and emptiness, exhaustion accompanied by an undiminished hunger, violent anger, disgust and shame. Modisane suggests that there was, in his "bird-of-passage" or "short-term" morality, a positive reaction to an

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not recognise the sociological significance of what I was doing, that with a central idea behind them I could use my stories as a reflection or a study of our society" (139; on "The Dignity of Begging", see 88-9). Modisane's writing does indeed go beyond escapism to incorporate albeit unconventional, and perhaps even unconscious, analyses of defiance and survival. He published the following short stories in Drum: "The Dignity of Begging" (September 1951); "The Fighter Who Wore Skirts" (January 1952); and "The Respectable Pickpocket" (February 1954).

existence of negatives, a contrast, at the very least, to a life of prohibitions (205-9). But it was spectacle not substance, addressing symptoms rather than causes.

Both Modisane and Sophiatown were eclectically cosmopolitan, indeterminate elements within the apartheid classificatory grid. Hannerz argues that in this context a selective appropriation of global cultural resources created a cosmopolitanism in Sophiatown that was a form of local resistance (1994:192). It could equally be argued, however, that it was Sophiatown's very heterogeneity, the absence of a unifying identity or cause, which restricted and undermined resistance to its destruction. Similarly, in its most extreme and uncritical form, as personified by Modisane, cosmopolitanism at the individual level degenerated into make-believe and wish-fulfilment: the "line between fantasy and reality becomes less and less distinct" (1990:170). Identity was liberated, obfuscated, lost, in an unreal reality, and the illusory promise and 'trips' of the oppressive city (Gready 1990). This cosmopolitanism and interaction between the global and the local was dominated by metropolitan influences, by mimicry and escapism, used to supplant rather than augment the local or the majority. The ambiguity of such a position is encapsulated by the plight of the 'situation'. Situated in-between, moving between irreconcilable worlds of race and politics, Modisane was neither one thing nor the other, on neither one side nor the other. His life was characterised by a self-destructive and directionless blend of frustration, meaninglessness, insecurity, pessimism, bitterness and incapacitation. His alienation was complete in a world in which syntheses of oppositions and negotiations of binaries were often politically contentious, self-destructive, impossible. Modisane and Sophiatown can be seen as forerunners and exemplars of strengths but also weaknesses of globalisation and postcolonial discourse, and of the profound ambiguity of an uncritical embrace of diversity/hybridity across the spectrum of identity, culture and politics, in the context of political crisis.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in Modisane's hopelessly confused and contradictory strategies of resistance. One of the things that is lost by being inside too many things is the capacity for political action. Modisane could locate no unifying ground for solidarity or resistance. The agency/action equation within which he positions himself is both too simplistic and too absolute, and ultimately reads like an exercise in self-exculpation. In a society in which apartheid is pervasive and intrusive, people are portrayed as products and victims of that society, conditioned and blinkered, to the extent of being forced into a predestined fate where agency and choice are all but eliminated. In relation to the destiny of lives, writing was overwhelmed by the process of being written: Modisane claims that "nothing belongs to" black South Africans "as an inviolable right", not even their own lives (1990:103). When he comes to the apportionment of blame it is almost always the fault of someone or something else, and/or he uses such vague formulations as when he talks of "a moment of transference of guilt. It was nobody's fault, the whole thing was bigger than all of us..." (120), or when he suggests, as he does in the book's title, that the blame can be attributed to history. The world view of the alienated cosmopolitan serves to obscure the sources of oppression, blur the lines of contestation and eliminate the possibility of effective resistance. Modisane was a cross-border commuter, an advocate of soft borders, rather than a serious political champion of change. An enormous chasm existed between his rhetoric, which was often angry and committed, and any related action. In this regard, Modisane passes judgement on himself: "but I sometimes think it is important to examine what people do about the things they say, rather than what they say about what they more often than not do not do" (247).

Sophiatown as a 'Space of Death'

At its best Sophiatown provided the setting for Modisane's dreams and a vision of possible futures. At its worst it was a black hole of violence and death. Death and

violence, of the state and of the street, were saturating, stimulating, stifling, sickening. They were a lingua franca, a part of Sophiatown and the terms of reference of an entire society, a form of resistance and oppression, self-elevation/affirmation and self-destruction.

> I am saturated with violence, it was a piece of the noise that was
>
> Sophiatown, of the feverish intensity of Sophiatown life, it was, and is,
>
> the expression and clarification of our society... we are born into it, we
>
> live with it and we die of it... (55)

"I learned early in life to play games with death, to realise its physical presence in my life, to establish rapport with it" (18), writes Modisane. It intruded into his own life when his sister Nancy died from starvation/malnutrition and, while he was still only 14, when his father was killed at the hands of a brutal assailant. The death of Modisane's father was to become an important point of reference and a metaphor, most significantly as a harbinger and symbol of his own death. The coffin by mistake bore the name of the son rather than the father: "The shock... confused and frightened me, but it seemed symbolic somehow; I was officially dead..." (31). Already dead, granted several reprieves from death, living in a place thick with death, Modisane repeatedly anticipates his violent demise. Death became an obsession - "my mind was impotent with obsessions of death - my own death; I explored the various permutations by which death would overtake my life" (114-15) - and its imagery a defining characteristic of his life. Modisane refers to "the coffin of my skin" (36) and to being "preserved in a tomb of hatred", without feelings or emotions, "I am a corpse" (76-7, also 285). If in the end there was a kind of numb accommodation, it is also true to say that violence and death were pervasive but never familiar: "each death has its own special pain, each pain kills a little something in us" (27, also 64).

While Modisane professes to be "neurotic about violence" (208), to hate and more particularly fear both violence and death - "I fear violence perhaps more than I hate it... if I feared death, it was that its component, violence, horrified and intimidated me" (54-5, also 170,208) - they were also both contagious and embraced (see 17,66,69). His embrace of violence extended to an endorsement of the need for violent revolution - this being one of the reasons behind his political realignment towards the PAC - and, more specifically, to him expressing a personal desire to fight. "We must fight. We demand total commitment... I respond to the call... The people are dying... I will kill" (246-7). It was never an easy commitment, he talks for example of being "paralysed by the moral conflict that I might have to destroy life that I may preserve it" (245, also 120-1,241), and ultimately it is one he is unable to make. Would he kill his white friends? Would they not be crushed by the military might of the South African army? Modisane retreats behind other needs and priorities to a position of intellectual rather than emotional or practical involvement: "In my mind I saw the violence and the blood and the death, and I had seen enough of all three, my mind could not take any more killing without unbalancing" (250).

Modisane's ambivalence towards violence and death is, characteristically, predicated on extremes. The vision of violence, complementing that of escapism and excess, is ultimately one of annihilation and apocalypse: "the attitudes are bigger than we are and perhaps we might have to destroy ourselves if we are to get at them" (230). Modisane continues:

> It is inhumanity therefore which we have earned by the labour of our
> intolerance: we refused to love each other, decided, rather, to die... We
> must die, brutally and horribly, that those of us who shall survive our
> intolerance shall by the cruelty of our death be so struck to the quick that
> they shall fear the intolerance which divides people into race groups

which would rather perish - in their racial groups - than love one another. We shall annihilate one another in the hope that the world will come to understand that man is... threatened... by himself. Man is the danger, and by his actions he shall destroy himself. (231-2, also 250)

Throughout, there is the spectre, at both an individual and a collective level, of an imminent, barely suppressed, explosion of violent outrage, of a volcanic eruption that will obliterate indiscriminately. The spectre of annihilation haunted Modisane, but also walked the streets of Sophiatown. Not only were the lives of Sophiatown and Modisane inextricably interwoven, so were their deaths: again, the self as/in place. The 'space of death' was both in, and of, place.

Blame Me On History opens with Modisane walking through a Sophiatown ravaged by its ongoing destruction under the Group Areas Act.[20] It is a journey of remembrance and reconstruction through a 'space of death'. The people, the places, the stories of Sophiatown were gone, only silence and desolation remained: it was "like walking through a ghost town of deserted houses and demolished homes, of faded dreams and broken lives, surrounded by rousing memories, some exciting others terrifying" (9). This 'space of death' contained the overlapping, interrelated territories of Modisane's own story, the life and death of his home and/as Sophiatown, and the collective inheritance and history - "I seemed to be walking on the pages of history" (42) - of land appropriation and annexation. Nowhere were the contours of this layered terrain more graphically illuminated than when Modisane returned to the ruins of the house where he was born in Bertha Street. Places of possession and belonging - "Sophiatown belonged to me... The land was... not only... mine, but a piece of me; the house was mine" even if

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[20] On the destruction of Sophiatown see Lodge 1983a.

it failed to keep out the rain and the cold (15) - were in the process of being levelled into a featureless, blank landscape of death.

Sophiatown was a part of Modisane and with its death a part of him died. His story begins with the line: "Something in me died, a piece of me died, with the dying of Sophiatown" (5); he later reflects that "there in the rubble was a piece of me" (9). "Sophiatown and I were reduced to the basic elements", claims Modisane, "both of us for the same reason: we were black spots" (14); both exhausted and expendable, reduced to dust. Standing on the ruins of his house and home, he writes, "I seemed to be looking at my whole life, the body which contained that life reduced to dust" (14). In the mirror of these ruins Modisane saw the collapse of his life, home and world. He also talks of the destruction of his soul montaged against that of Sophiatown, "I could not tell us apart" (285). The annihilation of person and place become one, interrelated and superimposed.

The landscape takes on a corporeal, bodily presence; the destruction of place becomes murder and the streets carry rivers of blood (see, for example, 42). Naked walls display gaping wounds and scars, bleed slogans of resistance; Sophiatown falls before the bulldozers which "gored into her body... for a brief moment... [it] was like one of its own many victims", a brutalised corpse (5). Reversing the somatic imagery, the place which had eaten away at him during their parallel lives - Modisane talks of the scars and wounds "which Sophiatown and South Africa had gored into my body" (285) - continued to do so during their equally parallel deaths: "every moment of life in the Sophiatown which was dying seemed as a tearing at my flesh, a feast of vultures, which left of my body the gaping holes of a skeleton" (115).

Modisane's decision to go into exile is married to these narratives of death. His friends were leaving the country; the whites that remained were increasingly reticent about

contact - when whites began to fear and shun contact across the colour bar "the country began to die" for Modisane (11) - he had resigned his job due to a growing disenchantment with *Drum* publications; his marriage was in a state of collapse; and Sophiatown was dying a slow and painful death. Furthermore, Modisane felt that violence and death were circling around him, closing in. The arrival of a letter offering a possible means of escape "was like a dying man's echo for help... there was the possibility of running away from the sight of death, and all around me there was the tolling of the bell for my body..." (266). Despite the ambiguities that surround Modisane's departure from South Africa - Sole finds disturbing the "alacrity" with which some writers chose exile at this time (1979:164)[21] - he can be considered an exile. There was a significant component of violence, dispossession, pain, and, ultimately, defiance involved in the process. When his application for a passport was turned down due to the intervention of the Security Police, Modisane rejected the offer made to him of a favourable recommendation in exchange for information about the "Mr Drum Goes to Church" story with which he had been involved (*Drum*, March 1956). He chose instead to commit the criminal offence of leaving the country without a passport.

About to enter exile, Modisane placated his mother by saying, "'Mama, I'm not going there to die... Soon our country will be right... and I will come back. You will see... It won't be very long'" (1990:292), while acknowledging the terrifying possibility that he would never see her again: "for so long as South Africa shall remain white, for so long shall I be an exile from the country of my birth" (297).

21
   Modisane sought a milder political climate and an expanded world. He talks of "the desire for change; to find something new, another way of life, to look upon another culture..." (1990:168). The language and imagery employed indicate a desire for personal rehabilitation, reconstruction and fulfilment.

South Africa and everything I had known, loved and hated remained

behind me. I was out of South Africa. But it was no victory or solution,

the compulsive agony was still with me, the problem was still with me;

only its intimacy was removed... My physical life in South Africa had

ended. (311)

Autobiography as Suicide Note

A useful point of entry into an analysis of Modisane's autobiography, *Blame Me On

History*, is Roger Rosenblatt's notion of autobiography as suicide note: "Every

autobiography... is an extended suicide note... The life recorded is the life complete to a

specific point, and is therefore as good as dead". The autobiography, as a full stop at the

end of the life sentence, is an announcement of closure. It is motivated by "a desire to

see both a shape and an end to... life, to seek the end of everything that has been in flux

and process, and at the same time to understand it all". Closure occurs from a vantage

point where pattern and order replace chaos and the fragments of life coalesce into a

recognisable whole. The life is isolated and laid to rest "through the act of

autobiography itself" (1980:178).[22] The cusp of exilic departure and arrival is one point

at which to write such an autobiographical suicide note. The life story ends with

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[22] Can Themba can also perhaps be said to have written fragments of a suicide note ("The
Will to Die", "Requiem for Sophiatown", "The Bottom of the Bottle", 1982:62-6,102-8,108-
15). In "The Will to Die" he wrote:

> I have heard much, have read much more, of the Will to Live... But the
> Will to Die has intrigued me more... I have often wondered if there is
> not some mesmeric power that Fate employs to engage some men
> deliberately, with macabre relishment, to seek their destruction and to
> plunge into it.... (62)

A number of South African writers committed suicide or died prematurely in exile. No
generation died so comprehensively as that which ventured into exile during the late
1950s and 1960s. The list of premature deaths includes Can Themba, who died in Swaziland
in 1968 of alcohol-induced thrombosis; Nat Nakasa, who died in 1965, aged 28, when he
jumped from the seventh floor of a building in New York; and Arthur Nortje, who died of
a drug overdose in Oxford in 1970. The tragedy of suicide confronted and asked unnerving
questions of other exiles: "There is no adequate way of responding to a suicide... It's
an unequivocal challenge. It asks: 'What have you got to live for that's so important?'
It's also an accusation; 'we', those who knew him, had failed him" (Akerman 1987:11;
also on suicide in exile see Moss 1985).

departure from home because this is the moment when meaningful life ends: life and text, life and death, home and exile.

> For some banished writers exile represents a form of death, a
> phenomenon which tends to make the former life seem complete, an
> integral structure: birth, life, death. That structure is not unlike a literary
> one, an ordered construction with a beginning, middle, and end. (Ugarte
> 1989:20-1)

Rosenblatt goes on to state that since "the 'argument' of black autobiography is against the existing universe of which the writer was and is an essential if uncomfortable part, the 'argument' of the work is extended against the self". He continues: "Black autobiography annihilates the self because by doing so it takes the world with it" (1980:179-80).

Entering exile, Modisane was a free man, a dead man choosing one form of living death over another, dying into another 'space of death'. Those in exile live "posthumous lives" (Heilbut 1983:31). The obliteration of Sophiatown marked the completion of a cycle of superimposed, cumulative death, of the irreparably inter-linked strands of state annihilation and self-annihilation, in South Africa: "and it seemed especially appropriate that I should be standing there [at the ruins of his house], as if to witness the closing of the cycle of my life in its destruction" (1990:10). Along with everything else that was destroyed with Sophiatown was a vision of a possible future. Exilic departure was a moment of closure, when Modisane imposed a pattern on the chaos and laid his lives and deaths in South Africa to rest through autobiography. By recording life up to the rupture of exile *Blame Me On History* is the final act of (self-)annihilation of Modisane's South African self and world. It is his suicide note. Autobiographical time stopped. Modisane finally found, as he left home and entered exile, his moment of

forgetting without past or future. Cut off from the past, with the slate wiped clean, the future seemed similarly blank. The perpetual present, however, can be both a prison and eternity (Hoffman 1991:117).

Rosenblatt argues that the autobiographer dies into a new life, "nothing remains but the future that because unknown can be thought utopian" (1980:178). Exile also heralds just such an unknown, often romanticised, future. It is an ending which also harbours the potential for new beginnings; as one chapter of life is completed, another begins (see Hirson 1995:355). In South Africa, Modisane refers to a purposeless drift into "a future without a future" (1990:205), to a life of chaos and uncertainty lived with no regard for tomorrow. But he also refers to a desire to choose life over death: "my eyes had looked long and seen too many deaths... I wanted again to be a part of the living, a piece of the cycle of life, to pretend a larger indestructible existence" (49, also 64). Amidst an otherwise pervasive sense of death, dying into exile can also anticipate a future and form part of a search for the resurrective cycle of life. Writers also wrote, in part, so that their death would not be complete or in vain. If there was an immediate sense in which autobiography contributed to the writer being cut adrift, to the severance of the umbilical cord with home, in the longer term it heralded a homecoming as, unbanned, it completed the journey home that the author was often not able to accomplish him/herself. Modisane was banned in 1966;[23] his banning order was lifted in 1986, the same year in which he died in Dortmund, West Germany. The suicide note announced a defeat and death while simultaneously asserting a level of control over a personal narrative and a past, thereby resurrecting and immortalising a life and history. Texts written in the afterlife of exile inscribed a presence in/on the blank time and space of

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[23] In 1966, under an amendment of the Suppression of Communism Act, which enabled the Minister of Justice to ban South Africans and former South Africans living in exile, 46 people living abroad - including Modisane, Themba, Matshikiza, Nkosi and Mphahlele - were designated 'statutory communists' and their work was banned, thereby, at least legally, they ceased to exist on the printed page in South Africa. The tragic irony of these writers being considered 'statutory communists' could hardly have been greater.

absence, a past on the present and future, and were their authors' passport to a posthumous life at home. As a bridge between past, present and future they ultimately reactivated the movement of time (Hoffman 1991:117,241-2,279-80).

Modisane's multiple alienations and (self-)annihilations - in terms of race, politics, culture, writing, family, place - found their consummation in the condition of exile and in the exilic 'space of death'. The idea of an autobiographical suicide note neatly captures this sense of consummation, encapsulating endings but also the potential of alternative beginnings and the possibility of an afterlife. It also indicates the importance of the written word to these potentials and possibilities. In conclusion, however, and returning to a central theoretical premise of this thesis, it is important to stress the many collaborative agents which violently underwrote Modisane's life. These included the structural violence of apartheid, the violence of illusory dreams and aspirations, the turning of the force of violence on himself and others, and the collaboration of all facets of violence in promoting the death that is exile and the autobiographical suicide note. Modisane both wrote and was variously written, transformed and did not transform the 'space of death' into a space of life, making the meaning of his writings and life complex and open to diverse interpretations.

Modisane's life was peculiarly idiosyncratic: for most of those affected, exile was a more collective experience, traversed with other baggage, and engaged with alternative weapons. All, however, experienced a sense of transient and restless dwelling that drove them into exile and stoked their desire for return. While in South Africa, Modisane's life was already underpinned by a sense of restlessness, drift, wandering and searching. He was on the run from virtually all forms of responsibility and commitment, both personal and political. But from what was he fleeing - apartheid? his colour? himself? - and what was he seeking?

'What will you do?' they said. 'Will you run all your life?' I wanted to shut my eyes and scream: Yes! I will die searching... I can barely understand this thing which will not let me be, I cannot sink my taproots anywhere... (1990:169)

ii) The ANC and Exile as a Race Against Death

Once I started to run, where would I stop? (Joseph 1986:196)

Cut him if he stand still, shoot him if he run. (Nkosi 1965:76)

Apartheid South Africa was a nation on the run. Many South Africans, like Modisane, were on the run before they left the country - "we running fighting running, / straining / like a universe of bending reeds" (Mphahlele, "Exile in Nigeria", in Couzens and Patel eds. 1982:169) - because to stand still was to be cut down, to be buried alive. This dynamic was most pronounced for the political activist, on the run from the police, forced underground, sleeping in different places, avoiding relatives and friends, home and the workplace. When the race became too close or too dangerous inside the country - most notably during the seasons for running (Langa 1987:143, also 148): in the early 1960s, after the 1976 Soweto uprisings and during States of Emergency in the mid/late 1980s - opponents of the state fled rumoured or impending detention/arrest and assassination, escaped house arrest, banning orders and conscription, jumped bail, and went abroad. At its most stark, the choice was simple: leave or die. The calculation of exile - that life and political activity would be extended and made more effective outside - was based upon an understanding that while the race would continue beyond South Africa's borders, the terrain, rules and weapons would change.

Those that got away often only did so by the skin of their teeth. Alfred Hutchinson describes a "runaway train, carrying a runaway man" as he escapes the Treason Trial on the way to Ghana (1960:81). Exiles left on exit permits, which meant they could leave but never return (Nkosi 1983:vii-viii,1994), 'skipped' the country illegally, spilled over its frontiers, 'footing' into neighbouring states, often covering long distances, travelling

at night, alone and in small groups. It was an adventure and a nightmare. Departure was invariably abrupt, immediate; exiles, like detainees, disappeared without trace. To protect both those in flight and those who remained behind, invariably nobody, including/especially family and friends, knew anything. The rupture of departure had profound effects - guilt, a sense of things left unfinished and unresolved - on the leavers and the left, young and old.

> It was not good the way I left. Mummy was sick, very, very sick... But I didn't tell her I was going - she told me... She said, 'My son, I know that one day you will leave me'... in the township parents know who has left the country... Then I had to take a decision immediately. She asked me several times if I love her... I did promise her that I love her[...] I haven't seen her since... What hounds me is how I left my Mum very sick. And I don't have information about what is happening there. I don't know how I would react if they tell me[...]... I don't want to hear about this, that she is missing or what[...] It's been very tough of course... very, very tough. (Thuso Mashaba in Bernstein 1994:70-1)

> Another funeral. Every time there's a funeral I become aware of other aspects of apartheid... Comrade Duma... passed away. He had left his wife in South Africa - gosh, when was it? 1964 or something like that. He had had to leave now-now, and he couldn't say where he was going. At that time she had three children and one on the way... She had to raise those kids on her own. And for all those years! A whole bunch of people came up for the funeral - from the Durban area where he had grown up. They said, here's his widow. Well, hell, she'd already been a widow for God knows how many years now. The implications of exile, of apartheid, mmm. (Father Cas in Bernstein 1994:193)

Ruth Mompati was outside the country when the Rivonia arrests took place and it became unsafe for her to return. Her children, aged two and a half and six when she left, were in South Africa with her family. It was ten years, "[t]en years of real agony", before she saw them again: "I used to get ill thinking about my children". At their reunion they were strangers.

> I was watching their reaction, and they were watching mine. I can *never* explain the emotional suffering of this meeting. It is extremely painful for a mother to miss her children's childhood... I died so many deaths. I felt, 'Good God, the South African regime *owes* me something... the childhood of my children!' But I'm not unique. Indeed, I'm lucky. I met my children after ten years... We could build a relationship again... many parents... never get that chance.[24]

Eleanor Kasrils was similarly separated by exile from a daughter from her first marriage, Brigid, for a period of ten years. Their separation had been so comprehensive that she failed to recognise her child when they met up again: "I didn't even know what she looked like. I remember rushing up to the wrong person at Heathrow... it was dreadful" (in Bernstein 1994:93).

In this way the youngest exiles, often young children, lost parents, parents lost children, couples lost each other, one member lost all other members of a family. The problem of establishing and maintaining contact was compounded by the security, political, and logistical problems of communication with/from South Africa and by the fact that people kept moving, both in exile and at home. The result was that lines of

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[24] The quotations above are taken from interviews with Ruth Mompati in Bernstein 1994:18-22, and Russell 1991:106-20.

communication were never established or were broken, contact was lost. The loss was sometimes temporary, sometimes it was irreparable and final. Exile, like imprisonment, destroyed relationships.

Families whose fate was tied to the liberation organisations were separated by, but also in, exile, as military training and operations, new jobs and educational opportunities, and other eventualities dictated. Exiles, in time, were given the choice between pursuing military training or educational opportunities. Destination and duration of stay, however, were subordinate to organisational needs. Exiles went where they were needed; they were still continually on the move: "the norms of exile were constant displacement and emplacement on orders not to be questioned, or by circumstances over which the one in refuge had no control" (Gordimer 1988:201); "[a]ll the partings and reappearances, the arrivals and departures, the climates and languages, the queueing for rubber-stamped entry and exit were present between them, as a wind gathers up a spiral of papers in dust (Gordimer 1994:183, also 99). Sometimes these journeys had to be shrouded in secrecy and unknowing:

> and it affects people, it affects families terribly... it undermines the social
> cohesion of your community. It's just a very unnatural state to live in...
> that's a feature of a military environment, but it was a specific feature of
> the ANC environment... I suppose any exile organisation is like that... the
> struggle right or wrong, do what's expected from you... you don't know
> when you're going to be recalled or when you're going to be posted
> elsewhere. It's like a military life writ large... You can be posted
> anywhere in the world... anywhere in the country, and that's exactly the
> way that it worked in the ANC. There was no guarantee that your family,
> well they couldn't go with you... (Williams interview)

ah, horrible, horrible. You try to influence the structures, to say: 'Try

your best to keep people together, otherwise we are recreating the very

same thing we've been criticising - you know breaking families to

pieces.' But what do you do when you get a scholarship for one and you

can't get one for the other? And I'm sure that they're aware of it and they

try. But that's just a part of the tragedy of having to live in exile. (Father

Cas in Bernstein 1994:193)

Exile, therefore, was characterised not simply by the rift of departure and separation

from home, but by the repeated, cumulative rifts of multiple departures and separations

within exile itself. Each departure was an unmaking of identity and relationships. Each

arrival, sometimes in very alien environments, required that a self and a life be remade

again. The dismemberment was almost physical, corporeal: "'my flesh and blood

wrenched from my own body'" (Sepamla 1986:96). Individuals, families and

communities were torn apart, fragmented and scattered, exiled time and time again.

Lives and relationships within the exilic 'space of death' were characterised by absence

and loss, by the painful rituals of departure and reunion, and all too frequently, by

collapse and disintegration. Barry Gilder, whose marriage ended in divorce following

prolonged separation, states simply: "The relationship just ceased to exist" (in Bernstein

1994:197). Sometimes separation felt like death (Mabena in Bernstein 1994:435-6).[25]

Writing about his arrival in Nigeria, Mphahlele describes feeling as though he had "just

climbed down from a vehicle that has been rocking violently for countless miles"

(1971:218). But quite apart from the dictates of organisational politics, intrinsic to exile

is a contagious and irrepressible momentum of its own. Exiles have to learn to run

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[25] On the separation of families by/in exile, see, for example, Eleanor and Ronnie
Kasrils in Bernstein 1994:87-94,174-81 and R. Kasrils 1993:71,79-81,93-
4,99,104,121,137,144,167-8,227, 285; also with specific reference to women and children,
see Bernstein 1994: especially 399-501.

before they can walk; once on the move the exile can never really stand still again. South Africa's literature of frustrated wandering, a literature on the move, is voluminous. Dennis Brutus, for example, is forever in motion, creating a poetry of departures and arrivals: "I shuffle through the waiting rooms / and air-terminals of the world"; "And I have done it again / and again / And now on to new terrain... and what new miserable uncertainties"; "I have been bedded / in London and Paris / Amsterdam and Rotterdam / in Munich and Frankfurt / Warsaw and Rome- / and still my heart cries out for home!"[26] In exile, after being released from prison in South Africa, Breytenbach states: "I found myself running through the streets of winter at five o'clock in the morning, tasting the tears of helpless despair. I am not in exile. I am travelling. What is it I keep on running away from?" (1985:259).[27] This momentum can easily become a sign and component of despair.

Having died into exile, seeking regeneration and rebirth, the restless unfulfilled movement of the exile represents a search for life. Bernstein talks of those who "continued to move in search of something that they had been forced to relinquish and for which there would never be an adequate substitute" (1994:24). It is also, therefore, an attempt to outrun death in its innumerable guises. But to run harder, faster, further, was to engage in a race that could not be won; death could never be outrun. "It is miraculous the way flight can turn into dead falling" writes Breytenbach (1989:259). The exile was diminished by perpetual and tortured flight. Each new departure/arrival reopened and aggravated the wound of exile, the seemingly perverse nurturing of a slow

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[26] Brutus, "I Come and Go", "The Golden Afternoon Drags", "Sequence for South Africa", 1978:25,40,94.

[27] Although Christopher Hope is more accurately described as an expatriate writer than an exile, the account of his return to South Africa in 1987, *White Boy Running*, is pervaded by a similar question: "'Why are you running, White boy?'", "a question no one stopped to answer... a question to which there was no answer" (1988:113). The book ends with Hope muttering his election mantra of President's names – Malan, Strydom, Verwoerd, Vorster, Botha...: "I begin to run in time to the rhythm, not because there is anyone after me, or anyone about to see me, but because somehow it is appropriate to keep moving" (273).

and protracted death. And yet, as has already been outlined, the exilic 'space of death' is also a transformative space that harbours the potential for resistance, and for death to be recast as various forms of life. The cycle of departure and arrival contains and repeats Modisane's volatile moment without past or future, with its potential for the un/re-making of identities, individual and organisational, social and political. But, more importantly for the discussion which follows, framing this cycle and channelling all the transformative potential of exile are the politics and place inherent in the condition of exile itself. They provide the exile's flight with a past and a future, purpose and direction, source and ultimate destination. Lindiwe Mabuza, in a poem entitled "Embracing Exile", writes: "Yes / We drift / Country to country: drift? / I move!" (in Feinberg ed. 1980:89). Nowhere is this anchored movement and its transformative promise more clearly illustrated than in the organisational face of exile politics: in the South African context this arena was dominated by the ANC and its allies.

The ANC in Exile

The ANC, its allies the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), and the liberation army, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), were in exile for three decades. If the already mentioned construction of a nation-in-exile encapsulated some of the potential of a future democratic order it also realised and anticipated some of the difficulties of constructing a shared nationalism within South Africa, given its shifting sands of diversity and a history in which such a sense of nationhood has not been attempted let alone achieved. Exile politics is characteristically divisive, self-destructive, fatally introverted and relegated, over time, to irrelevance.[28] Clearly it is a distinctive form of political practice removed from any

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[28] A perceptive analysis of exile politics in southern Africa is contained in Marcum 1972. Nadine Gordimer's, *A Sport of Nature* (1988), explores the South African experience of exile, including its politics.

potential future political dispensation at home by distance, time and political circumstance. Nevertheless, aspects of political and organisational culture are likely to provide threads of continuity, with the result that exile politics is important both in its own right and, in the event of ultimate victory, in relation to the politics of homecoming/home.

Throughout the years in exile the main sources of tension within the alliance were essentially both consistent and predictable. There were disputes and power struggles of an ideological, institutional and personal nature - between and within the ANC, SACP and MK, between Africanist tendencies and those who favoured a non-racial approach, between communists and non-communists, between factions belonging to different ethnic groups, between the leadership and the rank and file membership, between different generations, between the ANC alliance in exile and the opposition within South Africa - which damaged organisational effectiveness and morale. Exile political leadership and organisation was essentially authoritarian and centralised in nature, and tarnished, periodically and/or in relation to specific individuals, with allegations of elitism, corruption, incompetence and inertia (see Anthony 1991). Further sources of resentment among the rank and file were the ideological straitjacket of political education; the lack of consultation, stifling of debate and intolerance of criticism; the petty and intrusive restrictions on daily life - permission was needed, for example, in order to marry - and the brutality and excesses committed by the Security Department, known as Mbokhodo, 'the stone that crushes'. Extremely harsh living conditions in the camps were compounded by the boredom of endless waiting, and frustration at the lack of military activity within South Africa and entanglements in other wars in the region. There were also related questions about priorities: for example, should emphasis be placed on the external or internal fronts, on political or military objectives and command structures?

At certain important junctures, levels of dissatisfaction both increased and coalesced into more widespread/organised expressions of dissent and/or rebellion. These included the disaffection in the Tanzanian camps in the late 1960s; the tensions that led to the expulsion of the 'Gang of Eight' in 1975 (see Resha 1991:236-7,252,258-61); the discovery in March 1981 of a comprehensive spy network and the resulting crackdown by the Security Department that seemingly escalated into an attempt to silence and purge opponents and critics; the mutinies in the Angolan camps in 1984; and, again, the growing frustration and anger among the rank and file by the end of the 1980s.[29]

What is notable, even extraordinary, however, is that in the face of these enormous difficulties and over a very long period of time, the ANC managed to avoid the kind of debilitating splits and disillusionment which are characteristic of exile politics in general, and affected other South African opposition organisations, notably the PAC (see Lodge 1983:305-17,342-4, 1992a:191-8). Among the reasons for the relative success of the ANC were the quality to be found amongst its leadership and the suppression of rampant, institutionalised corruption. Aid from the Soviet-bloc, the most important source of external assistance, was also crucial, as was the resultant ability to steer clear of financial dependency on, and entanglements in the politics of, host countries in Africa (Lodge 1983:304-5). Lodge has argued that the ANC was in fact strengthened by exile in that it provided protection, security, powerful forms of external support, and facilitated organisational and resource development that would have been

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[29] As with the allegations in relation to human rights abuses by the ANC, significant information relating to internal disputes comes from literature informed by ANC dissidents (on sources of such information also see chapter 1, footnote 1). Material which initially appeared in *Africa Confidential* was later incorporated into Ellis and Sechaba 1992 (see in particular 47-8,54-66,87,116-21,128-36,191-3); also see Ellis 1994. Allegations and testimony relating especially to the 1984 mutiny have featured in *Searchlight in South Africa*. This literature paints a very different picture of the ANC in exile from previous, broadly sympathetic, academic analyses of the organisation (for a brief survey of the two different literatures see Lodge 1992:44-9). As Lodge implies, the truth probably resides in a yet-to-be-written middle path between the divergent narratives and political allegiances/sympathies (49). For a view on the camps from within the ANC, see Kasrils 1993:136-89,246-60,269,274-7.

impossible within South Africa (1988:229-30,232,251). Writing in the late 1980s, he

concludes that the ANC

> is an army, an education system, a department of foreign affairs, a mini-
> economy, a source of moral hegemony - in short, a government. Despite
> the manifest insecurities of dependence on weak countries unable to
> protect the organisation from the hostility of the South African Republic,
> despite the modesty of its material assets, and despite the human
> suffering which produced it and continues to inform every facet of its
> existence, it is a state in exile, and only in exile could such a state have
> been constructed. (1988:251)[30]

The history of the ANC in exile is extremely complex. In part this is because to talk of

the ANC in exile is to talk of a sometimes fraught unity-in-diversity and of exile in

every form and on every scale: from the individual to a microcosm of a nation-state;

from those flung to the furthest reaches of the diaspora, to others holed up in the

metropolitan centres of the world, and to the majority experience of rural, frontline,

southern Africa; from those who were in exile for over three decades to others whose

experience could be measured in a handful of years and even months. According to

Lodge, by the 1980s the ANC probably represented a total of 10-15,000 people in exile,

scattered through as many as 25 countries, but concentrated mainly in Tanzania,

Zambia and Angola (1992a:173-4).[31] Nevertheless, the strategic alliances and

management of diversity maintained enough of a shared purpose, the organisational and

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[30] The footnotes have been omitted from this quotation. Also see Lodge 1992:44-5,49, 1992a:173-4.

[31] Obviously, South African exiles/refugees in the southern African region, who decided "'to at least stay in the same season'" (Weschler 1990:129), exceeded those expressly represented by the ANC. This is also clearly true of other locations. In the late 1980s, according to Mazur, the vast majority of the 30,000 South African refugees in Africa were in the southern African region (1989:447,455).

ideological identity un/remade in exile held sufficient coherence, and the race against

organisational exilic death retained enough direction, for the ANC to survive and return

home to govern. To understand how this happened it is necessary to examine the ANC's

history in exile.

In the Frontline States

Following quickly on from the Sharpeville shootings and the declaration of a State of

Emergency, the ANC and PAC were banned in April 1960 under the terms of the

Unlawful Organisations Act. Shortly before the banning order came into effect Oliver

Tambo left South Africa under orders from the National Executive of the ANC to set up

an external mission. Others within the leadership went underground within the country.

The latter, through the newly formed MK, orchestrated the sabotage campaign of 1961-

3.[32] After the arrest of the core of MK's leadership at Rivonia in 1963 and the virtual

elimination of the ANC as an organised presence within South Africa by the middle of

the decade, the site of organisational decision making and control shifted into exile.[33]

Denied a base within striking distance of South Africa by a ring of hostile colonial

states the ANC in exile established itself in Tanzania.[34] Confined largely to looking-on

from afar, the frustration and demoralisation of the 1960s was punctured in military

terms only by the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns of 1967-68, a symbolically important

but ultimately unsuccessful joint operation with the Zimbabwe African People's Union

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[32] According to one estimate around 200 attacks were carried out in the space of 18 months (Ellis and Sechaba 1992:34).

[33] Lodge provides a four phase framework, of which the 1960-63 period of fundraising, diplomatic initiatives and the development of a military training programme was the first, for the development of the external wing of the ANC between 1960 and the early 1980s (1983:297).

[34] The dangers faced by South African exiles/political refugees in neighbouring states prior to their independence are described, for example, in Bernstein 1989:273-309, Dingake 1987:81-96, Jordan 1986:172-85,192-6, Kasrils 1993:71-8, Resha 1991:195-213.

(ZAPU) forces of Joshua Nkomo.[35] However, a series of events generated a momentum through the mid-1970s which served to undermine the apartheid regime and assist in solving some of the problems facing the ANC alliance in exile. To the backdrop of labour unrest and the rise of Black Consciousness within the country and, with the independence of Mozambique and Angola tightening the embrace of black independent Africa around South Africa's borders and transforming the ideological frontiers of the region, MK established its first effective command structures in what became known as the 'forward areas' (Lesotho, Botswana, Swaziland and Mozambique). In June 1976, by which time there had been no armed struggle inside South Africa for over a decade, the Soweto uprisings began.

The Soweto revolt was instigated, initially around the issue of Afrikaans language teaching in schools, by radical township youth, a new generation of activists steeped in the ideology of Black Consciousness and largely cut off from earlier political traditions. Although the ANC was marginal to the events taking place in South Africa, its organisational life in exile was irreparably changed in their wake. In a number of post-Soweto novels the narrative journey culminates in exile; as the race against death becomes impossible within South Africa it is carried over into a different/further dimension of struggle.[36] The dilemma the ANC faced was how to tap this extraordinarily vital resource and moment. In contrast to the PAC, perhaps the logical ideological home for the students at the time, which was in disarray, the ANC was sufficiently organised to react in a swift and effective manner. MK structures in neighbouring states made contact with student activists urging them to leave the country and join the ANC in exile. Military training facilities were available, mainly in a

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[35] Norman Duka, in Mercer and Mercer 1974, and Graham Morodi and Isaac Maphoto in Bernstein 1994:162-74, provide first hand accounts of these campaigns.

[36] See Mzamane 1987:136,138,243-45, Sepamla 1981:84-5,87-98,100-1,137-9,151,163-8,172,179,201,210-12,219,226-34,237-44, 1986:41-2,79-86,94-103,139-43,145,155-63, Serote 1983:85,88,91,97,142,160,171,181,183-90,192-206, Tlali 1980:82,121-2,172,183,282-94.

growing number of camps in Angola. The result was an unprecedented influx of new recruits: this, after Sharpeville in 1960, was the second major exodus, a new diaspora (Mzamane 1987:136, also 244).[37] As on Robben Island, the ANC won the contest for the new generation of anti-apartheid activists. From its bases in exile MK was able to mount its first series of military operations in South Africa. The number of insurgency attacks reported rose from 13 in 1979 and 19 in 1980 to 55 in 1981 (Lodge 1988:230; also see Barrell 1990:48).

The state responded to the Soweto uprising and its aftermath with the 'total onslaught' doctrine detailed in a Defence White Paper in 1977. This doctrine depicted South Africa as being under siege from a communist enemy that was omnipresent, multifaceted and orchestrated by the Soviet Union. The enemy sought the violent overthrow of the South African government and the destruction of the supposed foundations - Christian values, capitalism - of South African society. A 'total strategy' was required to combat the onslaught. These policy initiatives were closely associated with the presidency of P.W. Botha, who came to power in 1978 and who had forged close links with the SADF during over a decade as Defence Minister. On his accession to power the military not only came to dominate the security establishment but also played an increasingly significant role in policy making and government. The result was an attempt to provide an integrated and comprehensive defence of the state using a united and coherent command structure, and a flexible combination of repression and reform, co-ordinated by the State Security Council (SSC). The SSC, came to head a parallel system of government, establishing as its operational arm the National Security Management System (NSMS) which enabled the military to extend its influence down

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[37] By 1970 the ranks of MK had not grown beyond 2000; between June 1976 and early 1977 as many as 4000 people left the country (Ellis and Sechaba 1992:47,84; also see Barrell 1990:33, Lodge 1983:339; Lodge 1992a talks of an exodus of at least 6000 people following the Soweto unrest (177)); and between 1977 and the end of 1983 MK trained about 8,700 combatants (Barrell 1990:52). The much larger, but perhaps more general figure, of 14,000, for those who had gone into exile by the end of 1977, is provided by Allister Sparks (in Bernstein 1994:66).

to the local township level. These structures facilitated a significant militarisation of government and society.[38]

Regional policy was an important component of the 'total strategy' doctrine. Its aims were a combination of the economic and the political: to perpetuate and accentuate regional dependence; to hold other states hostage against/to international sanctions; to discredit black majority rule; to dissuade neighbouring countries from providing bases for the ANC; and to seal and secure its borders and re-establish a neocolonial buffer zone of friendly/compliant states. A Constellation of States (CONSAS) and agreements securing non-aggression and economic co-operation were to be used to formalise the arrangement. Destabilisation, which was to impose enormous and diverse costs on the region, was the coercive component of the policy.[39] The weapons within the destabilisation arsenal were formidable. Complementing a range of measures relating to the region's infrastructures and economies, and intelligence and espionage activities, were tactics of both overt and covert repressive force: conventional war and invasion/ occupation, surrogate forces such as RENAMO and UNITA, cross-border raids, death/ hit squads, sabotage, car and parcel bombings, kidnapping, and more. The marshalling of tactics varied over time and from country to country, targeting particular dependencies and vulnerabilities.

During the early months of 1980 the landslide victory for Robert Mugabe's ZANU (PF) in Zimbabwe's first independence elections was quickly followed by the launch of the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC), one of the

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[38] The 'total strategy' doctrine evolved during the course of the 1980s. For a discussion of its different phases see Swilling and Phillips 1989, and Hansson 1990.

[39] The internal and external components of the 'total strategy' were obviously inextricably interlinked. Like the former, the latter employed both carrots and sticks, was shrouded in secrecy, and evolved through different phases (see Cammack 1989). On South Africa's regional policy with particular regard to destabilisation see Hanlon 1986, Johnson and Martin eds. 1986, and Johnson and Martin 1989.

primary aims of which was to reduce regional dependence on South Africa. South Africa responded to these events with a more aggressive regional policy which continued with brief interruptions from mid-1980 until the end of the decade. During the 1980s a war was fought by and for South Africa with/in the region. With the exception of Angola, the South African security forces relied upon unconventional methods (counter-revolutionary/insurgency warfare, low intensity warfare) and military units. From the first joint MK-ZAPU campaign in Wankie in 1967, neighbouring states such as Rhodesia, the Portuguese colonies and South West Africa/Namibia were used as training/testing grounds in counter-revolutionary warfare for the South African security elite. These experiences, and indeed foreign security personnel once countries like Zimbabwe gained independence, fed into the creation of clandestine forces in South Africa. Elite special forces included Reconnaissance Commando units (the 'recces'), 32 Battalion, for many years headed by Colonel Jan Breytenbach (the brother of Breyten Breytenbach), the Namibian-based Koevoet (Crowbar), the Security Police hit squads operating out of Vlakplaas and similar Civil Co-operation Bureau units within the SADF. Although led by whites, most of these forces were predominantly composed of blacks from the defeated and disbanded guerrilla armies of the region and those who had been 'turned' or 'rehabilitated' under interrogation. Ex-MK combatants known as Askaris, for example, were deployed in Security Police hit squads. The special forces soldiers were brutalised, compromised, and carried out the dirtiest of the state's dirty work.

In the world-view of the state, the militarised special forces were on the front line of a just and almost holy war fought for the survival of the Afrikaans people, their God, ideology, way of life, and country. Violence and terror were institutionalised and normalised. Theirs was a mission in which everything and anything went. The forces and their methods grew out of and helped to perpetuate a particular kind of institutional culture. An insular brotherhood and its operations were characterised by arrogant

exclusiveness, autonomy, information on a need to know basis and secrecy, loyalty,

blind trust, and the most extreme of actions and orders carried out without question, the

use of various forms of cover/fronts allowing official and ministerial denials of all

knowledge and responsibility, and an effective immunity from prosecution. Sanctioned

to work with almost unlimited powers, accountable only to themselves and above the

law - "the country's borders were just fences and laws and regulations nothing more

than words" (Pauw 1991:62) - members of the special forces regarded neighbouring

states as their "playground" in which they could operate freely and virtually without

interference (Pauw 1991:42,84-5,147,172,189). Dirk Coetzee, commander of the

Oshoek border post between South Africa and Swaziland from 1977 to 1979, has

claimed: "I just took over Swaziland" (in Bernstein 1994:211). Their operations

respected one golden rule, "the eleventh commandment", never get caught. The

military, and the security establishment more generally, became a law unto themselves,

a state within a state.[40]

In the activities of the special forces a familiar pattern can be identified in which

boundaries were erased and redrawn, distinctions blurred, sometimes deliberately and at

other times unconsciously or in error. Distinctions between the police and the army

became blurred: both were highly militarised, both operated within the townships/South

Africa and abroad, and both targeted the ANC and its allies. Further distinctions that

were obfuscated included those between legal and illegal repression, between different

forms of warfare, between South Africa and its neighbours, between military, political

and civilian targets, and between South African and non-South African citizens. If

anything, the forces operating in the region had a freer rein, a worse reputation for

brutality and a lower level of accountability than those active within South Africa. As

was implied by the terms of reference of the Harms Commission - appointed in January

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[40]
   On this culture, often associated with notions of a 'cop culture', see Pauw
1991:62,91,106-13,245 and Steytler 1990.

1990 to inquire into "murders and deeds of violence allegedly committed with political motives", but only when they were committed within the borders of South Africa - security force actions outside the country were seen to be legitimate acts of war. In the battlegrounds of the region South African forces, both geographically and in innumerable other ways, respected no boundaries or borders. The aim of the South African state was to deny the ANC protection, security, support and the possibility of expansion, in other words all those things that Lodge claims the ANC acquired in exile, wherever it was based. If this meant terrorising the region, violating the territorial sovereignty of neighbouring countries, and undermining governments, then so be it.

In Steve Jacobs' "Diary of an Exile", a lawyer has gone into exile in the hope that his past will "slip off" (1986:127). His past encompasses interrogation and torture, being a state witness, the suicide of his wife, and exile. In exile he hears that Alfred Nguza, whom he testified against in court, has died in prison. The past does not, will not, slip off. The guilt "would follow me anywhere, its poisonous claws embedded in my psyche" (79). His betrayal is continually relived. Nguza haunts him: "'Tell them, and my messengers will kill you... No matter where you flee, no matter how far, my messengers will seek you out'" (138). The lawyer lives in a world increasingly dominated by illusion and becomes paranoid that his guilt has been announced to the world, that the nearby villagers have become Nguza's messengers. The book ends with him anticipating the messengers' arrival: "They are coming, I know... They are coming. I feel their presence in the wind... I hold my rifle in my lap... Outside, the darkness is pure; I will see their faces when they enter. I switch off my light. I wait" (143,145-6). This represents an inversion of a more familiar scenario in which the state's messengers of death stalked their running, waiting, anticipating prey. They were stalked at home, in neighbouring states, throughout the world. The race against death could not be won because there was ultimately no destination or location that was safe (see Cele and P. Naidoo in Bernstein 1994:199-208,233). The South African government attacked the ANC wherever it

sought refuge, bases or safe passage, and used its formidable arsenal of military and economic weapons, a blend of force, threats, diplomacy and positive incentives, to persuade its neighbours to stop supporting or even tolerating the ANC's presence and activities. In 1988, the then Minister of Defence, Magnus Malan, made the point succinctly: "'Wherever the ANC is, we will eliminate it'" (in Pauw 1991:114).

The Messengers of Death

In June 1980, in the first of a number of spectacular attacks that formed part of a campaign of 'armed propaganda' designed to generate publicity and mobilise support, MK successfully exploded several bombs at the South African Coal, Oil and Gas Corporation (SASOL). The state responded in January 1981 with a new style of cross-border raid on the Maputo suburb of Matola, in Mozambique (see Khanyile in Bernstein 1994:415,418-19). Due to the ongoing activities of agents of the South African state, southern Africa went on to experience more cross border violence than any other region of the world during the 1980s (Pauw 1991:124). The exchange of attacks/raids became a common feature of regional warfare. The December 1982 raid on Maseru, Lesotho, was followed within days by the exploding of several bombs at the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station; similarly, an MK car bomb outside the headquarters of the South African Air Force in Pretoria in May 1983 which killed nineteen people and injured more than 200 was followed by a bombing raid on Maputo three days later. Other patterns of attack favoured by the South African state included those timed to coincide with the meetings of significant organisations and institutions - such as the Commonwealth, SADCC, and the raid on Gaberone, Botswana, on the eve of the ANC's conference in Kabwe, Zambia, in June 1985 - and to otherwise influence political developments. Spanning both categories were a series of co-ordinated SADF raids on Frontline States which sabotaged the Eminent Persons' Group peace initiative by the

Commonwealth in 1986. In this unequal struggle, as never before, the soldiers of MK became death's messengers, and their message was clear:

> Around him in the dark, an horizon darker than the dark held the cold forms in which the old real, terrible needs of his life, his father's life and his father's father's life were now so strangely realised... You could not eat the AKM assault rifles... brought in golf-bags, you could not dig a road or turn a lathe with the limpet mines, could not shoe and clothe feet and body with the offensive and defensive hand-grenades, could not use the AKM bayonets to compete with the white man's education, or to thrust a way out of solitary confinement in maximum security, and the wooden boxes that held hundreds of rounds of ammunition would not make even a squatter's shack for the girl and child. But all these hungers found their shape, distorted, forged as no one could conceive they ever should have to be, in the objects packed around him. These were made not for life; for death. [They] lay there protected by it as they had never been by life. (Gordimer, "Something Out There", 1984:145-6).

The fear of a raid in the Frontline States by the regime's messengers of death, whose message was equally clear, was pervasive and ever present. The attack when it came was at once anticipated and unexpected. Mostly attacks took place under cover of night, when the sounds of death were both a source of terror and the only measure of the raid's scope, proximity and passage. At the heart of this darkness and disorientation was the sense of not knowing what was happening, who was attacking who and why, or of knowing all too well; and the question: are they coming for us? To frighten the local population raids were sometimes intentionally indiscriminate while on other occasions they were rendered so by poor and dated intelligence. Casualties, as a result, included civilian citizens of southern African states as well as political opponents. One of the most notorious cross-border missions took place in the early morning of 10 December

1982 when a commando force attacked various sites in Maseru. Of the 42 people killed, 30 were South African and 12 were Lesotho citizens.

> They came in the middle of the night... I will never forget the anxiety I felt there. We knew what was happening. Already there were sounds of people talking through the house... I just remember this sense of, '... what about the children sleeping next door?' And we looked at each other and we knew we were thinking about the same thing... It's easy to relate these things as if you had time, but it was all happening at once. And before I knew it, there was shooting in the passage... shooting and other war noises from outside of the room next door to us... where the children were sleeping... Well, it's you or[...] We had to defend ourselves... Then the attack concentrated on the outside of the house and at that time, the two children flew into the bedroom where we were. I just remember this sense of relief and just hugging them... And up to now I wonder what went on in their minds. But my second daughter... was not there; my sister-in-law... was not there. I remember this sense that we both had, communicating just by looking at each other... that they have been killed. That commotion lasted for a long time... it was like a lifetime... they re-attacked... re-attacked... we crawled out through this passage that was by this time just a scene of war, to the kitchen which was the only room which was not burning... And the only thought I had was, 'Are these two alive?'... the thing that drove us out of the house was the fire... I couldn't just think of running and leave my daughter burning in there... And he [Sexwale's husband] went in... and after a while his sister joined us, and after what seemed like a year he emerged with my first daughter... We left. We took everybody. We crawled. (Bunie Matlanyane Sexwale in Bernstein 1994:238-40; also Matsobane Sexwale 486-9)

Clearly such raids inflicted deep physical and psychological wounds on individuals, families and communities, and changed lives. "It was actually the turning point of my life, of my family life, of my political life, of my academic life" (B. M. Sexwale in Bernstein 1994:238, also 241). While, miraculously, there were no fatalities in Sexwale's family - a fate which had its own problems: "I have to live a life of having to justify why I did not die!" (243) - the family of Nelly Marwanqana (Ma-Mai) was decimated. She had been in Maseru with her family for only four days when the raid took place. Of the ten people in the house in which they were staying, five were killed - including her husband, a daughter, herself a young mother, and a son - and five, all family members, survived. Marwanqana's initial reaction was one of despair: "That time, I say, it's better if me I die all together with my children... why these Boers left me alone, it's better to kill me and all this family of Marwanqana must be finish". But it was a reaction which changed, with time: "Then I'm say ah, I must look forward. Yes, yes, yes. And my children has grown nice... I have no problem... Ja, is better now, somebody look after children, ja" (in Bernstein 1994:237).

In the aftermath of such raids, the centripetal unifying pull of a shared sense of grief and outrage was countered by a formidable array of centrifugal forces that profoundly damaged exile communities. The horrifying task of finding out what had happened, which relatives and friends and comrades had been killed - "I will never forget the sight I saw at that house that day... They had obviously shot them, shot them, until they could not die any more, and they still continued to shoot in them" (B. M. Sexwale in Bernstein 1994:241) - was followed by accusation and suspicion and dissatisfied constituencies challenging organisational authority and discipline. The civilians of host countries became more careful, suspicious and even hostile in dealings with exiles, while their governments were often forced into greater vigilance and harassment, sometimes to the point of deporting some or all South African exiles/refugees. For those who remained, it

became much more difficult to operate in the affected countries. The insecurities and uncertainties of the race against death in South Africa were transposed, virtually in their entirety, onto life in the Frontline States. Sexwale states: "It was impossible to lived there [in Lesotho]. It was hell... living always with this fear: where shall we sleep tonight? What have they seen? All that tension all the time" (in Bernstein 1994:241).

The political life and work of the ANC in Botswana was transformed by and in the wake of the June 1985 raid on Gaberone. The change was from a country characterised by relative openness into one in which conditions were extremely tense and difficult. Within Botswana the raid and subsequent smaller attacks provoked fear of both further violence and of the South African community of exiles and refugees. South Africans stood out - "[p]eople have a way of telling South Africans by the way that they walk, talk, dress and act" - and it became difficult "to survive, to get accommodation, to move in the streets", underground work became virtually impossible. A cycle developed in which ANC activists would be arrested by the local police, held for a short period and then deported to Lusaka. Due to the absence of replacements and the desire to maintain continuity of leadership in the country, deportees were sent back illegally. The pattern continued indefinitely: "It was a sort of... gentleman's agreement. We would get arrested, deported. They'd know we would come back". But as these recidivists became increasingly well known to the local police, political and other activity became more and more difficult. "Every time that you went to any public place you knew you were exposed... So that the act of going out to the shops, meeting people, doing your work, created a lot of tension" (Gilder in Bernstein 1994:196-7, also Moatlhodi 412-13).

The countries that comprised the 'forward areas' were not only powerless to act against the frequent violations of their borders by South African agents, they were almost as powerless to prevent the ANC traversing their territory and borders in order to infiltrate

South Africa.[41] They were in an unenviable position, between the two major players in the struggle for South Africa, neither strong enough to stand above the fray nor to unequivocally back one side against the other. In this political and military struggle the space in-between was again highly ambiguous. The space was both geographical and political, and the states that occupied it were both violated and violating. Often internally divided, torn between solidarity and expediency, South Africa's neighbours were, to various degrees, forced to adopt and/or embraced, forms of political compromise. The cycle of deportation and return in Botswana in the wake of the Gaberone raid is an example of one such compromise, but there were innumerable others.

An interrogation technique employed in Swaziland was to blindfold and disorientate ANC captives, give them the impression that they were near/on the South African border with 'the Boers' on other side, and to threaten that if questions were not answered satisfactorily they would be handed over. The border as weapon ran through the heart of this interrogational encounter. The Swazis performed the function of conduit. Ronnie Kasrils claims that although the Swazi police asked the questions, they "wore ear-phones and were directed by the South Africans sitting behind glass partitions in a make-shift studio" and that while making this concession to Pretoria they could not afford the opprobrium of the OAU that would follow handing ANC members over to the apartheid state; but they "were prepared to co-operate in this bizarre form of interrogation" (Kasrils 1993:225).

In a further more general example of political compromise, pressure was placed on southern African states to sign the agreements which sought, among other things, to drive the ANC from the region. Of the agreements signed the most significant was the

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[41] On the ANC's vocabulary of border violation, see Kasrils 1993:197-200,205-6; on strategy, see 262-6.

Nkomati Accord of March 1984, a non-aggression pact between South Africa and Mozambique. It stands as the most powerful illustration of the impossible fate of the states caught in-between. Mozambique had a Marxist government, closely allied to the ANC and bitterly opposed to the apartheid regime. It was the most proficient of the 'forward areas' for the ANC. From the base of Maputo, Swaziland had been the gateway to South Africa. And yet the accord resulted in the expulsion of the ANC from Mozambique, with the exception of a small diplomatic mission. It was an enormous setback and disappointment for the organisation: "Ja, that is the time that really broke me. It was painful you know, after all the ten years that I had been working with FRELIMO, that that happened. The way they handled our people I just couldn't take" (Joyce Moodley in Bernstein 1994:35).[42]

Facing the threat of imminent deportation from Mozambique, large numbers of MK cadres, along with sizeable quantities of arms and explosives, had to be rushed into Swaziland. In an equally hurried manner they then had to infiltrate into South Africa. Swaziland, which itself had secretly signed a security pact with South Africa in 1982, was extremely treacherous terrain due to its diminutive size and population, and the high profile of the South African Security Branch working in co-operation with sections of the Swazi police.

> It was, from an underground point of view, more dangerous than being in South Africa; because you were in a pocket-handkerchief kingdom, with two towns of about thirty thousand people in each and a strip of highway forty kilometres long. There was a saying that after 10 p.m. only the ANC and the South African Special Branch were on the road. (Ronnie Kasrils in Bernstein 1994:179)

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[42] On the role of Mozambique and Swaziland for the ANC, see Kasrils 1993:191-3; on the Nkomati Accord, see 211-13.

According to Kasrils, Swaziland was "a capricious blend of beauty and the beast"; a 'Disneyland' "of daydream and delusion which could suddenly transform into nightmare" (1993:217). Leadership of the operational structures in Swaziland fell to Kasrils who remained in Swaziland illegally for over a year. The ANC machinery operated under enormous pressure, struggling to ensure security and maintain internal discipline. Kasrils describes this period of arrests and raids, escapes and deportations, mounting tension and surveillance, when the race against death quickened and "[h]ysteria in Swaziland was at an all time high" (224), as follows:

> It was... incredible... I was now heading a structure in Swaziland that had been dealing with forty, fifty, sixty people, and we now had two hundred armed guerrillas on the run, who we had to accommodate and look after and find money for. And prepare to infiltrate... into South Africa. 1984 was the most hectic... underground ANC houses were besieged... shootouts occurred... our comrades, shooting over the heads of the Swazi forces, attempted to hold out or break out of that siege and just escape. Cases of comrades being rounded up and put in jail, and breaking out en masse... cases of comrades being killed by the Swazi forces; one or two Swazi security people being killed; South African Boers coming in, and with the complicity of the Swazis, arranging a so-called escape from prison which was actually South Africans kidnapping our guys back to South Africa... comrades... captured by the Swazis... were interrogated ostensibly by Swazis, but really by South African Special Branch... It was real tough stuff. (in Bernstein 1994:179-80)

Kasrils states that during this period, "[w]e managed to survive, managed to get a lot of comrades into South Africa, and keep an underground structure going..." (180).

Elsewhere he claims that although over 100 cadres were rounded up and deported, the organisational machinery managed to infiltrate over 150 into South Africa (1993:226). In some ways, "the MK cadres and the innovative ANC underground in Swaziland snatched a short-term victory from the jaws of defeat" (Barrell 1990:53).

Nowhere was the sense of being on the run from death more pronounced for the exile than in the Frontline States, nowhere were South Africa's messengers of death more powerful, nowhere was life more insecure and uncertain. Warning of an impending attack or crackdown led to rapid action - going into hiding, departure, self-defence - while in their aftermath exiles faced increased tension, hostility, and, potentially, deportation. Exiles were often present in the countries of the region illegally, operating underground, sleeping by day and active at night, watched, followed and continually on the alert, moving from safe house to safe house, known by numerous aliases: "he was Paul in Swaziland, in Lusaka he was David, in Botswana he became Benjamin, in Lesotho he became something else" (interview Mabitsela). They travelled in disguise, on the improvised and forged travel documents of the stateless. Kasrils writes of this particular exilic 'space of death': "Those years in the Front Line, with an AK-47 always under the bed and regular changes of address to keep one step ahead of death, were indeed Desperate Dan stuff" (1993:261, see especially 189-243). By way of conclusion, this is Lauren Richer, an exile in Botswana, talking about living with a sense of fear and foreboding in the 1980s: "We used to sleep with an AK under our bed[...] being aware of being followed and watched, not know[ing] when it would happen, if it would happen; terrible strain, hell of a thing[...] all of the time" (interview).

Losing Military Battles, Winning the Political War

The level of armed resistance achieved in 1981 fell or was not significantly surpassed in the following three years (Barrell 1990:52,54,60; Lodge 1988:230). Moving through the

early 1980s the effectiveness of the ANC and its armed wing was undermined from within and without. They were rescued again by events in South Africa. Government reform initiatives of the early/mid 1980s, such as the Tri-Cameral Parliament, floundered in the face of widespread resistance epitomised by the formation of the United Democratic Front in August 1983 and a period of massive civil unrest between 1984 and 1986. Circumstances in the increasingly ungovernable townships at last seemed to favour popular insurrection, the definitive era of 'people's war', which would enable MK to infiltrate and build or link up with support/organisational networks in South Africa, instead of attempting to influence events from exile as it had done since the early 1960s. Despite problems of command and control that spanned both political and military spheres there is no doubt that, unlike during the 1970s, the ideology of the ANC dominated oppositional political culture in the 1980s.

In 1985 reported incidents of revolutionary armed activity were three times more than the previous year, at 136 incidents, and rose again in 1986 to around 230 (Barrell 1990:60, Ellis and Sechaba 1992:171, Lodge 1988:230-1,1992a:178). Accompanying an upsurge of activity within the country was a third major wave of South Africans going into exile. Although there is significant disagreement about the size of MK (see Lodge 1988:233, 1992a:179), by the end of 1987 one commentator states that over 12,000 combatants may have been trained over a ten year period (Barrell 1990:42,64). A reasonable estimate of the size of MK at this time would be that it comprised around 10,000 members. The South African state's objective in the region was still to drive the ANC from the Frontline States. The policy of destabilisation was applied ruthlessly and without regard for paper agreements such as the Nkomati Accord. With the ANC denied bases in Mozambique since the signing of this accord in 1984 and still periodically vulnerable to further purges, attention shifted to other states in the region. A raid on an ANC house in Lesotho's capital Maseru in December 1985 was followed in January 1986 by the closure of the Lesotho-South Africa border and an economic blockade. The

resultant coup brought to power a pro-South African military regime and the ANC was forced into retreat by expulsions and an ongoing offensive against its members. Subsequently, ANC and MK structures and operational capacity in Swaziland and Botswana were also undermined and destroyed.

Within South Africa itself, the state responded to the ongoing uprising by declaring a series of States of Emergency, beginning in 1985. This perpetual emergency was characterised by the presence of troop in the townships, by violence stoked by conservative and officially backed vigilante groups, so-called 'black-on-black' violence, let loose in an attempt to impose a degree of governability on the townships, and by hit squad activity both within and outside the country's borders. This was one of those "undeclared wars that maim and kill without battlefields or boundaries", with a front that was "anywhere and everywhere" (Gordimer 1988:252). There were no boundaries left to erase, no thresholds to cross.

The activities of death/hit squads need to be understood within the context and history of repressive methods deployed under apartheid. A number of the factors that contributed to their emergence have already been discussed: the 'total onslaught' doctrine, the militarisation of government and the security establishment, and the prevailing institutional culture. The security forces had also grown accustomed to both legalised repression and to illegal/informal repression operating above and beyond the law, to unilaterally imposing any sanction up to and including death in the name of state security, to official public language that seemed to invite such abuses, and to not being held accountable for their actions in the courts or elsewhere. The pattern of combating crisis with terror, of sub-contracted and extra-legal repression, enabled the state to increase the levels of violence and destabilisation while covering its own tracks. Death squads controlled opposition when other methods failed, or even threatened to fail, targeting those who otherwise were out of reach: when security legislation proved

ineffective or the authorities lacked the evidence to obtain the conviction of a known or suspected opponent; when the security forces preferred the immediate and definite finality of its own expedient brand of justice to the time consuming niceties of judicial procedure with its, albeit minimal, chances of acquittal; and so on.

Custodial violence/death and death squads function within the same institutional culture. Both collapsed the elements of the criminal justice system into the moment of execution. Impunity and blanket denials were the order of the day. One form of violence fed another. The victims of torture were 'turned' into the perpetrators of state sanctioned murder. Extra-judicial killings were sanctioned to avoid the scandal of further custodial deaths, notably after Biko's murder.

> The death of scores of detainees without visible punishment of the
> people responsible for their safety created a milieu which nurtured the
> growth of death squads. It encouraged some policemen to think they
> were above the law when dealing with people suspected of crimes
> against the state. From that mind-set there were but a few steps to
> serving in, or even organising, death squads to hunt down anti-apartheid
> activists. (Laurence 1990:66)

The death squads, therefore, were a natural and predictable outcome of apartheid, its ultimate and most secret weapon.[43] Albie Sachs was the victim of a car bomb during April 1988 in Maputo, Mozambique. Another passage through the 'space of death':

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[43] On hit squads and their history, see Laurence 1990 and Pauw 1991. Beyond assassinations - Pauw (1991:257-8) suggests that probably 230 activists were the victims of death squads, but other estimates put the death toll at nearer 50 (Laurence 1990:2,63) - death squads undertook a range of other activities including 'disappearances', bombings, sabotage, arson, vandalism, burglaries, and break-ins. Again it is worth stressing that the political stature of those killed - Rick Turner, Joe Gqabi, Griffiths and Victoria Mxenge, Ruth First, Jeanette Schoon, Mathew Goniwe, Cassius Make, Dulcie September, David Webster, Anton Lubowski - meant that their significance went beyond any mere tallying of figures. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the activities of death squads are particularly associated with central and southern American countries in the late 1970s and 1980s where the number of dead and 'disappeared' was more usually in the thousands and tens of thousands. For a brief

Oh shit. Everything has abruptly gone dark, I am feeling strange and cannot see anything. The beach, I am going to the beach... something is wrong. Oh shit, I must have banged my head... The darkness is not clearing, this is something serious, a terrible thing is happening to me, I am swirling, I cannot steady myself as I wait for consciousness and light to return. I feel a shuddering punch against the back of my neck, and then what seems like another one. The sense of threat gets stronger and stronger, I am being dominated, overwhelmed. I have to fight, I have to resist. I can feel arms coming from behind me, pulling at me under my shoulders. I am being kidnapped, they have come from Pretoria to drag me over the border... This is the moment we have all been waiting for, the few ANC members still working in Mozambique, with dread and yet with a weird kind of eagerness. 'Leave me,' I yell out. 'Leave me.'... 'I would rather die here, leave me, I'd rather die here.' I feel a sudden surge of elation and strength as I struggle, making an immense muscular effort to pull myself free... I hear voices... But I am unable to struggle any more, I just have to go along and accept what happens, my will has gone. We are travelling fast... consciousness fades and returns, swirls away and comes back... no thought related to action, but passive acknowledgement that my body is being transported somewhere, that I exist, even if without self-determination of any sort. I wonder if we have reached the South African border yet, I wonder who my captors are...?... More urgent voices... treating me as an object, to be lifted and carried and moved this way and that[...] I feel the... people all around me. Nobody engages me as a person... I am wrapped in complete darkness and tranquillity. If I am

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comparative analysis and a discussion of the links/ties between South Africa and Argentina/Chile, see Pauw 1991:257-9, Steytler 1990:114-15.

dead I am not aware of it, if I am alive I am not aware of it, I have no

awareness at all... 'Albie[...]' through the darkness a voice, speaking not

about me but to me... sympathetic and affectionate... A glow of joy of

complete satisfaction and peace envelops me, I am in the hands of

Frelimo, of the Mozambican Government, I am safe. 'What happened?' I

am asking the question into the darkness, my will has been activated... I

have a social existence once more, I am an alive part of humanity. A

voice answers... '[...] a car bomb[...]' and I drift back, smiling inside, into

nothingness. (Sachs 1991:7-10)[44]

As the States of Emergency crushed the uprising within South Africa, the ANC and its

army were being systematically hounded out of its frontline bases. As a by-product of

the New York accords of December 1988, which set a timetable for the departure of

Cuban troops from Angola and committed South Africa to decolonise Namibia under

the auspices of the United Nations, the ANC had to close down its camps in Angola and

move several thousand MK cadres to Zambia, Tanzania and Uganda. "Some [from the

Soweto generation] had already experienced a similar expulsion from Mozambique, and

now they were on the move again, always one step further from home" (Ellis and

Sechaba 1992:191). Nevertheless, in 1988 MK mounted the highest number of armed

attacks ever, and the number of such incidents exceeded 200 in both 1988 and 1989

(Barrell 1990:66, Lodge 1992a:178).[45] Overall, however, the ANC's position was

deteriorating. The war, at least in the form envisaged and for the time being, looked

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[44] For other accounts of hit/death squads see Bernstein 1994:198-225, and in fiction, Gordimer 1988: especially 247-54.

[45] Barrell goes on to argue that the number of MK combatants reported captured and killed dropped dramatically, largely due to "improvements in the ANC's underground inside South Africa and its capacity to integrate an armed presence, and a winding down of new infiltration" (1990:66). In contrast, Ellis and Sechaba claim that the record number of attacks in 1988 was achieved only at the expense of losing large numbers of trained soldiers to Security Police actions, and by attacking undefended soft targets, for which the ANC paid a heavy price in terms of declining international support (1992:181). From 1987 the ANC did attempt to build a more comprehensive and integrated internal presence and leadership through Operation Vula.

increasingly unwinnable. MK lacked bases in the Frontline States, Soviet support was withdrawn with the ending of the Cold War, and morale in the camps was again dangerously low. While the ANC was in a weak position as the 1980s came to a close, the position of the South African government had also significantly deteriorated.

The apartheid regime was under enormous pressure from economic decline, internal resistance and international sanction(s). If the era of destabilisation began with South Africa treating the region as its own backyard, it ended with military defeat in Angola, the independence of Namibia, the withdrawal of South African and Cuban forces from these countries, and regional peace initiatives sponsored by the United States and the Soviet Union. In this context of mutual fatigue and converging interests the political journey to majority rule gathered momentum.

Any assessment of the effectiveness of the ANC, and particularly its army, in exile must take into account not only the condition of political exile itself but also the enormous problems - such as the lack of advantageous terrain and the fact that at no stage was it possible to establish secure military bases in neighbouring countries - confronting the liberation movements. The outcome was, perhaps, inevitable. The armed struggle never developed to any significant degree beyond externally commanded and supplied cross-border raids by small, organisationally isolated units. Relatively few combatants were active within South Africa at any one time. Survival time was short and survival rate was low as MK consistently sustained heavy and damaging losses. Its members gave themselves up, were captured, imprisoned, 'turned' under interrogation and/or killed, and returned, often having abandoned their missions, to local political or civilian life. A major reason for these losses, and perhaps the most important unresolved problem of the ANC's exile, was the poor co-ordination between military actions and political

structures and between external and internal opposition.[46] 'Armed propaganda' never sparked a decisive and/or sustained assault on state power.

> MK... never became a true 'people's army' in the classic sense... it focused on attacks by small units which rarely interfaced with the civilian population... [a 'people's war'] was never fully achieved. It remained relatively isolated from the upsurge of mass protest in the 1980s and its major weakness was that it remained an 'army in exile' - with long communication lines - rather than a force fully absorbed into society. (Shaw 1994:231, footnote omitted)[47]

As a result, despite the mystique attached to MK, the armed struggle played a largely symbolic role, and MK's greatest success and influence was in the arena of propaganda and the inspirational example provided by its cadres' commitment and courage. While on balance the ANC lost the military battle, on balance it won the political war, and in this victory both the political and military components of the struggle played a part. It was through this ultimate victory that the ANC transformed its exilic 'space of death' into something that resonated with life; exiles returned home, alongside prisoners, to profoundly influence the creation and possibilities of a new democratic South Africa.

If, as is being argued in this thesis, the apartheid state externally framed and underwrote the lives of its opponents, in forcing significant organisational structures into exile it attempted to locate them outside the frame or text of the struggle for the country, while itself acknowledging no borders or boundaries and still hunting them down wherever

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[46] The undeniable military difficulties faced by the ANC were compounded by incompetence. See, for example, Lelyveld 1987:335-9.

[47] For an assessment from within the ANC/MK of their armed activities and the armed struggle more generally, see Kasrils 1993: especially 180,186-9,193-6,200-13,218,226-7,231,234-46,252,263-6,276-7,281-2,285,288,297.

they sought refuge. Death - in the form of exile as a 'space of death', the race against death, and the state's messengers of death - was a constant companion. Frontline lives, in particular, were violently collaborative as a result of this death driven exclusion and pursuit. Exiles contested this dominant flow of force in the quest for security, and re-entry into and participation within the national frame. The breaking of the frame of exclusion, full participation in the future, and the filling out of previously 'half-told', 'half-known' lives and stories are, for the frontline exiles, among the fruits of victory.

The Guide-Line Across the Chasm

Breyten Breytenbach's *Memory of Snow and of Dust* explores the multi-layered interaction between the creative act, home and exile, birth and death. The first part of the book is a letter written by Meheret, an Ethiopian exile in Paris, to her unborn child. The father, Mano, a 'coloured' South African actor returns on a mission to the "land of absence". The day before his departure Meheret tells Mano that she is pregnant: "I wanted to give him hope (or rope enough?), a reason for believing, a motivation for coming back to us. We have nothing left but hope" (1989:6). She believes the child will bring Mano back to them. Meheret announces to her unsuspecting child, "This [the letter], the telling of your past, will be my present to you" (11). The letter serves to "fashion" the child, who in a sense is written before birth. By the end of the letter Meheret is informed that Mano has been falsely arrested on a murder charge, sentenced to death, and that "there was no more hope... Nothing could be done now to save him" (208). Her final words are as follows:

> Nine months full. You are not a book. And yet you are nearly written.
> You have come with me such a long way. Now the detachment must
> come. Tonight will be a wake. By dawn, I know it must happen by
> daybreak... You will lift your blue, smothered head to the light, tied to

me with a rope of blood. The rope is the connecting link between death

and life. May you go out the good way. May you walk well. (209)

As the child and the letter in which the child is written are due to be born in exile, the

child's father is to die at home. The child, and by implication the letter, are the umbilical

chord or rope linking life and death, child and father, exile and home. These images and

events are irretrievably bound together: "It [hanging] is easy like birth, being born,

cutting from the neck the rope which cut into the neck" (291). Exile is a race against

death which can not be won. But it can be survived and constructively transformed. This

chapter has argued that even in its most individualistic form, as the example of Modisane

illustrates, and in the most politically dangerous frontline terrain, as shown by the ANC,

the exilic 'space of death' contained within it potentially resurrective life. Mano writes

from prison: "Writing is like plaiting a rope. And the rope is the present linking past to

future. The guide-line across the chasm" (306).[48] Exile autobiography can take the form

of a suicide note, but it can also provide a "guide-line across the chasm" linking death

and birth, past, present and future, exile and home. Again writing reconnects, and

reactivates the movement of, time, and across space. Such autobiography can be a

continually reworked rite of passage which implies the possibility of survival and

continuity in exile, of creativity in exile as an ongoing process. In the words of Mano,

"'[e]xile is the living proof that death doesn't kill'" (29).

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[48] In Coetzee's *Age of Iron*, Elizabeth Curren describes her letter as a "rope of words" (1991a:181); a rope that attempts to link mother and daughter, home and exile, death and life.

Chapter 4: Permanent Exiles and Retrospective Migrants: Breyten Breytenbach and Es'kia Mphahlele

> it is obviously only one form of exile when you are far away from the society that gave birth to your work and for which it is destined. Nearly all South African writing reflects varying stages of exile and alienation. That is what our literature is all about. (Breytenbach 1986:77, also Gordimer 1989:135)

> Exile is, in many respects, the central problem in South African literary history. In no other country save perhaps 1930s Germany did the state mount such a concerted effort to expel and destroy the most innovative representatives of nonofficial culture. (Bunn 1996:33)

Artists and purveyors of culture crossed the burning bridge into exile for a range of reasons relating to politics and culture. Among these were the poverty of resources and opportunities, the segregation of both performers and audiences, various forms of the most overt censorship and oppression, and the suffocating cliché that the South African condition could become for artistic expression. Whether the creative imagination was overtly political or not, whether the passions of resistance ran deep or were a matter of indifference, a political identity was invariably imposed; culture became an inherently political activity. Exile, furthermore, was a moment of politicisation, a threshold of radical emergence. As the example of Modisane amply illustrates, however, not all such exiles were political activists.[1] Nevertheless, culture's practitioners, because of the relatively wider embrace of their influence, were among the first and among those most consistently targeted by oppressive measures and, as a result, left in droves. Nkosi went so far as to say: "It would appear that for creative South Africans, both black and white, exile is now an inescapable condition" (1983:88). Among the cultural exiles were jazz musicians, singers, actors, painters, and writers. It is on the latter group that this chapter will focus.

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[1] The outcome of the political-cultural complex, of combinations of force and choice motivating exile, were articulations of self-definition that were rarely straightforward, often ambiguous, sometimes incoherent (see Hope in Bernstein 1994:345-8, Nkosi 1994).

The written word and creative process, like organisational politics, are agents of transformation within the exilic 'space of death', 'guide-lines across the chasm'. The lives and works of Breyten Breytenbach and Es'kia Mphahlele provide testimony to the fact that exile can encompass the, albeit painful and fraught, unfolding of a creative process. The process takes on a particular form. Each new literary creation plants a milestone on a path to survival, a footprint along the way. Preoccupations appear repetitive, circling what Breytenbach has described as the "central wound of exile" (1989:45). Resisting the forces of healing, exile becomes "a wound like a mask which had grown to the flesh" (Breytenbach 1993:95). The story remains the same: "The biography / I am repeatedly in the process of / writing is always the same one, / and it may be described / as a variously sliced-up or torn-apart / book of myself" (Breytenbach, "*A Kind of Telling*", 1989: prologue). Self and exile, art and life, narrate a single story which treads and threads the narrow line between awareness and obsession. The story is told and retold so compulsively because otherwise it and the author and their exile and South Africa's exile would have no tangible existence. Edward Said has said the following with reference to the Palestinians: "there seems to be nothing in the world which sustains the story: unless you go on telling it, it will just drop and disappear... The other narratives have a kind of permanence of institutional existence and you just have to try to work away at them" (in Rushdie 1991:178). The telling itself, the forms and techniques of telling, the bold intent to "tell / the world about what still lives" (Modisane, "Lonely", in Couzens and Patel eds. 1982:273), are a way of staying the course and staying alive.

The lives/works of Breytenbach and Mphahlele indicate that at some point in this ritual of (re)living and (re)telling, exile becomes its own subject matter and its victims

become "permanent exiles".[2] Like no other single moment, the (non-)resolution of return crystallises the permanence of exile. But it also transforms, and chrystallises the transformation of, exile; natural and complete, a condition, it is also redefined, in a way that recasts the past and present, into the fold of migrancy. The process of becoming both permanent exile and retrospective migrant involves a violent un/remaking of identity, imagination and the creative portfolio.

Creativity, for the exile, is impaled upon the inherent dichotomy, contradiction and paradox of the condition, upon its essential duality. Perhaps the most significant duality, because it informs all others, concerns the interplay between absence and presence. It is as if the exile carries the absence "as an unspeakable disease - and this disease keeps him separate from others" (Breytenbach 1986:75). Breytenbach also writes: "You live and you write in terms of absence, of absent time (or in terms of a questioned present time). Not an imagined or remembered existence: more an absent presence. A state of instant reminiscence" (211). Presence and the present are always displaced, deferred, somehow absent. Relating two temporal discourses from the previous chapter, from departure/arrival, a moment without past or future, exile becomes its opposite, a lifetime culled of any sense of the present, lived in terms of a remembered past and anticipated future. But there is also the potential for an unequal coexistence of both absence and presence/present, and of the variously achieved, often creative, transformation of one into the other. Breytenbach has written of a stage when writing comes into its own, "the missing is transformed into a delicious mixture of ache and ecstasy, changing shape and modifying its nature, until the very absence becomes presence" (1990:31). And elsewhere: "Absence, that was the very presence!" (1989:82). The duality may take root to the extent that it retains its hold independent of exile itself.

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[2] This phrase is borrowed from the title of Jay 1986.

This remark relates to Mphahlele after his return home: "I desperately want to be present and absent at the same time" (Chabani Manganyi 1983:11).

The paradox of exile has paradoxical creative implications. Breytenbach talks of "the contradictory redundancy and fertility of the state of exile"; of "the sharpened sense of loss and the increased awareness of gain" (1996:41-2).[3] In the sphere of language, for example, he states in relation to his native tongue, Afrikaans, that on the one hand "it is rather like carrying the bones of your ancestors with you in a bag: they are white with silence, they do not talk back" (1986:74), while on the other, exile made his mother tongue "into a 'homeland', a movable feast, indeed a dancing of the bones... It gave a *taste* to words" (1996:46). The bones of language may become white with silence or dance with new meanings.

Various forms of displacement/migrancy have been likened to a state which activates artistic creativity. For Terry Eagleton this has to do with a point of balance between operative distance from a society and intimate involved with it: "great art is produced... from the subtle and involuted tensions between the remembered and the real, the potential and the actual, integration and dispossession, exile and involvement" (1970:18). One might easily add to this list absence and presence. Michael Seidel, in a similar vein, states that "experiences native to the life of the exile seem almost activated in the life of the artist: separation as desire, perspective as witness, alienation as new being" and he talks of "exile as an enabling fiction" (1986:x,xii). For Ugarte, "the life of exile is, in many ways, the life of fiction" and "exile literature lays bare the workings of literature itself" (1989:26,20), while according to Said, also, the unreality of the exile's world resembles fiction (1984:167,1984a:52). From various perspectives, therefore, the connection is repeatedly made between exile and a fictional state of being and between

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[3] Also in this regard see Nkosi 1983:vi-xi, 93-6.

exile and the literary imagination. The exile appears to be almost uniquely well placed to become a writer. Alongside the dark chamber of incarceration, exile is seen to be creatively enabling. But how has exile, with its connotations of loss and death, been transformed into such a potent motif of twentieth century culture (see Said 1984a:49,53)? How has the exilic 'space of death' been transformed through the creativity of art into a landscape of life?

In a South African context it is mainly Breytenbach who has equated exile with the make-believe and unreal, with writing, and more particularly with the creative act (1986:153, 1993:222,1996:38-49).[4] "And if we were to generalize some more - could it not be said that all literature as we know it today, wherever its origin, flows in fact from exile?" (1986:77). More specifically, what, according to Breytenbach were the advantages of being out of South Africa, away from apartheid, in exile? Firstly, to be in exile was to be free from fear and oppression. He has described not belonging, being an outsider, as "probably a blessing in disguise" and even a privilege (1986:211-12): the exile could learn the chameleon art of adaptation; inspect the inner lining of integration; was taught something about mechanisms of survival and tolerance; and began to understand the feel of harmony, if only as a conscious construct from which s/he was excluded. Alienation provided access to the essential. Furthermore, the writer could look back at a homeland armed with new ideas, altered perceptions of space and time, a sense of distance and a different perspective, a broader, more international, vision; was free to imagine/dream a past and the future of that past. There were lessons to be learnt:

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  Also see Hope, although as mentioned before technically more expatriate than exile, in Bernstein 1994:345-8. In an interview with Andries Oliphant, Njabulo Ndebele stated that being outside the country afforded him "a necessary distancing from South Africa. This, paradoxically, served as a means of recall, of retaining a kind of distilled memory. I found that being removed from some experiences at home served to recall those very experiences in a very vivid and compelling manner". Oliphant goes on to say: "apart from the crucial aspects of recall and reflection, I think absence from a place with which one is deeply engaged can lead to the enhancement of the specificity of that place in relation to other places. This then may establish the possibility of engaging in a radically transformed fashion with one's place of origin". Ndebele responds, "quite true... it is very well stated in terms of my own experience" (1988:342-3).

"In telescoping many contradictions and opposites, exile has provided me with a panoply of lessons" (1996:46). At the heart of his response to exile has been the notion of creativity. Breytenbach claims: "You learn about creation - because you must compensate for not fitting in naturally with the environment - and thus transformation and metamorphosis" (42, also 46). It has provided motifs for his work: silence, death, transformation, the void.[5]

For Mphahlele, exile was blighted by long periods of drought with regards to his creative writing. Academic achievement, literary growth and intellectual stimulation were the most significant, indeed the only, gains of exile. Although ultimately insufficient it was this creative component that made life in exile bearable (Chabani Manganyi 1983:12, Mphahlele 1984:119,163,168). Work, in its various forms, provided a form of insulation, shelter from the storm. Exile also impacted upon themes that litter Mphahlele's writing: the wanderer, the glass-house, the 'tyranny of place'.

In stark opposition to the notion of exile as enabling creativity is a very different concept: exile as creative death.

> Exile as a mode of genius no longer exists; in place of Joyce we have the fragments of works appearing in *Index on Censorship*. These are the rags of suppressed literatures, translated from a Babel of languages; the broken cries of real exiles, not those who have rejected their homeland but who have been forced out - of their language, their culture, their society... amputated sensibilities, not free... whole... (Gordimer 1989:288)

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[5] See Breytenbach 1986:75,1988:129,1996:41-2,46,109.

The writer risks "the rupture of silence", "eventually becoming the living experience of the fact that exiled memory is the slow art of forgetting the colour of fire" (Breytenbach 1986:211,1996:39). Nortje writes: "[p]ast does not cling, but spreads and settles / like colour in the water, heart's diffusion" ("September poem", 1973:51).

> In exile, you cling to memory because you daren't forget, cannot afford
> to. That brutal memory assures you of an identity, which absence...
> chews up slowly at the edges; like a caterpillar travelling along the edge
> of a leaf, destroying the very physical prop on which its body rests.
> (Mphahlele 1985:73)

Mphahlele bemoaned the lack of a meaningful cultural context, community and relevance, and their replacement by an ocean of insecurity. He could not survive on borrowed fears and commitments, the 'tyranny of place' demanding his loyalty. For Breytenbach being in exile meant being deprived of the environment where one belonged naturally, functioned completely, fitted in instinctively, and enjoyed a shared and unquestioned sense of security. The immediate ability to serve, communicate and contribute were lost. These characteristics of exile inevitably had creative repercussions.

Wally Serote has claimed, "exile is an assault on creativity" (in Bernstein 1994:335). The implications of distance, in time and space, were accentuated by the fact that, in the exile's absence, apartheid relentlessly un/remade the physical and human landscape of South Africa. Writing often assumed an air of unreality due to a lack of immediacy and contact. Those who had developed their craft using the troika of politics, realism and home, found the loss of the tangible directness of lived experience, and what Maughan Brown evocatively calls "adjusting the focal length" (1991), difficult to overcome/

achieve or turn to their advantage.[6] Significantly, Mphahlele notes that an exile's writing registers ideas more readily than it dramatises concrete experience (1981:12, also 1974:241). Perversely, writers who went into exile in order to escape creative death, often simply confronted it in a different form. The creative problems were profound indeed: who to write for, what to write about, was it possible to write any more at all?

These difficulties were compounded by the banning of writers and their work in South Africa. Banned writers existed, as has been said of Dennis Brutus, as a vacuum, an absence, a black hole in the firmament of South African literature (Gardner 1984).

> All one attempts is talk in the absence / of others who spoke and
> vanished / without so much as an echo. / I have seen men with haunting
> voices / turned into ghosts by a piece of white paper / as if their
> eloquence had been black magic. (Nortje, "Soliloquy: South Africa",
> 1973:5)

Such writers wrote about and for people who could not read their work; they were physically, creatively and politically erased from the text of apartheid South Africa; silenced and effaced, they became missing persons, the 'disappeared' (Lindfors 1994:160-1). Banned at home and lacking, indifferent to, or indeed hostile towards, an international audience, many were "like disembodied voices crying out for a dimension that [would] give them meaning" (Mphahlele 1984:130). They often fell silent: "our hearts are dry / with your silence. Exile / is no more than a part of death.... I cannot break / the stones of your silence or send you / the irreparable grief / of your homeless land." (Cope in Cope ed., "Silence", 1979:25). Clearly not all exiled writers were equally affected by banning and censorship: for example, while Mphahlele's work was

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  Maughan Brown uses this phrase in the context of an examination of the implications of exile for the work of Alex La Guma.

banned, Breytenbach was less harshly treated by the censor: while the opponent was exiled the Afrikaans writer remained free.[7]

In this context it is possible to see the exile, alongside the prisoner, as variously written and contested through writing. Prisoners, with the exception of Breytenbach who wrote into a state manufactured void, were not officially allowed to write creatively at all. In a not dissimilar way, the state wrote the exile out of the country, off the page, and into a void. Banning and censorship regulations, as another manifestation of the state's power of writing, functioned as messengers of death for writers in exile, as an attempt to force them outside the frame of creative discourse. The state's role in lives and their telling was again violently collaborative: exile was compounded by banning and censorship, the 'ownership' and meaning of texts was contested and manipulated, violence was internalised as self-censorship, and opponents were written into various forms - absence, silence - of creative death. Counter-discourses, life stories, were repeatedly narrated as part of the exile's attempt to regain a voice, self and world, and to re-enter the national and discursive frame. Life stories did not so much enter an arena dense with prior versions as attempt to inscribe the state-imposed absence, silence, void, with oppositional texts and lives. Again the word was a weapon in the un\remaking of the self and its attendant worlds, and in the struggle to transform a 'space of death' into something that entertained the possibility of life.

Not only the word, but also the body, was complicit in the mechanisms of un/remaking. For the exile, like the prisoner, space/landscape was layered, exfoliative. Variously alienated from space/landscape by apartheid (by its geography of dislocation, racial classification, political exclusion) and by exile, this layered world could, again like that of the prisoner, collapse down to the body, the total body as self/world. David Bunn, in

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[7] On the subject of censorship and literature, see Merrett 1994, Visser 1992.

relation to an exilic "crisis of representation" (1996:33), writes: "When landscape conventions failed for exiles such as Arthur Nortje, the body became their only place of imaginative refuge... In writing a new literary history that will unify the experience of exiles and local writers, we should not underestimate the effects of this imaginative, self-directed violence [and healing] that, for some, became the only means of keeping a far-off home alive to them in the present" (43,[] bracket my own). The body provided the irreducible core of the "imaginative geography" (33) of both prisoner and exile; and articulated a violently collaborative textuality.[8]

The coexistence of exile as creative life/rebirth and death suggests the need for a nuanced understanding of the relationship between the paradox of exile and the paradox of writing. This chapter seeks to examine the complex impact of this relationship on the work of Breytenbach and Mphahlele. In plotting the biographical and narrative trajectory of these two exiled writers, the chapter focuses on the twinned evolution of a lifetime impaled upon exile's contradictions and the central ideas and themes of their writing.

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Breyten Breytenbach: The Journey of the Eternal Dissident

Breytenbach left South Africa in 1960. "In the beginning there was leave-taking. I can just about name the date when I found myself suddenly stripped of all previous certainties... At the age of twenty I left behind me a country, a continent, a youth, a language, an identity and perhaps also a memory. What came after would have to be imagined" (1996:159). Finally settling in Paris, Breytenbach effectively married into

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  With reference to the body not only were exiled writers 'disappeared' and like 'disembodied voices', lacking the dimension that would give them meaning, but exile was also experienced bodily, as amputation (Moss 1994:11), and as the voluntary and involuntary detachment of body from mind/soul: "The body is far wiser / than the brain, it makes / its home where it finds itself / thinks less of exile" (Tromp, "Still Feeling", in de Kock and Tromp eds. 1996:289).

exile, entering into an 'inter-racial' marriage with a Vietnamese woman and thereby restricting his ability to return home. He also became involved in anti-apartheid activities. Repeated applications for a visa were rejected until permission was granted for a three month visit, from December 1972. Breytenbach had been away for, "[t]hirteen years. A lifetime. A waste" (1985a:46). *A Season in Paradise* is the story of this first journey home.

Homecoming had both a private and a public face. In the private realm Breytenbach sought cathartic closure - "the trip turned out to be an effort to come to terms with my roots, to be finished with the business of youth" (1988:129, also 1985a:39) - recollection and remembrance - he walks the fields of his youth, encounters previous selves, moves through layers of his own being (1985a:55-6): in a beautiful image he recalls waking at night to "tiptoe back past all these moments of myself / taking care not to wake the little corpses" (140). Something "forgotten (or thrown away?)" (228) had to be retrieved. Home, in one sense, meant childhood, youth, family. It had the aura of magic and paradise. "But what will I find there? What late lamented 'I' will I encounter there?... I am in search of simplicity, I want to rediscover an innocence... I am on a quest for that safety which was mine before there was any need for me to recognise it" (37). At another level, however, Breytenbach recognised that the reality of home would not coincide with his idealised reconstruction: "And it won't be like that. Perhaps I will then be able to destroy the image and grow lucid?" (37).

Complementing the return to youth are intimate reflections on family, notably Breytenbach's parents and ancestors. The heart attack suffered by his father towards the end of the visit permeates the writing of *A Season in Paradise*, the shadow of death accompanies revisited youth and hangs over impending departure: "I will die and go to my father / ... my father has a boardinghouse with many rooms" (195-6). His father's boarding house is an ancestral home. Breytenbach returned to lay claim to his

beginnings and his right to an end - "For me, beginning and end lies in this earth" (230) - that part of South Africa which was his and his alone: "It's *my* land, isn't it? It's private property?" (219).

But Breytenbach's private South Africa had an ugly public face. Hopes were high that he would return to the fold: "The word in the air was 'reconciliation'. The prodigal son would yet return, the breach would be healed, and all would be well" (Coetzee 1992:375). This was not to be the case. "I looked on darkness a great deal" (267), Breytenbach confesses. The homecoming was plagued by the attentions of the media and security police, and by controversy. "I felt exposed and hunted" (1996:160). At the heart of the darkness was Breytenbach's powerful sense of estrangement from his own people:

> That was the reality with which I had to come into contact. People of my
> tribe, people of my history, people of my language, people who are at the
> core of my unconscious safety wanted to talk to me - is it from that
> unconscious and fundamental safety then that I must become alienated?
> The sting of death lying in one's own bosom... The land is screaming
> death if only we cared to listen... We are responsible for what has
> happened, we are responsible for what is going to happen. (1985a:209-
> 10)

Estrangement from his own people meant alienation from unconscious and fundamental safety. Breytenbach's private South African paradise could not be separated from its public face. He summarises his own dilemma: "You can't get away from your own past, even if you wanted to. And you can't tie your own people to you, no matter how dearly you'd like to" (217).

Memory, imagination and expectation, reality - the interaction between the home of youth, exile and adult homecoming, alienation and belonging, life and death, innocence and loss of innocence, his love and hate for his people and country - provided the paradoxes, fractures and continuities of insight upon which *A Season in Paradise* was written. New impressions and formulations are superimposed upon, and interwoven with, the old. On departure Breytenbach was "provisionally free / and deprived of all genealogy and memory and security, / in search of the frontiers of the night" (268). However, some corpses Breytenbach had tiptoed past were now awake and were asking familiar questions: about who he was; about his relationship with his home country; about the still unresolved contradictions between its private and public faces; about the role of the artist-activist and exile. These questions were soon to draw Breytenbach back to South Africa in a very different capacity and on a very different visit.

As already discussed in chapter 1, when Breytenbach returned to South Africa in 1975 it was on behalf of a resistance organisation, Okhela. He travelled in disguise carrying a passport identifying him as Christian Galaska, citizen of France. Again there were complicated private and public reasons for this return; he was still riven by contradictions and unanswered questions:

> How much of [my trip] was an attempt to force a break in the
> contradictions in which I was caught up: the dreamer ensnared by
> political work - neglecting his art - and suffering from it; the exile who
> had never accepted the finality of his exile, whose roots were still in
> South Africa; the man, becoming a European, writing in an African
> language, with the world evoked by it, which no one around him
> understood? How much of it was suicidal? Or repentant homecoming?
> (1985:95, also 1983:4)

The resulting period of imprisonment provided a further chapter to his ongoing relationship with South Africa: his family, his people, his home. Divisions and bitterness within the family, merely hinted at in *A Season in Paradise*, were brought into the open. One brother was a member of the armed forces, the other a reporter "with decidedly fascist sympathies" (1985:68), the family contained both heroes and traitors, gaolers and prisoners. In April 1978 Breytenbach's mother died. He was not allowed to attend the funeral. His father suffered a stroke as a result of which he was partly paralysed. The private South Africa of innocence, youth, safety, and family - his memory and reconstruction of home - was falling away behind, and even conspiring with, the horrors of its public reality. "There will be much killing of the image. Reality is that the illusion will be executed" (239). Having been imprisoned by his own people there was now no way back. "To be an Afrikaner is a political definition. It is a blight and a provocation to humanity" (354):

> my alienation as a subversive criminal is permanent; nothing can ever
> bridge the gap between the authorities of the Afrikaner tribe and myself.
> And I accept this and I would not be happy otherwise, because I do not
> consider myself to be an Afrikaner. To be an Afrikaner in the way *they*
> define it is to be a living insult to whatever better instincts we human
> beings may possess and struggle to maintain. (280, also 73,257, and
> 1983)

To be imprisoned in South Africa, particularly in the situation in which Breytenbach found himself, was to experience perhaps the most comprehensive form of exile.

> What *The True Confessions* does so brilliantly is relate how a character
> disappears under multiple layers of exile in prison: exiled from society at
> large, from his family, from his former life in Paris where he was already

an exile, exiled in solitary confinement from his fellow inmates, and
even exiled, like a pariah, from the Afrikaners, his own people, who are
holding him. (Campbell 1986:1028)

Breytenbach was in prison long enough for it to become a home of sorts, but his real home had been disfigured irretrievably. It was "a home that would never be home again, which I had become alienated from forever. But the alienation was not from the earth, which I still recognized, with which I still felt at peace" (1985:257). On his release from prison Breytenbach was seeing everything "for the first time" and "for the last time", "[e]verything was dying, everything reborn" (327,332): "It is always the time to go" (331).

The return to Paris in December 1982 was a form of homecoming. But for "the man who went down to the corner to buy cigarettes and who came back eight years later", things had inevitably changed, people had moved on: "I came back from that paradoxical paradise and have no life left... What remains is gratuitous, free, no attachments, no importance. I have no affairs. I have no interests. These too have been scorched clean" (27). Breytenbach knew what awaited him in exile, and he couldn't get there fast enough. While on his previous return into exile he had been "provisionally free", "in search of the frontiers of the night", now he was "turned entirely free in the gardens of the night" (378).[9] With reference to his relationship with South Africa another stage seemed to have been reached: "*For the dream is saying to some extent that the flying dreamer's native land is inaccessible to him*" (238).

9

    This translation from Afrikaans is by Denis Hirson. In the collection of poems, *Judas Eye*, Breytenbach provides his own somewhat freer translations of two almost identical poems, the first, like that quoted in the main text, entitled "Release", and the second, "Liberation": "all freaked free in the boweries of night"; "entirely released in the gardens of the night" (1988:53,113). The sentiment, however, remains the same.

In the aftermath of his release, during the 1980s, Breytenbach's unease with exile as label, condition and community became clear. Alongside statements stating categorically that he was not an exile were descriptions of himself as an émigré and a vagabond. Breytenbach asserted that he abhorred the concept of exile. It was a condition and a set of expectations he did not want to fall into. It was a "meal ticket", debilitating, self-pitying. It was too revered a condition, clothed in a myth of romantic lamentation, theatrical and overly dramatic. It was a crutch and a cliché. It was frozen in time, petrifying, awash with nostalgia. He was repulsed by exile politics. And yet Breytenbach also saw himself as the perennial exile and his work continued to circle around its central wound.[10] Proclamations of an attempt to move beyond exile, as with imprisonment, coexist with their continued influence in/on his life and art.

In December 1983, Breytenbach became a naturalised French citizen. For the first time in his adult life he could live somewhere without being a foreigner, he was no longer a political refugee. Like Barnum in *Memory of Snow and of Dust*, Breytenbach "swapped his pale prison skin for that of a Frenchman", (and even underwent "a heart transplant"?), but similarly he was to have "some rejection problems" (1989:85). Later he was to write: "Indeed, I am but a momentary Frenchman passing through" (1993:73, brackets omitted).[11] Breytenbach's inability to truly become a Frenchman was only exceeded by his failure to cease to be South African. He has stated that imprisonment severed the umbilical chord, "[t]hereafter I could continue, knowing that South Africa will always be the mother-prism and pain for me... I was liberated to live my leftover life fully elsewhere. To move with the changes... To accommodate the unexpected death" (1988:130); and, after a subsequent return trip, he claimed that the return had

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[10]
 In relation to the above arguments about exile see, for example, Breytenbach 1986:18-20,207,210-11, 1988:129,130, 1992:62-3, 1996:39-40. Also see Nixon 1992:24-5.

[11]
 Breytenbach has also written that he is destined to be a foreigner, but not a stranger, in Paris, "the only town I know really well" (1996:161).

released him from exile, exile became a thing outside him that could be discarded (1996:48). But Breytenbach's alienation/liberation from his people and country, and his parallel alienation/liberation from exile, was typically ambiguous. The evolving set of relationships with both home and exile, as fleshed out in the following examples, were to be characterised by both continuity and change.

The publication in 1986 of *End Papers*, a collection of pieces about South Africa written both before and after his imprisonment, was one staging post along the way:

> you came to the conclusion that you'd have to conclude this in-between slice of your existence - already out of prison but not yet arrived in paradise - that you'd have to back out of the hack standby role of 'Mr Ex-Detainee', 'Mr Anti-Apartheid', 'Mr Odd(er) Afrikaner' if you wanted to survive at all through creating... that above all you'd have to tip a goodbye hat to the personage of 'Mr Exile' and *move forward into new pastures* unrestricted by past and guilt and passport and belonging to death. Except that you're wedded forever to the cause of the South African people. Except that... But finally got around to ... putting together this record passing itself off as a book... To get it over and done with. As of now. *The last will and testament of the wandering African.*
> (1986:19)

The answer to the question of whether he was burned clean of any attachment to his ancestral earth was "Yes and no". Entanglement had simply become "more complex, my rooting more painful, my involvement deeper, my concern more acute" (208). But Breytenbach also refers to a desire to move out of this "monstrous interregnum, to move away from old attachments": "And the need to get it all behind you. You have identified with the agony for too long. The stage is bare" (29,225).

But the stage, of course, was by no means bare. *Memory of Snow and of Dust* was

published in 1989 and is a novel which remains autobiographical but treats exile as

something from which he had been released to the extent that it is a fictional reworking

of experience and ideas. The three main characters are exiles in Paris: Barnum is a

white South African writer whose exile has been interrupted by a period of

imprisonment in South Africa; Mano is a 'coloured' South African actor; and Meheret is

a part-time journalist from Ethiopia. Mano, in particular, personifies exile and

alienation: 'coloured', bastard, actor - "the imitator moving over foreign territory...

invisible... a transit point, an impersonation - better still, a translation" (1989:24) - a

tortured mix of revolutionary and artist. Breytenbach's own experience of exile is

dispersed between his characters and used to link individual and national fate with their

perceived universal implications.[12] Barnum states: "'We humans are now a foreign race,

ear-marked by absence, and the absurdity of our lives reverberates in us'" (63). Exile,

like imprisonment, becomes a universal condition, a state of being.

This understanding of exile is again inextricably interwoven with the process of artistic

creation. Barnum continues: "'The magic of the writer is that he can shape this absence

and then slip into the skin of his making. And what if writing were the art of selling the

skin of absence?'"; but also refers to the need to "'break through the screen of

absence!'"(63,87). The writer can concoct and discard lives, take on the attributes of a

God with no responsibilities, to ensure his/her own survival. Barnum again: "'I can

create people out of paper and ink, from thin air... making them dance the way I want

them to... plotting their destinies for them... killing them off. You could say they are as

many sacrificial goats dying in my place. As long as I can kill and describe the killing, I

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[12] Breytenbach has written elsewhere: "Exile teaches you about individual fate with universal implications - because it is eternal and has always been with us: we are all dimly aware of our incompleteness, of the thick veils of illusion in which we are draped" (1996:47, also see 1992:59).

shall be alive'" (62). Parts of Breytenbach, older versions, previous 'I's, other selves, die and are resurrected throughout his writings. Much can be learnt from the way in which fictional characters and selves who share the writer's burden of exile survive or pay with their lives/deaths for the author's survival (see Milbauer 1985).

Soon after the publication of *Memory of Snow and of Dust*, in early 1990, South Africa entered its political transition to democracy. What does such an era imply for the troubled, eccentric exile? *Return to Paradise* is described by Breytenbach as the last part of a triptych, the other components of which are *A Season in Paradise* and *True Confessions*. Its focus is another three month trip to South Africa, in 1991, under the auspices of the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa (IDASA). A profound sense of pilgrimage to the intimate and familiar - "This is my world, my voice fits precisely in these patterns of speech, my eyes see the same aloes the ancestors did" (1993:168): "It is the heritage you [father] left me, an inner presence, the sliding distances to which I belong, the reverberations etching my dreams" (177) - is again countered by the feeling that he is a foreigner, a stranger. With the death of his parents there is no longer a house/home. The past is "[a]nother country, another life" (186). Tracing his family genealogy at one point, Breytenbach exclaims: "'Give me back to myself!'" (162). He can still neither stay nor leave; doesn't know if he is coming or going.

> Why did I come back? Nostalgia, unfinished business, loose ends, to complete the incomplete, for annihilation, deathwish. Why will I not return to stay? Too late now. Foreigner here... Bitter dreams. No roots. Attachment too painful. Deathwish[...] (162)

In the familiar cycle of beginnings and endings, openings and closures, arrivals and departures, the emphasis is on the latter half of the binaries. Breytenbach's private South

African world is slowly dying, increasingly overwhelmed by the country's seemingly irreparably ugly public face.

Breytenbach describes himself as of, or at least previously of, the ANC, as an anarchist, and as having run out of convictions. During the 1980s he largely withdrew from involvement in organisational politics. He felt that he personally and the revolution had been betrayed. The forces of liberation had learnt too much - corruption, ideological dogmatism, lying and self-dillusion, a lack of democratisation - from the oppressor. Breytenbach himself was regarded as contaminated by all sides. As a political identity, he has chosen the role of eternal dissident, defining himself in negatives, "in absences and hollows", as against and in opposition to (74,196). In relation to the ANC and the new dispensation, Breytenbach has talked of dissent as a manifestation of critical loyalty, of loyalty as vigilant opposition, and of a collaboration which is conditional and based on principled criticism (1996:79,82,86, also 150). There is still much to admire in Breytenbach's vigorous independence of mind and in his determination to speak out about the unpalatable and the controversial. Fervent critiques of the unholy trinity of politics, state and power; an unwillingness to condone/accept last minute conversions during the death throes of the old regime; a hostility towards the unseemly haste to forgive and forget; the frankly expressed view that one hegemony is simply replacing another: all these are genuine concerns. But Breytenbach ignores the wisdom of his own comment that "only a fool would pretend to understand comprehensively what South Africa is really about, or be objective and far-sighted enough to glimpse its future course" (1993:xiv).

The partial picture is consistently taken and inflated into the whole. Incredibly, he can identify virtually nothing positive or constructive in the transition from apartheid to

majority rule.[13] Less laudable tendencies that have always been present in his work have become its dominant trajectory. The negativity of the eternal dissident is exemplified by a flailing anger, bitterness and cynicism, by relentless and destructive sniping - at exiles and expatriates, Afrikaners, the ANC and particularly the SACP, at critics, writers and intellectuals, and assorted others - by trivial superficiality, tedious caricature and irrelevant and crass heckling. Breytenbach truculently destroys the sand castle being built on the beach and walks away. He has neither cause nor vision. The drive to burn bridges and wilfully (self-)destruct appears absolute: his almost genetic rebelliousness is typified by an apparent delight in the accumulation of enemies:

> The line of my life as indicated here - a warped thread in the complex
> cloth of a much larger tale - seems to be woven against the woof of
> Government and State, the Afrikaner establishment and the new
> politically correct orthodoxy, the exile community of professional
> victims, and finally the ANC. It has been my pleasure to disagree with
> the living and the dead. (xiv-xv)

> I lost my friends and my sense of direction, I discarded my dreams, I
> scuttled my chances of participating in the National Reconciliation... I
> forfeited the repose of belonging to 'my country' with 'my own people', I
> deformed my past and destroyed my future. What freedom! (217, also
> 209)

Alongside Breytenbach's private creative discourse in which he conducts a dialogue with his own demons is a parallel public creative discourse in which few are now omitted from the voices against which he speaks in a no longer hidden contestatory

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[13] Further reflections on the transition are contained in Breytenbach 1996:7-9,20-37,74-87,100-5,142-58.

dialogue. The dialogue has become a rant and the process is characterised by exclusion and isolation. The brilliant aphorisms; the self-consciousness and -criticism; the wonderfully moving passages written about his mother and father (145-6,174-81), about friends such as Uys Krige (141-6), and about the South African and African landscape; his deep ambivalence towards the Afrikaner people drawn with greater sympathy and attachment (also 1996:32), and a more generous embrace of his family: all these things are present/remain, but they are no longer enough. Words weave ever tightening, ultimately suffocating, circles of selfhood. The worlds of others are inaccessible to him.

What, then, of art and politics? Or, indeed, of responsibility? Breytenbach's world has become one in which there is a fundamental incompatibility between politics, which "presumes (upon) power and must therefore posit non-transformation to ensure the mediocrity of control", and revolution, which is "inserted in the 'acting process' of creation which is an undoing" (218).[14] This quarantining of politics divorces it from mechanisms of change. Structures of power are depicted as resilient and irreversible, as inherently corrupt and oppressive. The often repeated question, "What happened to the revolution?", is enveloped in a mood of fatalistic resignation and determined pessimism. "Things have fallen apart", "[t]he situation at 'home' will continue deteriorating" (109,221). There will be no fundamental change. The future is bleak. "So where does that leave me? Where do I stand? What is my politics?" writes Breytenbach elsewhere: "It may shock you when I say I find this personal *tabula rasa*, this zero degree of functionality, rather exhilarating" (1996:104, also 71-3,86,95,105).

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[14] For Breytenbach, revolution and creativity/art/writing share a potential for radical transformative change, for extending and transgressing limits; in this regard they are, in essence, fundamentally different from politics. "Writing which aims at transforming awareness can be about searching (for) the margins to stretch the limits; politics however moves down the centre from compromise to collusion to corruption" (1996:104). On the relationship between politics and art, see 1996:7-8,10-19,65-6,71-3,94-105.

The most consistent component of Breytenbach's pessimism is the violence racking

South Africa. He talks of the ANC and National Party "gradually imposing a 'stability'

laced with blood" (1993:xiv). Violence is recorded through barrages of brutality taken

from newspaper reports. It is in Natal that this vision of apocalypse finds its most

poignant source and vindication (200-5). It is a "war zone" complete with its "killing

fields" and "pogrom areas". The war is pervasive yet invisible, the perpetrators are

known but cannot be stopped, the reality is ethnic cleansing and refugees, a young life

is described as "a scorched area of screaming numbness" (203), peacemakers are

rendered incoherent. Breytenbach provides, as he himself observes, a litany of violence

- "The land is awash in blood" (204) - but nothing else. "There is nothing one can do. So

what does one do? Continue!" (202). Again the truths of his account are insidiously

generalised and projected into the future: "I am looking at the future and it chills me to

the bone" (201).

During the 1980s Breytenbach was still selectively politically active. As he puts it, he

was "lucky enough to be of some assistance in breaking down the walls of taboo

between 'inside' and 'outside'" (xiv). Most significantly, he helped facilitate the first

major meeting between Afrikaner intellectuals from within the country and the ANC in

Dakar, Senegal, in 1987, and was involved again when, in 1989 at Victoria Falls in

Zimbabwe, a meeting took place between Afrikaans writers and the ANC.[15] Although

Breytenbach's claims for these events are on occasion grandiose - of the Dakar

conference he states: "We were putting in motion a process that would decisively alter

the history of confrontation between black and white[...]" (17) - they were

groundbreaking and courageous events. But as the division between inside and outside

became less stark, mediators were no longer needed. Beyond these events numerous

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[15] The proceedings of the Victoria Falls conference are recorded in a volume appropriately called *Crossing Borders* (A. Coetzee and Polley eds. 1990). The ANC in exile met a succession of delegations from various interest groups in South Africa during the second half of the 1980s.

gatherings and journeys - both South African and African - are woven into the text of *Return to Paradise*. They thereby extend the scope of the journey in time and space, and mesh together the past and the present - "the story is neither of the past nor in the present but winds its way through words in a lost time" (xv) - South Africa and an elsewhere dominated by Africa.

This is a story about a journey home within the journeys of a decade within a life as journey. "The original text is a journey" (2). Breytenbach talks of having "become accustomed to a nomadic existence" (xiii) and it is a wandering that affects all areas of his life. "This book was written on the wing" (xv). "It is a story of the crossing... It is a story of the passage..." (218). In perpetual transit, his eye is trained on displacement and mobility, on the nomad, the refugee, the migrant, the exile, the traveller. His is a world variously on the move. The contingency of identity, for example, is explained through the notion of travel:

> Perhaps the deciding factor is not *who* you are, but *where* you find
> yourself. Which already implies that identity is circumstantial and
> relative, an idea which only gets fleshed out in the search for positioning
> in relationship to the Other... through the recognition of differences. It is
> through shifts and attempts at fixing, as in olden days when one tried to
> plot a course with an eye on stars which themselves were always on the
> move, that you realise you are alive... Fernando Pessoa has claimed: 'To
> live is impossible; to travel perhaps[...]'... It is also said that in olden days
> you travelled so slowly that you were no longer the foreigner at your
> point of arrival[...] (73-4)

There are many aspects of Breytenbach's world view - the emphasis on the journey/travel, diversity, transformation, on the in-between/hybrid and borders, on the

shifting, unstable 'I' - that resonate with that of postcolonialism. In one of his essays, for example, Breytenbach talks of erasing boundaries and extending limits specifically with reference to awareness of Africa, but the notion has broader application.

> It is another contradiction that exile should be a pointed experience and yet, in a world of specialization, be promoting lateral vision and parallel thinking. You have to think yourself out of a hole. Indeed, the experience and products of exile could be a dissolvent of border consciousness. It could be a way of reconnoitring, shifting and extending the limits. (1996:47, also 10-19)

Illustrations of the in-between/hybrid include the South African population/nation and Breytenbach's belief that Afrikaans is a creole language. Their narrative influence extends through content, form, and the blend of fact and fiction: "All meaning is of course *métissage*, a new mixture of existing truths" (1993:xiii).[16] But to study Breytenbach, like Modisane, through this particular theoretical lens is essentially to be struck by the profound ambiguity of postcolonial discourse in the context of political contestation, and by the centrality of components of its vision to a comprehensive alienation and a political incoherence/incapacitation. The need to unpack the potential and pitfalls of postcolonial theory is illustrated by the fact that Breytenbach's attempted negotiation of binaries - self and 'other', writer and activist, resistance and co-option, life and death, continuity and change, fact and fiction, home and exile: denying oppositions, reading one in the other and going beyond - is a source of liberation but also, and increasingly, of estrangement and confinement.

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[16] On the/a middle ground/way, see 87,158,161.

Breytenbach's personal journey has a, perhaps increasingly tenuous, place of anchorage in (South) Africa: a point of departure, and certain "constants... [t]his earth was the first to speak. I have been pronounced once and for all" (75). But the journey has lost the purpose and direction of exile. Although the motif of exile remains, as universal condition (182) and in the characters/selves - Mr Ixele, Elixe, Walker - that people his story, Breytenbach has been cut adrift from its certainties and sanctuaries. "The more you travel, the less chance you have of arriving" (76).[7] The journey has become a catalogue of people known and met, of meetings and conferences and world travel. "I'm aware of the superficiality - from airport to dinner table to lecture room" (217). It is the superficiality of the former exile growing into the clothes of the disorientated, estranged recidivist returnee passing through. "I found that one could travel from language to language, from death to life and from exile to home, but not translate from one into the other" (218). Again there is the suggestion of an irrevocable rift, the dream of shedding an old, superfluous, skin.

> It is time for me to return where I came from. Am I happy now? It is of
> no importance. I came, I saw, I was confused... Anyway, I have finally
> become redundant. Wasn't that the true purpose? The man with self-
> respect should leave when he wants to. Nothing particularly noble in
> that... And then? Perhaps it will be like death. Certainly the spring which
> made me react at opportune and inopportune moments will be broken.
> I'll be rootless... a wandering monk... (209-10, also 217)[18]

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[17] Elsewhere, Breytenbach states: "Perhaps the long walk to freedom knows no final destination" (1994a:162); and in a related observation: "For me, more and more, writing is about travelling and not about destinations" (1996:95).

[18] Breytenbach's farewell to exile, and to South Africa, continues (1996:7,25-6,86,100,106-16).

Breytenbach's is a journey that increasingly takes place under the shadow of death. Not only is South Africa a country deep in corpses - "One picks up death in this country" (30) - but alongside the anonymous dead, the journey takes in dead writers, notably Uys Krige to whom the book is dedicated, pilgrimages to grave-sides, and the experiences of death in exile, often of those who died struggling to get home. "The ferrying of corpses... Moving the corpse... Carrying the corpse... Holding the corpse... Corpses floundering in the flush, tossing and bobbing like words which the watery throat cannot pronounce, these are shadows of my imagination" (122,125,126,129,132, also 73). And, finally, Breytenbach's relationship with South Africa remains a form of living death. He writes that "completing life is to fill remembrances with collected death" (72). Each book, each suicide note, grows heavier with its weight.

Breytenbach is an Afrikaner, a South African, an African, a Frenchman, a European, a cosmopolitan and very much an individual. He writes in Afrikaans, English and French.[19] In an interview in December 1991, and elsewhere (including in *Return to Paradise*, if in a qualified past tense (xiii)), he has described himself as "'a Whitish, Afrikaans-speaking South African African temporarily living outside the continent'" (1992:57). As the personification of the state of exile, "it is difficult if not impossible for [him] to indicate and describe the state of non-exile, of belonging, of integration" (1986:71). To be an exiled writer is "to be living *elsewhere...* to be writing *differently...*" (211). The sense of non-belonging has been rendered complete by the discovery that he

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   To my knowledge a study remains to be done on the implications for Breytenbach of linguistic homelessness, and/or the ways in which each of these languages have become informed by the others within a language matrix of creole, bastard tongues, and/or of the extent to which he writes, in whatever dominant language, in distinctive private dialects of often opaque and multiple meaning, and/or the degree to which the linguistic results can be attributed to exile. In this vein, George Steiner, in an essay on "extraterritoriality", talks of "the condition of multilingual imagining, of internalized translation, of the possible existence of a private mixed idiom 'beneath,' 'coming before' the localization of different languages in the articulate brain" (1972:10, see 3-21). This too, of course, is a reformulation of barriers and boundaries and a mode of travel. According to one interview, Breytenbach wrote part of *Return to Paradise* in Afrikaans before translating it into English, and then started to write in English to save time. It therefore represents something of a movement between languages (in Viljoen 1995:8-9).

does not belong at home, by the (non-)resolution of return. Exile has become existential, a condition, and in the process universal and total. But, paradoxically, Breytenbach's exile became permanent at the moment when he ceased to be an exile at all; his displacement/migration can no longer be understood under the rubric of politics and place. Home and exile - and again, the same could be said for imprisonment - as idea and rhetorical device/capital, to be selectively appropriated and manipulated, have overwhelmed their political and geographical counterparts. Accumulating exclusions, alienated and adrift - "The political person doesn't easily comprehend the notion of drifting" (1993:183) - Breytenbach's journey is now that of the migrant. What light does such a definitional shift shed on his past and work?

One of Breytenbach's poems contains the lines: "each journey has its time-bound reach and intention / just as the verse on the line must know the point of its turning" ("transit", 1988:60). But Breytenbach's own journey, and its narrative telling, has missed or lost its point of turning and, with it, its direction and purpose. Each journey/story is another return to sniff the same old sour vomit, a further aggravation of the unhealed wound, a final farewell to people and places jilted many times before, one last look in the mirror.

> It is better to write one's memoirs when still young, when one can yet
> strike resonances from the unknown. Passing time brings only shrivelled
> yesterdays and a bitterness to the tongue. For me it is too late... My
> journeys have become embarrassing confessions. (1993:189)

Breytenbach's creativity has been both inspired and maimed by the duality and paradox of exile. And the creative process of unravelling and reknitting the life fabric goes on. "Of course the book doesn't stop here... Where to? One day I should write a book about exile..." (219,222).

Es'kia Mphahlele: The Wanderer and the Premature Return

Mphahlele left South Africa for Nigeria in 1957 at the age of 37. *Down Second Avenue* was written on the cusp of departure and arrival. It is the story of the alienation and exile within South Africa that drove him to seek exile beyond its borders. Mphahlele states, "I have been moving up and down Second Avenue since I was born and never dreamt I should ever jump out of the nightmare" (1971:159). He was progressively alienated from family and home by education, as teacher and writer, by his rejection of Christianity, and finally by exile. During 1952 Mphahlele was banned from teaching after orchestrating opposition to the introduction of 'Bantu Education'. There followed a five year period of uncertainty and frustrated professional nomadism. Mphahlele has described himself as a pathological teacher, and the same could be said about his writing: "conditions were crushing me and I was shrivelling in the acid of my bitterness; I was suffocating", largely because he was "'contributing nothing'... 'I can't teach and I want to teach, I can't write here and I want to write'" (200,210). Like many exiles, Mphahlele has written and rewritten his early South African life in relation to his need for a viable past and the changing demands of the present (see Chapman 1989:218): "How nostalgic one can become for even those things, those people, those places which inflicted such savage pain" (Chabani Manganyi 1984:61). Exile was to prove as much a jump into as a jump out of a nightmare.

The pattern of movement, transience and searching established within South Africa acquired another dimension when Mphahlele sought sanctuary in Nigeria. Mphahlele completed *Down Second Avenue* on the momentum of arrival. It was a time of unwinding into the freedoms of exile, of release and adventure, of being uncommitted and free of allegiance, which nurtured a love for Africa and for its promise. Mphahlele has claimed that it was Nigeria in particular that restored Africa to him. While the momentum of arrival in Nigeria lasted, exile was "exquisite and enriching" (1984:247).

But the euphoria was never uncomplicated and waned rapidly. His feelings from early

exile are captured in the poem "Exile in Nigeria", which illustrates the ambiguities of

learning to adjust to freedom: "windows open... that were shut so long... in the painful

south of the south" at the beginning of what was already acknowledged to be "a long

long road" (in Couzens and Patel eds. 1982:167-174). "Three years in Nigeria. Three

years of adjustment, and still no solution in sight", Mphahlele writes elsewhere, and he

continues: "A hard fact to live with: that once an exile, always one" (1962:223).[20]

Most of the first decade of exile was spent in Africa, with the exception of a two year

period from 1961 to 1963 in Paris working as Director of the African Programme for

the Congress for Cultural Freedom.[21] Mphahlele grew into exile as the African continent

grew into independence and various literary renaissances. He almost seemed to fall

from one literary renaissance into another: from the *Drum* generation in South Africa, to

Nigeria and West Africa in the late 1950s and Kenya in the early 1960s. He entered a

cauldron of debate about issues such as negritude, of which he was a dedicated and

controversial critic, and through his writing, teaching and activities for the Congress for

Cultural Freedom was centrally placed to contribute to the wider renaissance. During

the 1960s, as something of a champion of and ambassador for African culture

Mphahlele travelled widely in the continent and elsewhere. His influence extended to

establishing, organising, securing funding for, editing, participating in/contributing to a

range of initiatives including cultural centres and conferences, anthologies, journals

and other publications.

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[20] For a discussion of Mphahlele's Nigerian short stories, see Mzamane 1989.

[21] Mphahlele, and others, did not know at the time that the CIA was channelling funds into the organisation (see Mphahlele 1984:90-1, Chabani Manganyi 1983:236, Nkosi 1990:33-4).

Mphahlele moved to Kenya in 1963 under the auspices of the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Two periods of professional frustration, political anger and creative drought in Kenya and later in Zambia created a rupture with his native continent: "Kenya severed the bond and set me looking elsewhere for a possible home - outside Africa. The honeymoon with Africa came to an end" (Chabani Manganyi 1983:245). After two years in Denver, in the U.S.A. , Mphahlele returned to Africa to become Senior Lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Zambia. It was to be a 21 month period of total frustration, an utter waste. Accumulated frustrations from his exile in Africa were given their sharpest focus in Zambia. Africa was restored to Mphahlele by personal freedom, African independence and a widespread literary renaissance, only to be taken away by a realisation of the limits and fragility of an exile's freedom and security, disillusionment with independent Africa, and a drying up of his artistic well-springs.

In between these two periods when Africa was pulled from under his feet Mphahlele experienced exile in America. During his two year stay at the University of Denver he acquired a PhD in Creative Writing, which provided temporary relief from an otherwise ongoing creative slump. Mphahlele wrote the autobiographical novel, *The Wanderers*, as a dissertation for the doctoral programme. In this next instalment of a life in progress, moving from exile at home into exile abroad - "I travel my story..." (in Duerden and Pieterse eds. 1972:110) - the journey within and without both overlaps with and is taken beyond Second Avenue by the protagonist, Timi Tabane, who is clearly based upon Mphahlele himself. *The Wanderers* introduced various Mphahlelian exilic themes that were to become familiar touchstones in his writing, most notably, the exile as wanderer: "the darkness of exile the long long road, a road full of wanderers, wanderers of no fixed abode" (1971a:204). It also introduced what were to be the subterranean mediums of exilic expression throughout his wandering: music, especially jazz and the blues, as a medium capturing the essence of the exile condition - "the long

black song" - and recurring dreams, of the northern Transvaal of his childhood and of pursuit. Tabane acknowledges an endemic restlessness and rootlessness: "... I recognise the urge to keep going. You see, once you have left your native shores, you continue to circle up there, like a bird in a storm. Only, the storm is inside yourself this time" (263-4). In the preface to the 1984 edition of the novel, Mphahlele writes: "I intentionally left the ending of this novel open: no resolution; only suspended disbelief; hard questions; disruption of family life; rejection and acceptance of black aliens in African countries; the continued attachment of these to their former colonial masters..." (1984a:6). This most autobiographical of novels provided a promise of further instalments; self-creation was to be the project of a lifetime.

At a personal level, Mphahlele did not wander alone but with a family 'caravan'. *The Wanderers* analyses the increasingly alienated relationship between Timi and his son Felang in a manner that parallels Mphahlele's relationship with his eldest son, Anthony. As becomes clear in this novel and in subsequent writing, children and family relationships became a victim of rootlessness, of perpetual transience and movement, of the tug-of-war between family and the peer group and environment of alien cultures, particularly later in America. There was no common culture or past. Generations within the family experienced exile differently. Home and exile meant different things, assimilation was resisted to different degrees, the balance and nature of profit and loss in exile varied. The result was a tremendous sense of loss:

> They had seen too much in too short a time... we were caught up in a
> spiritual web in which a value took precedence over people - our own
> family of five children. What we saw in their personal struggles was
> shattering because in a way it showed us what exile could do to us. But,
> and here is the rub, there was no way of seeing it clearly without being

thrown off balance... it was a love without understanding... Exile turned

the family unit into a battle front... (Chabani Manganyi 1983:264-5)[22]

In *The Wanderers* the death of Felang while fighting for the Congress in exile is linked

to Timi's desire to leave Africa. The novel also registers the evolution of a

disenchantment with post-independence Africa: "Africa is still a white man's paradise,

not a black exile's" (1971a:304); "Where's the roar of triumph, the triumph of black

rule?" (311). Such feelings prompt Timi, as they had prompted Mphahlele, to seek to

leave the continent. Mphahlele wrote of the fictional death of a son and the symbolic

death of a continent perhaps in an attempt to keep the real relationships between

himself and son/continent alive, but equally plausibly, perhaps, in recognition that the

relationships had died or been irretrievably changed. In relationships with both his

offspring and Africa a pattern of exile and return, rejection/separation and

reconciliation/reunion, was in the process of being established.

After leaving Zambia, Mphahlele experienced a second sojourn in America. It lasted for

seven years during which he was based at the Universities of Denver and Philadelphia.

While the period was one of academic and intellectual stimulation, the exilic

momentum from Nigeria had long since dissipated, and this was notable as the era of

longing for and ultimately planning for the return home. Mphahlele came out of a

further fictional drought with the completion of the novel *Chirundu* in 1975. *Chirundu*

is an angry synthesis of Mphahlele's frustrations as an exile in Africa, and in Zambia in

particular. The compromise and hypocrisy of Africa's ongoing confrontation with its

colonial inheritance and neo-colonial present in education, law, politics and religion is

mercilessly attacked. Corruption of a moral, personal and political nature is rife. In such

a context refugees and exiles are refuse, to be dealt with at the whim of the political

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[22] Powerful testimony to the fractured dynamics of family life are contained in Mphahlele's letters to his daughter Teresa (in Chabani Manganyi 1984).

expediency of the moment. Mphahlele's indictment of post-independent Africa draws on his personal experience and the exile condition in the context of the broader canvas he paints of political and moral malaise.[23] The novel, while still autobiographical, is a more complex fictional undertaking than *The Wanderers*. Perhaps appropriately, this novel of disillusionment with African independence returned with him to South Africa, as preparation and warning (1979a).

In 1975 Mphahlele, aged 55, entered a period of crisis which is most poignantly captured by the twinned concepts of the glass-house and the 'tyranny of place':

> every so often you hit a certain age when you pause on the road of this life to take stock... I live in a glass-house, the one I ran into eighteen years ago. It's roomy but borrowed. I can live in it as long as I pay the rent and as long as I don't start kicking things about, scratching or staining the walls, I'm told. ... I could, if I chose, renew my lease indefinitely in this glasshouse, quite forget, write off my past, take my chances on new territory. I shall not. Because I'm a helpless captive of place and to come to terms with the tyranny of place is to have something to live for that saves me from stagnation, anonymity... A little while longer, you keep saying to numb the pain... The glass around me registers again on my senses, reminds me that I have been looking at the landscape outside so hard the glass dissolved, merged into the light out there... So much to learn to endure or just to know at fifty-five, so much to affirm, so much to taunt the adventurer. (1984:159-65)

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[23] See Mphahlele 1982, for his thoughts on the phenomenon of exile within Africa.

Since 1966 all Mphahlele's work had been banned in South Africa. The loss of place and absence of a native audience condemned him to an irreparable erosion of his South African identity, to creativity as reflection without presence, echo without origin, and to self-narration into a void, as interminable monologue. He was in an insecure, vulnerable glass-house. His place was elsewhere.

Mphahlele resisted assimilation and integration in his creative work, and more generally, in all of his places of exile, but particularly in America. Drawn from Mphahlele's African experience, where his fingers were burnt on several occasions, was the conclusion that he could not fight other people's cultural battles in search of commitment, trade his identity for borrowed fears, that causes could not be promiscuously traded merely on the basis of colour. This, in part, was the essential distancing of the glass-house in which he lived. Resistance to an irrevocable assimilation and/or involvement elsewhere was due to the extra dimension that made his cause and perspective his own, the 'tyranny of place': "The tyranny of place, the tyranny of time[....] Grassroots. The muck, the smell, the fortitude, despair, endurance. Always the sounds begin again. Experience and the place that contains it[....]" (20). This was a tyranny that had profound creative implications: "Some people say they can write novels in which place does not matter... They can create a theatre in the mind. This kind of experiment goes against everything I hold sacred in the composition of fiction. The tyranny of place is something I submit to" (168).[24]

For Mphahlele, such a condition - caught between the glass-house and the tyranny of place - eventually became untenable. He could not be satisfied nor function effectively in a world composed solely of ideas. A plundered memory had been exhausted, it could not carry the search for the fiction writer any more. The life project, what Chabani

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[24] Also on the tyranny of place, see Mphahlele 1979,1981.

Manganyi calls the search for the novelist, became increasingly desperate. By the early to mid-1970's this symbolic death could no longer be contained by a creative solution. Paradoxically this crisis accompanied the completion of Mphahlele's most ambitious work of fiction, *Chirundu*. Was the novel and its setting an admission of being irretrievable cut adrift from a South African context and audience? Was it the final act by which he, like the leaf eating caterpillar, destroyed the very prop, in this case memory, on which his creativity depended? Was Mphahlele simply tired of raking over the same soil and battling with the same interface between autobiography and fiction? "How long could I survive the curse, as a writer, of leaving my finger-prints on everything that I wrote?" (Chabani Manganyi 1983:289). There was a sense of death closing in (Mphahlele, "Death" and "Death II", 1981a:274-7,283-9). Whatever Mphahlele's motives in the manipulation of death in *The Wanderers*, in *Chirundu* not only was Africa written to death but so was the novel genre.

> I came to fear death in America most passionately and this then became
> the supreme metaphor for the exiled writer wading through his fifties.
> Not only a metaphor of death, death also became the subjective kingpin,
> spiritual reality - the supreme paradox. *I want to go home to die[...] I am*
> *dead.* True and false, for a return home would be an act of reclamation.
> The first death, the death of the novelist, had announced itself...
> (Chabani Manganyi 1983:289)

The desire to return achieved a kind of irrepressible momentum, a pattern of inevitability, during the 1970s. In May 1976, after 19 years in exile, Mphahlele was granted a visa to visit South Africa for three weeks to attend a conference at the Black Studies Institute in Johannesburg. The joy of homecoming - "What a homecoming...." (1984:171-95) - was juxtaposed with the Soweto uprisings. For Mphahlele the urge to return permanently was strengthened. Tired of restlessness, insecurity, and

statelessness, he wanted self-reclamation, self-renewal, rebirth and to die on ancestral soil. The call of the ancestors, community and place became irresistible; the search for self had become a search for community which would give the teacher and writer identity, and in which relevance and commitment were possible within a known cultural framework. Just as an inability to write had spurred Mphahlele's exile so it contributed to his decision to return to South Africa. In Philadelphia what remained of the Mphahlele caravan - none of the children were to set up permanent residence in South Africa - packed their bags for the final homecoming in 1977.[25] He arrived as he had left, an unemployed black male, with nothing more than permission to enter the country. Homecoming was a profound, even blind, act of faith. It replaced one form of exile with another, the familiar "spiritual exile" of South Africa (Chabani Manganyi 1983:29).

Mphahlele's homecoming was laced with controversy, particularly among his fellow exiles. It was seen as a betrayal of solidarity that compromised the exile community, and as an event that would have propaganda value for the regime. Criticism was directed at a decision based unashamedly on self-interest, at a return on a "government ticket" (Chabani Manganyi 1983:13), and at his willingness to work within the system, notably its bantustan and 'Bantu Education' components, with particular venom directed at the "intellectual dishonesty" (1984:212) of being prepared to teach under the system of education which he had condemned in the past. The political situation had if anything deteriorated since his departure. It was a homecoming fraught with risk and confined by conditions. Mphahlele maintained his right to teach African students wherever he could do so and to work within a system he abhorred. He, like Breytenbach, had ceased to be involved in overt/organisational politics while in exile and in justifying his return took a further step back from politics by attempting to remove his reasons for exile and return from the political domain into that of the more

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[25] For Mphahlele's reflections on the positive and negative repercussions of exile for his children, see, for example, Bernstein 1994:54-5.

narrowly personal. Although Mphahlele underwrote his exile with the importance of place, by draining it of a political dimension he became, in a sense, a retrospective migrant. Nevertheless, he picked up the badge of oppression as he was recycled by the bureaucratic procedures of apartheid. His experience at the University of the North, where due to political intervention his application for the chair of English was unsuccessful, and in Lebowa more generally, Mphahlele's 'homeland', where he worked as a civil servant for the government of Lebowa as an Inspector of Education, before gaining an academic post at the University of Witwatersrand, was a

> staged political humiliation. The trap was set and I walked straight into
> it... I find that after various circular movements I can rationalise it and
> live with it. The conclusion, however, fails to give me the sense of
> release which I experienced after I had made the decision to return...
> Everyone... is compromised. It is a matter of style and degree... In exile,
> it was the literary compromise that bothered me. After my return it is the
> existential and political compromise... What may yet redeem the
> situation for me is that unlike the literary compromise which is
> essentially a personal idiom, the existential compromise is a national
> dilemma. (Chabani Manganyi 1983:296)

Elsewhere Mphahlele claims, "There are no victories, no heroes, in this process of resolving the compromise that exile is, or in the silent refusal to contemplate a resolution" (1984:248). These widening circles of accommodation and rationalisation become increasingly convoluted.

In 1984 the second instalment of Mphahlele's autobiography, *Afrika My Music*, unravelling the wanderer's life in exile from Nigeria to homecoming(s), was published. Like *Down Second Avenue* it was written partially at home and partially in exile; the

exilic cusp was again an autobiographical moment. What this otherwise disappointing book captures most effectively are the co-ordinates and evolution of Mphahlele's 1970s crisis, which ultimately came to encapsulate for him the essence of the exile condition, and the joys and turmoil of homecoming. It was left to a biography, *Exiles and Homecomings* by Chabani Manganyi, published in 1983 and written largely in the first person, to impose its title as the dominant paradigm governing Mphahlele's life. Descriptions of his early years at home could just as easily apply to adult life in exile:

> many changes, transitions and disruptions of one kind or another occur.
> In my case, there had been several such discontinuities and changes... It
> was not the physical movement from pillar to post that mattered so much
> as the emotional swings that accompanied these changes. (41)

Homecoming for Mphahlele ended years of restless and frustrated movement abroad, and despite its problems and ambiguities brought with it a sense of continuity, renewal, and belonging, and a sense of place; it restored to him a community and an audience and bequeathed a sense of fulfilment and completion. After his return the prohibitions on his writings were, in stages, lifted. Mphahlele's most recent novella, *Father Come Home*, moves towards the completion of the creative cycle, the simultaneous rediscovery of self and creative writer, following the completion of the physical cycle of exile and return. It is the most profoundly fictional of Mphahlele's longer prose and his fingerprints, although still present, leave a much fainter imprint. The story is set largely in northern Transvaal in the aftermath of the 1913 Land Act, and is still a story of exiles and homecomings although wandering is now occasioned by migrancy, removals, family separation and reunion. Certain stock Mphahlelian concerns - such as the indomitableness of African women and the importance of the ancestors - are brought home again. It is the story of a father and son, of a family divided and reunited. Such themes resonate throughout Mphahlele's life. Towards the end of the novel Maredi

Tumalo, the restless wanderer, the boy who searched for his father now himself an old man, says: "'When you have grown away from a place you only begin to long for it in your old age...'" (Mphahlele 1984b:93). When he dies, like Mphahlele, he seeks to join his ancestors.[26]

Conclusion

The continued drifting of Breytenbach could hardly be in greater contrast to Mphahlele's return to his childhood and family home in the northern Transvaal. While the former will return, within the conventional politically-determined trajectory of exile, too late if at all, the latter, within the same trajectory, returned too soon. The idea of exile/homecoming, uprooted from the initial parameters of place and politics, has thoroughly permeated the life and imagination of both men. It is arguable that Breytenbach and Mphahlele had their status as permanent exiles clarified and entrenched at the moment when their exile was effectively over, through its unorthodox (non-)resolution; and that simultaneously their exile, past and present, was revealed as/became something else, something altogether less politically committed within the lexicon of displacement and migration: retrospective migrancy. Exile drove them out of its harsh and jealously guarded terrain *and* became more complete, imposed itself as a condition, a state of mind, universal, permanent. Either way, the moment of return engendered further dimensions of alienation. This violent and paradoxical un/remaking of identity, imagination and life work, although it may be unmasked elsewhere, is most obviously made manifest through the dilemma and ambiguities of return, at the juncture - possible, real, deferred - of homecoming.

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   For a discussion of the impact of return on the writing of Mphahlele, see Lindfors 1994:156-9.

It is important to acknowledge that the identity of permanent exile/retrospective migrant was forged in violent collaboration with the regime. Agents of this un/remaking of the exiled self included the various erosions and accretions of time, related changes in the nature and political/cultural capital of exile, evolving political beliefs, and more: but all such agents were rooted in the ongoing violence of the apartheid state. Furthermore, the violence of state-subject collaboration, of the contestation, dependence, complicity nexus, previously outlined in relation to Breytenbach - the 'other' and/as self - is now complemented by the violence of the state induced experiences of imprisonment and exile/homecoming, that for him are both over and eternal, continue in different ways to mould his identity and imagination, and by which he is written whilst he writes. The same could be said for Mphahlele in relation to exile/homecoming. A final set of actors within the ambit of violent collaboration were the already mentioned banning and censorship, which played an inestimable role in the formation and deformation of exile, and other, literatures.

Breytenbach and Mphahlele have been unravelling the same story, their own and that of their exile, for a lifetime. It is their life-work. Creatively in form and content, and experientially, exile is a process. Each new book is a beacon that lights up the journey. The life story becomes a sentence that will not end, an endless page that cannot be turned; these writers lay their lives, back to back and cover to cover, continually exploring new dimensions of exile, of decades spent impaled upon its paradoxes and contradictions. Repetition attempts to affirm a tangible and sustainable existence and the writing of a past and future in/onto an ambiguous present; enables the continuous un/remaking, most importantly of the self, in the context of the evolving demands of the present; and represents an attempt to reclaim/resuscitate life from the 'space of death' through writing. It is an agent of survival in the discursive void and an attempt to re-enter the frame of relevance. A large caste of characters and selves, an eclectic group of heroes and villains, tread the same path. They have been messengers of life and death,

sacrificed and substituted, heralds of danger and hope. They have provided a means of escape and/or simply carrying on.

In the exilic realm of living death the creative process itself is a journey: between autobiography and fiction, memory and forgetting, reality and the world of ideas, commitment and the self-serving, the fragment and the whole, home and exile, absence and presence, the past/future and the present, life and death, rootedness/confinement and liberation/alienation. Over time, however, the attrition of the journey takes its toll. Memory yields diminishing returns; the retellings, in conjunction with exile itself, lose their original direction and purpose in the drift away from politics and place; categories of movement and displacement begin to blur; the pendulum within the essential duality of creative life and death often swings decisively towards the latter. The ambiguous (non-)resolutions to exile chosen by both Breytenbach and Mphahlele indicate a desire to go beyond the strictures and limitations that it imposed upon their lives and work. While some writers seek a way out by variously shedding their exile and embracing other identities and imaginative terrains, others choose alternative identities and terrains from the start. For migrant writers the world is perceived as more of a space of life than of death: politics and place are more willingly jettisoned, creative and life transformations are generally easier, undertaken with a freer rein, a broader brush. One such writer in the South African context is Dan Jacobson.

Chapter 5: Dan Jacobson as Expatriate Writer: South Africa as Private Resource and the Literature of Multiple Exposure

"Literatures of Exile": "Literatures of Counter-Exile"

Claudio Guillén (1976) has described writing in which exile becomes its own subject matter as the "literature of exile". The "literature of counter-exile", in contrast, is that in which "exile is the condition but not the visible cause of an imaginative response often characterised by a tendency towards integration, increasingly broad vistas or universalism"; separation is incorporated insofar as it is triumphed over, enabling the writer to offer "wide dimensions of meaning that transcend the earlier attachment to place or native origin". Generally the writer moves from the former preoccupation to the latter. Andrew Gurr has plotted the dimensions of a similar transition quite meticulously. He identifies a pattern among exiled colonial writers who initially painstakingly reconstruct a vision of home in realistic prose fiction. Such a process can take a decade or more and only thereafter, "if the vision is achieved and the therapy works, does the writer emerge, truly detached, homeless and historyless... in Naipaul's gnomic phrase, 'in a free state'" (1981:11).

In an argument that is both related and different, the processes of alienation/liberation from home and heterogenisation can be said to be inevitable for all those subject to migration and displacement. But in the case of the exile they are resisted by the demands and responsibilities of politics and place, and hence occur begrudgingly, more slowly, almost as an admission of failure. For the migrant, expatriate and émigré, in contrast, they represent a tantalising and world-expanding exploration, embarked upon with more enthusiasm than trepidation, embraced as the key and path to success. The processes are, therefore, the result of a many-paced transition or translation. Taking the debate a stage further, the following adapts the previously discussed argument of

Hannerz concerning Sophiatown: in relation to perceptual worlds and modes of cultural production/reception, the migrant, it can be argued, is located where cross currents are strongest and where interactive processes produce the most striking new results. Cultural forms are often not only original, being neither entirely of one place nor of the other, but also more accessible from either location. Equally, it can be argued that such a hybrid, in-between position and production, is accessible from neither location, and as a result belongs to neither, is rejected by both.

The migrant is caught between contrasting and competing worlds, confronted with crossing over between them. Denis Hirson has written: "We belong to no single place, ours is the history of / those who cross over" ("The Long Distance South-African", 1992:6). Salman Rushdie describes migrants, "borne-across humans", as "metaphorical beings" (1991:278). The migrant is blessed with what Said has called "contrapuntal" awareness (1984:172, 1984a:55) and Rushdie labels "stereoscopic vision" (1991:19). Situated between worlds, in both and neither, fragmented and multiple, less than half but also more than double, such people occupy a space in which perceptions and worlds, home and abroad, inside and outside, the old and the new, can interchangeably be rewritten, superimposed, on one another. The most powerful image of this process is the double exposure of film.[1]

In the case of South Africa, to spurn the demands and responsibilities of exile was to run the risk of being labelled escapist and irrelevant, to disappear into the margins of South African literature and/or edge towards the mainstream of other national or international literatures. To avoid this fate, that which was gleaned from exile was typically projected back onto a South African context. However, reversing the process -

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[1] This idea is borrowed from the Russian émigré poet, Vladislav Khodasevich, as discussed by Brown (1984). A further relevant image, analysed by Stone, is that of pentimento (1982:265-324).

projecting South Africa and understandings and perceptions forged in South Africa onto a variously defined elsewhere - offered an alternative to the exile whose fading glance was forever homeward, and who invariably suffered the multiple erosions (of identity, of creativity, of being itself) of long term estrangement. A shifting of emphasis within the double exposure opened up fresh perspectives and new worlds. This discussion of Guillén, Gurr and the literature of multiple exposure situates the analysis which follows. Few South African writers can be, or indeed would want to be, located within creative transitions such as those outlined by Guillén and Gurr. Dan Jacobson, however, in interesting ways conforms with and departs from the trajectory outlined by both men, and is, amongst South African writers, furthest along its course.[2]

Going Round the Course Twice

Dan Jacobson's life has been caught up in both the Jewish and South African diasporas. He is a second generation South African of Eastern European Jewish descent who grew up in Kimberley. Following a first encounter with England in 1950, when he taught at a Jewish boys' school before returning to South Africa the following year, Jacobson has lived in London since 1954. For the adolescent Jacobson there was an essential unreality to his immediate surroundings while England, as frame of reference and seductive idea, had irresistible substance:

> My parents from one world, this constrained yet half-abandoned world
>
> around me, I read in book after book of yet another: of England, of
>
> Britain... As so many others have done... I found it wasn't the reality of

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[2] The definition of exile used by both Guillén and Gurr differs from that outlined in this thesis, in which their theories would be seen to be more applicable to the migrant, expatriate and émigré than the exile. Within this range of terminology, Dan Jacobson is most accurately defined as an expatriate writer. For Christopher Hope's reflections on Gurr, see 1989:93-5. The work of Peter Abrahams could also usefully be discussed within these paradigms.

the countries from which the books and movies came that I was compelled to doubt, but the reality of the country I lived in: this undescribed and uncertified place where not a single thing... was as other places were. Everything around us was without confirmation, without background, without credentials; there was something unreliable, left out, about the whole place, and hence about all of us, too. (1985:8-9)

Jacobson was subject to the shared feeling of "ambitious, young provincials": "the feeling that they are living in disguise in their own homeland; that they are positively disfigured by their surroundings, compelled to conceal their deepest natures from themselves and from everyone else; and that all this is going to be changed soon, somehow, elsewhere" (120). His descriptions of, and the status bestowed upon, both colony/province/periphery - barely half a country: "A colonial culture is one which has no memory" (1971:7) - and coloniser/metropole/centre, were inextricably bound up with their respective unreality and reality, and, in part, the product of a mind steeped in the latter's written word.[3] Unlike the exile, expelled from all they hold to be real into the unreal beyond, the journey of the expatriate, migrant, and émigré while often geographically the same, is imaginatively and ontologically the reverse.

Jacobson has described his desire to leave South Africa and settle in England as "really quite imperious": the political dispensation and cultural terrain in South Africa were depressing and stifling; to become a writer seemed an easier ambition to fulfil elsewhere. By venturing to London, into a chosen culture, Jacobson was participating in

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[3] And, it might be added, ignorant of the former's oral word and tradition. Furthermore, in literary terms, South Africa was not as barren as Jacobson suggests above as he himself has noted elsewhere (1971). On the unreal nature of South Africa also see Jacobson 1960. Christopher Hope has made numerous observations about South Africa's unreal, fictional quality; for example: "The real world... lay elsewhere, so we could not lay claim to a history, all we had were politics, and if you discounted the politics, all we had left were fictions" (1988:105, also 1984). For a reflection on similar beginnings but a very different resolution to this archetypal colonial dilemma, see Gordimer's "That Other World That was the World" (1995:114-34).

a particular kind of colonial narrative: "All this is one version of the standard provincial-metropolitan experience; of the ambitious young man from the backveld going into the big city and seeking his fortune. This is what I was doing" (Gray 1989:77). And what, in Jacobson's terms, did it mean for a South African to go England?

England is truth, and it is dream; England is reality, and it is pure vision. England is like a mirror in which they see their deepest selves reflected, the selves they have sought for and never found, and have known only by the sense of incompleteness that haunted all their previous days; yet England is chillingly, vastly, uncomfortably strange, with a strangeness made only the more poignant by the sense of dream-familiarity that accompanies it. England is their own past; yet they have never seen it before: England is all they have hoped for; yet it is a disappointment that endures and endures... England contains nothing less than the meanings of the words they have used all their lives; yet they understand them no better for having seen her. England makes unreal all they have done, all they have been, outside her; but grants no reality to what they may become within her. They would not have her any less than she is; yet they can never forgive her for being all that she is. If they stand in an English street and look about them, there is a secret, insistent whisper in their ears, inescapable - the echo, the resonance of that past which is altogether theirs and yet not theirs at all. (1992:140-1)[4]

The host or metropolitan country as idea(l) and dream, as a country of the mind, is familiar territory for the colonial, and also for the migrant more generally, as is the

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[4] On England as idea see Jacobson 1960a.

imaginative or illusory knowing, the "half-right, half-wrong vision" (Heilbut 1983:18), obtained from books and other cultural artefacts. It was to England and English literature that Jacobson went when tracing his literary genealogy, and books functioned as passports, to use Rushdie's term (1991:276), to imaginative and literary worlds, to geographical worlds, and to the professional world of the writer. Arrival for such a traveller is the moment when a read past and a dreamed-of future converge in the present. On arrival in London, Jacobson was treading between the lines of a read-London/England, negotiating the contours of an idea. London was "familiar in a ghostly way" (1985:88), and the act of verification was a confirmation not only of place but also of self. The remoteness and glamour of imaginings, of the city and of himself in the city, were contextualised and transformed by the reality. There was a sense of loss, dislocation and loneliness - "Now that I was on my own I knew that I had really come to London. Evidently London did not care" (85) - but also unrivalled opportunity: "It was as though some part of my imagination had been dry before, deprived of the nourishment it did not even know it needed; now, immersed in the English medium, it slowly filled itself and expanded" (88). Jacobson's primary emotions were pride, gratitude and rapture (1960a:26-7, also 1995:17). From England - which seemed so full, so packed with life, rich, dense, elaborate, immense - South Africa appeared uniformed, flat, bare. England was presence, South Africa was absence.

Jacobson has talked of both a responsibility in relation to writing about South Africa and a sense of irresponsibility in not doing so. The former related to "THE SITUATION" and, at the time in question, to the fact that South Africa had been written about relatively little and therefore there was a responsibility to try to "render its surfaces" and give them words. Jacobson wrote several 'South African' novels - *The Trap* (1955), *A Dance in the Sun* (1956), *The Price of Diamonds* (1957), *The Evidence of Love* (1960), *The Beginners* (1966): the dates given in brackets are those of the original dates of publication - that were to varying degrees "naturalistic" (realistic), in

addition to a number of short stories. Already, within and by the end of this initial

sequence of novels there was evidence - geographically and in literary style - of crossing

over.[5] In time the feeling of responsibility diminished: "when I found that I no longer

wished to write about South Africa, or rather that I *could* no longer write about South

Africa" a sense of external obligation fell away. After something of a creative drought

Jacobson reached a quite explicit decision to move away from South Africa as both

setting and broader inspiration for his fiction, a decision reached less because a vision

of home had been achieved than because he had exhausted his stock of material with

which to continue the attempt. Irresponsibility was something Jacobson was "glad to

exploit", it entailed a sense of liberation and release: "To be free of those pressures was

perhaps to be free to attend to other, internal needs which might otherwise never have

been known to me".[6] Jacobson has tried to fly by the nets that South Africa throws at its

writers' souls.[7] On the relationship between politics and writing, he has stated that,

"[l]ess and less... do I find that that which really matters in imaginative literature

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[5] The novels map a seemingly inevitable trajectory and series of connections: the South African land and landscape is empty, vast, barren, virgin, silent (*A Dance in the Sun* 1988:140-1,153, *The Price of Diamonds* 1968:5,58, *The Beginners* 1968a:23,34); this is related to it being inhospitable in other ways, unrecorded, provincial, to reality, which is also an idea(l), being culturally and more generally elsewhere, to a desire to leave (*The Evidence of Love* 1992:63-4,72, *The Beginners* 1968a:19-20,27-8,30,195-7,210-11,226-7,236-8,472); which in turn is related to the move from province to metropole, where the latter is characterised by freedom, abundance, depth, complexity, by incomprehensibility, indifference and alienation, by ambitions and successes, frustrations and disappointments, and the former by a contrasting meagreness, "poverty-stricken in its inventions... blank in its surfaces" (1968a:292, also see, *The Evidence of Love* 1992:140-2,170-83,198-9, *The Beginners* 1968a 263-4,292-4,299-317,367,386-7,392-5,429,439,462). In this scenario it is not exile/abroad which is a blank space, but home.

[6] For the above arguments and quotations, see Gray 1986:34-5, 1989:79-81, and Hamilton 1977:26.

[7] A number of Jacobson's characters, in both his earlier and later novels, leave their provincial home for the metropolitan centre, some bearing it within them as a culture- and book-bound idea. Like Joyce's Stephen Dedalus they attempt to fly by the nets - of politics, nationality, ethnicity/race, language, culture, religion - that are flung at the soul, in different contexts and countries, to hold it back from flight (this reference is specifically made with reference to Adrian Bester, a South African in London, in Jacobson's *Hidden in the Heart* (1991:22-6)). In the metropole the characters can know themselves anew, attempt to make a fresh start, lose and remake themselves. These characters echo the experience and desires of Jacobson himself (see, for example, 1995:17).

emerges from the level of consciously held opinion or belief in the author, or speaks to that level in the reader" (1984:288).[8]

Jacobson has "gone round the course twice as a novelist: first as a South African writer; then... writing fiction which is not only *not* about South Africa, but is also a different kind of fiction from what had gone before... much less straightforwardly naturalistic in character" (Hamilton 1977:25). In the same interview he also described this change as a

> reversion to an earlier or older self. If I became a writer for any single reason, it was that I loved reading as a kid... because it was a way of being other than I was, someone else... And as I grew older this was still essentially the reason why I loved reading and wanted to become a writer. I wanted to participate in this activity, this other-making activity. (26)

While experiencing a greater freedom to creatively un/remake the self/'other' and world than the politics- and place-bound exile, Jacobson is definitively not truly detached, or in a free state. A writer, any writer, continually writes and rewrites him/herself onto a progression of chosen contexts. Hope has stated: "increasingly now... I find myself transposing elements of my own life into non-African situations and making fictions of them" (1989:94). The experience of South Africa can be (re)written onto a range of contexts in a variety of ways. It does not diminish Jacobson's imaginative achievement to state that he remains irreparably formed and conditioned by his initial years in South Africa.[9] Jacobson has distinguished his external connections with South Africa - those

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[8] Also see the interview by Hamilton (1977) for Jacobson's reflections on the role of literature and "art for art's sake".

[9] Sheila Roberts has also argued that preoccupations in Jacobson's non-South African work derive from political insight and from a way of perceiving moulded by South Africa (1984).

relating to people and places - which have changed irreparably with the attrition of time, and internal connections which remain: "memories, in the first place; and beneath even the deepest of memories, those modes of apprehension through which the world makes itself known to each of us, and which thus create our individual past, present, and future, and our sense of the relationship between them". Writing has value because it reveals "as nothing else can, the quasi-instinctual, self-created modes of apprehension... and the worlds which have been made available through them to the writer". Jacobson concludes that "everything I write has something more than its origins" in South Africa (1984:287-8).[10] Collaborative agents in such modes of apprehension include the family and a society/culture, and their articulation in the formative place of childhood, as well as the violence of the state.

It is important to illustrate both how South Africa is an integral part of Jacobson, a heritage in which he is imprisoned, a world by which he is written, and also how it represents a world from which he is alienated and liberated. With reference to his 'final' return to Kimberley, Jacobson writes of a "dreamlike world... which represented myself to myself more deeply than anything I had seen or felt since; and from which, at the same time, I felt myself to be utterly sundered" (1985:184, also 1994:175,367-8). It is worth noting that Jacobson absolutely belongs and absolutely does not belong in London too.[11]

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[10] Also see 1994:40. Similar observations are made with reference to the formative nature of the narrator's childhood in *Hidden in the Heart* (Jacobson 1991:108-9; also see 1968a:394-5). Other writers have made comparable observations. Brutus states, "this was the world through which I learnt the world / and this the image for my vision of the world" ("It was a sherded world I entered", 1978:31) and Breytenbach talks of a "substratum which constitutes the mechanism of my being" which was "formed during the tender pre-rational years in Africa" (1988:126; also 1996:25,159-60). While both Brutus and Breytenbach fall or at least fell into the category of exiles, expatriate and émigré writers voice related sentiments. Rose Moss writes, "South Africa is the soil of my imagination. It appears in my work continually as the original world where things are as they must be. This world – sun, sky, stone, grass – has been, is, will be" (1984:298). These observations about a childhood home, although not written by a South African, are also pertinent: "All it has given me is the world, but that is enough... Insofar as we retain the capacity for attachment, the energy of desire that draws us toward the world and makes us want to live within it, we're always returning" (Hoffman 1991:74-5).

[11] This is a phrase used by Doris Lessing with reference to her feelings about England, which is noted by Clayton (1992a:22). Jacobson has documented further observations on alienation and non-belonging, with reference to England, South Africa and as an

Such is the plight of the migrant/expatriate/émigré: caught between worlds, forever in the act of crossing over, within a double or multiple exposure that implies a state of perpetual negotiation and translation. Within this scenario, South Africa has profoundly influenced the worlds made available to Jacobson as a writer, and is a primary world transposed back onto these other worlds. Nowhere is this more relevant than in Jacobson's insight into the workings of power.[12]

Psychological Manoeuvres in Individual Minds

A childhood experience of bullying and ostracism was something from which Jacobson was "never wholly to 'recover'". The episode was often to be recalled in later years when he speculated about how incomparably greater horrors could take place: "about the ever-repeated psychological manoeuvres which had to be gone through in innumerable, individual minds" before the perpetrators could act; and about why the victims and bystanders reacted as they did (1985:36-7). Jacobson's reflections on the operation of power dissect the psychological manoeuvres of individual minds.

The Rape of Tamar, published first in 1970, four years after *The Beginners*, marked the beginning of Jacobson's second career as a novelist. The story is that contained in 2 Samuel 13: it concerns the rape of King David's only legitimate daughter, Tamar, by his son Amnon; the hatred Amnon feels for Tamar after the rape; the repercussions for family and state when Tamar seeks help from her brother, Absalom, rather than David; David's refusal to punish Amnon in accordance with the law and Absalom's rebellion,

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existential/universal condition (1960a:26-8, also 1995:19). Roberts has made the perceptive point that for Jacobson's characters alienation is an existential phenomenon and so their geographical situation, whether real or imaginary, is not of primary importance (1992).

[12]
    South Africa also bequeathed an attention to power to others (see Hope in Bernstein 1994:347; also Cilliers 307).

which encompasses the revenge murder, two years in the making, of Amnon and ultimately his own murder as well. The story spoke to Jacobson, in part, because of its South African resonances:

> It was only when *The Rape of Tamar* was done that I realised it was not only as a Jew but also as a South African that I had presumed to feel a special affinity with some aspects of the story of David. Why as a South African? Well, in relation to the empires and metropolitan powers of his time, he was a provincial, a man on the margins. Yet, thirty centuries later, it was his life, not that of any of the greater kings contemporary with him, which was still feeding my own fantasies... (1988a:140)

Therefore, somewhat paradoxically, it was in a book that contained a "secret assertion of the priorities or rights of the provincial" that Jacobson moved away from an overt preoccupation with South Africa (Gray 1986:36). Drawn to the story - as a Jew, as a South African, as a provincial - Jacobson wrote into it an exploration of the psychological manoeuvres of individual minds behind the story's bare rendition in the Bible. The resulting multiple exposure speaks of and to both South Africa and elsewhere.

How does David preside over the somewhat precariously united kingdom of Israel and Judea? He makes use of the inexhaustible tricks of the governing trade: credulity, the capacity to believe passionately practically anything that it suits him to believe; a mastery of surprise and duplicity; an attachment to justice that is never greater than his attachment to his own power; a preparedness to cut his losses and never to ally himself to defeat, least of all his own; he "rides upon the very crest of that tidal equipoise between the violence of law and the violence of lawlessness..." (1973:10-11,15,94,98). David is the consummate politician. To his sons he grants everything except power,

security and freedom (15-16). To be his son, a prince, is to be both a master and a slave; to enjoy the ambiguous liberty of being able to do what others simply dream; to be above the official law but subject to other less stable, less reassuring, laws. What is the point of being a prince if you can't do what you like? What is the point of being a prince if you can and do? Amnon, longing for self-transcendence, for the magic of the forbidden and that which would always be just beyond his reach, rapes his sister. Absalom takes the law into his own hands and murders his brother. For each their ultimate success is also their ultimate failure. David still rules over his kingdom.

"Yonadab can live only in Yonadab's world" (48), and as he is the narrator of the story so can the reader. Yonadab is well connected but not sufficiently well connected to be anything other than a lackey in David's court. He is riven with ambition and jealousy; he is a liar, a sceptic, a schemer, and a meddler; he serves and betrays, serves in order to betray. It is he who watches the rape and reports back as our special correspondent, and who has the uncanny knack of being present, present in order that he may observe. And yet he is more than narrator and observer: he is determined to be seen as an active participant in the story and an influence on the course of events, as someone who counts. Yonadab urges Amnon to commit the rape and plans its execution, just as he later connives with Absalom in the plan to kill Amnon. As a servant to many masters he is often in possession of foreknowledge within the unfolding events, as well as of hindsight within their telling. Yonadab's power is based upon interference, manipulation and betrayal, but ultimately his ambition gets the better of him, he is unable to withdraw in time to save himself. In the end he is undone, found out, banished from the court.

The fictional Republic of Sarmeda in a subsequent novel, *The Confessions of Josef Baisz*, owes a great deal to South Africa: in the naming of its people(s) and places, its landscapes, and so on. But Sarmeda is ultimately a fictional country, politically as suggestive of the former Eastern Europe as of South Africa, whose politics are an ironic

blend of fascism and communism. Jacobson has described it as a "dream country...
quite literally. Many of my dreams are set in a place which runs together Europe and
Africa in bizarre ways. So does Sarmeda" (Hamilton 1977:25); while for one reviewer,
this nowhere/somewhere place, was "*the* solution" to the problem of the exiled
imagination, "the pulling together of all his exiles - from Russia, from Israel, from
South Africa" (C. J. Driver 1977).

The story is about political power pursued solely for personal gain and devoid of
broader commitment or conviction, it is power as the psychological manoeuvres of
individual minds broken down to its lowest, meanest, common denominator - and at its
heart lies another lackey, Josef Baisz. Josef Baisz is "bodyguard, police-spy, kidnapper,
murderer, and favoured son of the regime" (1977:4), a conniver in unfolding events
whose political philosophy can be summed up as follows:

> To wound and to love; to love what I wound; to betray and look pityingly
> upon the consequences of my treachery; and to do it again - and again -
> and again - and each time as if for the very first time, with a trembling,
> magnetised sense of fate or inevitability upon me: that was my addiction.
> (120)

Josef Baisz loves only what he betrays, loves only through betrayal. Jacobson has stated
that Baisz "operates the system... I think that in operating the system, which just *is*, as
far as he's concerned, he's rather more like most of us than most of us care to
acknowledge" (Hamilton 1977:25).

Josef Baisz's own unique gift or talent is an addiction, the master or God he serves, and
there can be no escape, reformation, or transformation. It will never set him free. In the
end he turns the addiction on himself: "At last I was going to take Josef Baisz by the

throat. Yes! At last I could begin to feel for *him* that soft, loving tenderness which hitherto had been reserved only for his victims. I could even begin to pity him" (1977:202). If he is never to be discharged from the necessity of double-dealing, treachery and betrayal then the master within him shares the vulnerability of all the other masters he has ever served. Josef Baisz writes his autobiographical confession to all his masters, before taking his own life and himself becoming the last of his victims. The story ends with the completion of an autobiography, quite literally, as suicide note: "Many years ago, in the silence of my father's warehouse, I swore that I would make something of my life. Well, I have. This" (204).

It was perhaps in *The Rape of Tamar* and *The Confessions of Josef Baisz* that Jacobson finally achieved his vision of home. Home was a fictional world of which Jacobson was the sole creator, on which he was the sole authority, and for which he was answerable only to himself. This new home represented a departure from South Africa but also contained strands of continuity, notably an interest in the mechanisms of political power. If South Africa fostered, even wrote, Jacobson's concern with power, he has been able to take a step back from its specificities and deal with power as mechanism and process. Both novels dissect the 'ever-repeated psychological manoeuvres' in 'innumerable, individual minds' of the leaders, the lead and those in-between, which go to make up the workings of power. They depict the kinds of personalities that oppressive and corrupt regimes reward and bring to the fore, the kinds of personalities that operate a system that just is. Jacobson does not offer partisan politics or the hope of radical, revolutionary change. Instead he offers a scepticism that attempts to uncover that which he feels lies at the root of politics, especially repressive politics, and an implied warning that this could provide the continuity that underpins, perhaps undermines, political change. This political vision, further developed in his later writing, is clearly a multiple exposure: it draws on and is relevant to South Africa and

simultaneously gestures towards a significantly conditioning elsewhere. It is a vision

synthesised from different worlds, constructed between worlds.

Autobiographical Fiction and Fictional Autobiography

> Imaginative writing is in some respects a curiously merciless business: merciless to the
> writer, I mean. On the one hand he wants what he has written to have a life of its own,
> to be answerable for itself, to speak to the reader on its own terms and for its own ends.
> On the other hand, the completed story or poem is bound to reveal more about his mind
> and sensibility than he can even know. The work will not conceal from others his need to
> hide himself within it; nor can he hope to surprise the reader if he has not succeeded in
> surprising himself. (Jacobson 1988:6)[13]

> Exile, immigration, and the crossing of boundaries are experiences that can therefore
> provide us with new narrative forms or, in John Berger's phrase, with *other* ways of
> telling. (Said 1989:225)

The paradigm of crossing over is also relevant to Jacobson's movement between and

experimentation with literary genres, and it is possible that this, although by no means

an automatic or universal reaction to it, owes something to him being an expatriate:

destined to be located between worlds in all things. Jacobson, although primarily a

novelist, displays a multi-dimensional interest in things autobiographical. As has

already been indicated there are powerful undercurrents of the autobiographical in his

fiction. There is also a recurrent interest in the craft of autobiography itself, and many

of his fictional characters are themselves autobiographers. Autobiography in the hands

of the novelist consciously dissects the nature of the autobiographical act: the interplay

between fact and fiction, the creative tensions between memory, forgetting and the

imaginative ordering and reshaping of experience, and the resultant personal and

literary vision projected onto a multitude of worlds (see Cavaliero 1986). The

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[13] On the autobiographical nature of fiction also see Jacobson 1995.

autobiographical and fictional need to be read in, and through, one another, as a further manifestation of the double/multiple exposure."[14]

Jacobson's work theorises the complexity of self representation. In *The Confessions of Josef Baisz*, the protagonist states the following with reference to the task he has undertaken:

> To use the insidious form of untruth known as 'hindsight' in order to re-
> create the untruth of bygone ignorance: that, I now see, is the real art of
> the autobiographer. What a job! Sometimes it seems to me even more
> ambiguous than any other task I have ever undertaken. Which is quite a
> claim to make, all things considered. Told one way, looking forward as it
> were, and proceeding from one event to the next, my story may seem to
> be a mere sequence, without design or purpose. Told another way,
> looking backwards, it can be made to resemble a plot, a plan, a
> cunningly involuted development leading to a necessary conclusion.
> Being both narrator and subject, how am I to know which way to look?
> Besides, I have to contend like everybody else with the idiotic
> haphazardness of memory... But whatever way the story is told, whether
> as a plot or a series of accidents, as a design or a mere addition of day
> upon day and year upon year, it must lead eventually to this moment.
> Here. Now. To me sitting in this chair and putting these words to paper...
> (1977:80-1)

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[14] Jacobson's fictional and autobiographical writings can be used to shed light upon one another, as has already been illustrated in the discussion of the workings of political power. For a further example, see Roberts 1993.

Jacobson has made much of the relationship between hindsight and foresight, past and present, in his stories: Yonadab confesses, "Hindsight tempts one to pretend to foresight"; while the narrator of *Hidden in the Heart* states with reference to hindsight, "How sagacious it makes one feel! And how helpless" (1973:45, 1991:27). Life stories are told at the intersection - at once inevitable and insidious, transparent and opaque, beyond manipulation and self-serving - between past and present, hindsight and foresight, and the persistent randomness of memory and forgetting: in other words, they are told at the junction of fact and/as narrative shaping.

The Dinan Collection featured in *Her Story* is an indiscriminate assortment of papers and writings belonging to the late Celia Dinan which are edited and presented by a third party to serve two closely related purposes: firstly, to introduce the collection and their author and secondly, to organise the notebooks which contained *Her Story*. *Her Story* is described as "an angular or unexpected filling-in of the most familiar of sacred tales" (1988b:42), the familiar tale being that of the crucifixion of Jesus and the two thieves. While *Her Story* is obviously not an autobiography, the proposed relationship between the author's writing and her life/world provides insight into a distinctive way of understanding the relationship between autobiography and fiction, and in particular the autobiographical nature of Jacobson's own work: "Her life was what she wrote *out of*, not what she wrote *about*" (34). "Being wholly a fiction it reveals to us, as nothing else could, the sense she had of her own being - and of ours" (43).

In a related way Jacobson's novel, *The Wonder-Worker*, offers the possibility of transformation at the interface of autobiography and fiction. It is the story of a fictional autobiographer writing his 'memoirs', in the form of autobiographical fiction. Both the central character/autobiographical mirror, Timothy Fogel, and the narrator/author seek a kind of liberation through the power of transformation. The act of writing and that which is written offer the potential for layers of transformation within the same text. On

encountering a temporary writer's block, the narrator/author describes a sense of "panic... from the thought of being left quite on my own, to get on with whatever I am, in this nowhere of a place, having nothing to look forward to - no developments, no surprises, no other selves to entertain" (1973a:75-6).

Several of Jacobson's novels are more fictional autobiography than autobiographical fiction. Characters engage in writing which is to varying degrees and in different ways autobiographical, and which is used in the subsequent construction of the narrative. Sometimes it quite simply is the narrative. Fictional autobiographers are depicted constructing their own story. Life stories are superimposed on one another and characters/lives can be seen emerging through one another in a further example of multiple exposure. This is another arena of multiply told, collaborative lives. *Hidden in the Heart* contains a complex interweaving and layering of lives and strangely parallel love stories. The story is one of obsession: obsessional love; obsession with the past, someone else's past, the inaccessible past of a lover; and ultimately obsession with the life of another. The narrator states with reference to herself: "she is writing something which is both autobiographical and about the life of someone else; which is autobiographical precisely because it is about someone else's life" (1991:104). She tells her life by being a conduit for the life of another; and in the end, through the completion of the story, she is able to definitively strike out for her own life and abandon the past. In a sense the telling has bequeathed her a life.

Like Celia Dinan, Jacobson writes 'out of' rather than 'about' his life, including its South African component - the difference being the transformative power of writing and the written - in fiction that reveals to us as nothing else can the sense he has of his own being, and ours. It is the telling and the 'other'-making activity that bequeath to him the primary facets of his own life and identity. It is his own personal 'regime of truth'. This is the most important sense in which Jacobson's fiction is autobiographical. Few

novelists have so profoundly explored the potential dimensions of the autobiography/ fiction multiple exposure and the need to see one through the prism of the other. His own autobiography was to take this exploration a step further.

Time and Time Again

In 1985, Jacobson published his autobiography, *Time and Time Again*. It had been two decades since he had written fiction explicitly set in South Africa. Autobiography facilitated a return to a South Africa that remained intimate, the South Africa of his childhood. Experience in a country that was fixed and distant in time remained accessible in this form. Autobiography also enabled a return to the naturalistic/realistic mode, albeit in an autobiographical configuration, in which he had previously written about the country. Jacobson presents a series of "'autobiographies'" that carry the tension of his desire both to "tell the truth, as far as I knew it" and also to produce narratives, real stories (1985:vii); thereby providing another manifestation of the creative tension between the autobiographical and/as narrative shaping in his writing. The story-teller turned to his advantage the fickleness of memory by constructing an episodic account that attempts to "preserve or even dramatise something of the erratic or fitful nature of memory, and hence something of its intensity, too" (viii).[15] The combination of memory and forgetting, truth and real stories, foresight and hindsight, past life and present retelling, give the life recalled a particular texture, structure and direction. Not surprisingly, given the nature of his fiction, Jacobson wrote an autobiography that was also a theory of the genre.

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[15] With reference to the writing of the novel, *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie has noted the following: "it was precisely the partial nature of these memories, their fragmentation, that made them so evocative for me. The shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were *remains*; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquire numinous qualities" (1991:12).

The structure of the autobiography testifies to Jacobson's bipolar life: part 1, to a childhood spent in (provincial) Kimberley and part 2, to an adult life spent in (metropolitan) London. Polarity has both a spatial and a temporal dimension: a childhood and adult life spent in different places create "territories of time" (Gray 1989:77-8). A distance in time is superimposed on a distance in space. The passage of time and ageing are major preoccupations in *Time and Time Again*. Time is folded back upon itself. The child becomes an adult who in turn becomes child-like again. A further shift in emphasis within the multiple exposure can be identified: a movement towards South Africa as a territory of time. Such a shift perhaps captures all that is ultimately left of home for the long-term expatriate or exile.

Jacobson's recent fiction - *Her Story* (1988), *Hidden in the Heart* (1991), and *The God-Fearer* (1992) - dwells significantly on an obsession with the past. There is a simultaneous desire to reverse time, undo the past, and to preserve the past. Kobus the bookbinder in *The God-Fearer* takes the familiar route to life-preservation, he writes it down. But the story told is not the one he intended to tell. His tired memory can no longer remember the events of yesterday - Jacobson's observations about memory, hindsight and the ambiguous nature of the autobiographical venture are, if anything, accentuated by old age - but he can not forget, indeed is haunted and obsessed by, memories from almost three quarters of a century previously. A 15 year-old 'Christer' girl, Sannie, had committed suicide after Kobus gave evidence at her trial, which was quite literally a 'God-Fearer' witch-hunt. Religious turmoil and persecution followed. At the trial Kobus, who knew her innocence, had lied and prevaricated; he chose what he thought to be the safer and less painful path. The truth would not have saved her - although she would have known that she had not been abandoned - but it would have ruined him. Such were the psychological manoeuvres within an individual mind that enable Kobus to become a witness and accomplice. In retrospect he recognises the loss of a unique chance to make something of his life.

As an old man Kobus is haunted by two 'Christer' children, Sannie's children, generations never to be born: "Unspent possibilities, lives denied, stories never told, breaths never taken, souls forever houseless, hopes forgotten..." (1992a:84). There is no escape from what he has done, no retrospective justice, he can not unsay his words or undo his deeds. Kobus is left to mourn "not only their unlived lives, but the lives of all others like them; and his own unlived life too, the possibilities he had never taken advantage of..." (156). The expatriate writer, whose position has provided unique opportunities to create lives and worlds, perhaps in the autumn of life comes to reflect upon lives, worlds and stories, both autobiographical and fictional, that remain merely denied possibilities, unvisited, uncreated and unlived. The multiple exposure and repeated narration of lives, which circle around the life of Jacobson himself, occupy an arena that although dense with prior versions is always incomplete.

Kobus commits a life to writing that when folded back upon itself is seen in a new light. It is only as an old man that he can see the significance of a moment in his youth and all that flowed from it. Territories of time have become a important component of Jacobson's work.[16] The territory of childhood remains both intimately known and crucially formative. Within Jacobson's autobiographies, time is folded back upon itself to identify those moments and episodes with which he is "still living with the consequences" or from which he was "never wholly to 'recover'" (1985:36,60). Autobiographical writing unravels the author's life back to and forwards from moments that lie at the heart of modes of apprehension and from which all else follows; thus, the past is seen within the perspective of the present. As Jacobson has said, the world

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[16] The conclusion to *The Beginners* provides an early exploration of territories of time. Suffering the twin ills of ageing and deteriorating health, Sarah Glickman becomes dependent and child-like; reminiscence, over a distance in time and space, provides a further folding back of time. After her death a child is named Sarah after her deceased grandmother (1968a:469-93).

makes itself known through such modes of apprehension which create our individual past, present and future, and our sense of the relationship between them.

In 1994 Jacobson published *The Electronic Elephant*, an account of his travels through southern Africa, along the Great North Road from the Cape into the interior to the north. His interest in the road was both historical and personal. Among the sources of the latter were that he grew up in Kimberley, whose diamonds irrevocably altered the course of the road, and whose history was inextricable from that of the great, semi-desert hinterland to the north and west. "I had never doubted where this journey should begin. Kimberley was the obvious place. It was where all my journeys had begun" (1994:17); Kimberley, where "a forgotten self instantly re-formed within me... which had forgotten nothing" (20, also 25). Jacobson talks of a dream landscape "which I always knew, even while I dreamed of it, to lie somewhere to the west of Kimberley", a

> secret territory... waiting for me... It was as if I owed something - though I could not have said what - to that half-known, half-feared region which had lain forbiddingly on the very doorstep of the Africa I had grown up in. In a perverse way, the fanciful inventiveness of my dreams, the complex human and topographical features my unconscious mind bestowed on it, helped to make clearer to me the real nature of the hold the territory still had over my imagination. Ultimately my dreams seemed to express a dread or shame that there might be *nothing there*: nothing to be seen, nothing to be learned, no one to meet, no past to register, no future to care about. Which would be a source of greater wonder: to go there and discover that this was indeed the case, or to discover that it was not? (12, also 92)

This eloquent travel account provides a further acknowledgement by Jacobson of his being marked by South Africa as time and place, and a linking of a personal history and

knowledge with other histories and knowledges."[7] It is also an autobiographical journey through territories of both space and time.

Conclusion

Jacobson is forever finding new ways of hiding within his texts, ways that retain the capacity to surprise. He un/remade himself by leaving South Africa, in reading and in writing. This chapter has sought to illustrate how, in ways which have evolved over time, he remains a writer who speaks of and to South Africa. He departs from the theories proposed by Guillén and Gurr in several ways. Among the most important are that the initial home is never totally transcended but variously continues to influence the worlds made available to, and created by, the writer. Furthermore, autobiography can provide a literary homecoming to that intimate and formative territory, as a territory of time, even after decades of living elsewhere.

The story contained within *Hidden in the Heart* is turned on its head towards the end after the Afrikaans writings of Adrian Bester are translated. The Afrikaans language is described by the narrator as "a kind of private resource for him; he returned to it every now and again, unpredictably, especially as he grew older" (1991:151). Later she refers to it again: "Apparently his native language had become a kind of half-code for him... He used it to conceal and reveal what he was unable to put down in any other form" (195). South Africa has functioned for Jacobson, during his second career as a novelist, as such a 'private resource' and 'half-code'. His writings illustrate clearly the complex manner in which he is written by South Africa while he writes, in which the agency of an original home collaborates in the construction of identity, imagination and modes of apprehension in ways that are both violent and non-violent, overt and subtle, relating to

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[17] See 1,7-9,11-13; on the future as a territory of time, see 6-7.

the state and to other components of society. His experience and evolution as a writer perhaps gesture towards future possibilities for South African literature: with South Africa functioning as 'private resource' and 'half-code', lives written 'out of' rather than 'about', with less violence and less involvement of the state in the collaboration that is narration.

Jacobson can live only in Jacobson's world. The expatriate is forever condemned/ liberated to a fate of residing or falling between worlds, crossing from one to another, living a multiple exposure. In this case, the result is an identity and creativity that share the time, space and some of the characteristics of the postcolonial, but which is arrived at via a different route and subsumed within other languages/discourses entirely. Jacobson's ideas are interesting and persuasive across a range of applications - identity, culture, politics - due to the subtlety and selectivity of their application, the disarming clarity of their presentation, the lack of universal explanatory ambitions and the absence of preconceived, abstract, intrusive or grandiose theoretical intentions. Temporal worlds (past, present, future), physical worlds (South Africa and both real and imaginary elsewheres), literary worlds (fiction and autobiography) and lives (actual, potential, imaginary, unlived) can, as in the case of Jacobson, be projected onto an infinite variety of canvases, notably each other, to create a literature of multiple exposure. In such a way, to use Jacobson's vocabulary, while the provincial may be moulded by the metropole it is also true to say that the metropole is moulded by any number of provincials. Jacobson came to England as an ambitious young man hoping to make something of his life. Well, he has. This.

Chapter 6: Home and Homecoming

Exile both nurtures a heightened sense of home and anticipates a homecoming. In this sense the culmination of exile, its conclusion and closure, is written. The preceding chapters on exile and expatriation contain a number of possible trajectories homeward: Modisane's autobiographical suicide note as a passport to a 'posthumous life' at home; the arrival of the ANC's nation-state in waiting; the (non-)resolutions of return for Breytenbach and Mphahlele; and Jacobson's return to a territory of time and as travel writer. The necessity, dream, illusion, reality and impossibility of return are intensely contradictory, a cause of inspiration and fulfilment, and at the core of the violence of exile. Homecoming, like exile, as an product of the repressive state can be seen as a violently collaborative agent in oppositional lives.

Home for the exile is an imagined country created through layers of memory, nostalgia and desire: "the expression of the desire for home becomes a substitute for home, embodies the emotion attendant upon the image" (Seidel 1986:11). Home is a function of place. There's no place like home: there's no home like place. But it is also a function of time. Like so much in exile it is of the past and future not the present, a shadow country that might have been or might yet be (Rieff 1994:197), a territory of time. Imaginary territories of place, time and belonging coexist uncomfortably with very real places and times where belonging was ambiguous and from which it was necessary to escape. Home is fixed in time, defined in terms of time, a place set in time and a time set in place. And yet it evolves through forgetting and imagining, as it acquires the fragmentary accretions, learned from afar, of its more recent history and of other times and other places. Between the static and the dynamic, past and future, old and new, memory/forgetting and imagining, reality and the ideal, home and away, lies the place called home.

The shrine of home occupies the space and time of absence, yet it is simultaneously absent and present. The immediate reality of exile is suppressed and denied while the open wound of a lost home is both felt and acted upon as if it were real. A present absence cohabits with an absent presence. "You are engaged with an elsewhere that cannot be reached: isn't it the defining characteristic of exile?", writes Breytenbach (1996:43). Denied the sustenance of tangible immediacy, home is inevitably undermined by the contagious plague of absence, receding into the realm of the selective and partial, metaphor, allegory and symbol. And yet in a context marked by their loss and denial, home represents completion and wholeness. In the words of Gloria Nkadimeng: "'Home is home! There is nothing more than home...'" (in Bernstein 1994:137). The ideal of home becomes both more abstract and vague, and more exacting and embracing, the greater the exile's distance from it in time and space.

Home is a reality which becomes an expectation, a dream; whereas exile is an expectation, a dream, which becomes a reality. The grass is always greener on the other side: "The exile's new world never fulfils his expectations, and his old world... grows sweeter with distance, and its sweetness makes him more bitter" (Roberts, "Ah, Prague!", 1993a:170). Absence makes the heart grow fonder. If this home elsewhere were to have one defining characteristic, it would be a longing infinitely stretched on the rack of loss: "The longing remained, pitiless, inescapable... In the entire structure of the lives they had built up in foreign parts only one thing had reality: the land they had once possessed and then lost" (Schoeman 1978:81, also see 35,80,82,201). This longing for home is a disease, the disease of homesickness - for which the symptoms are longing and loss, endless reminiscence and nostalgia, a painful sense of distance and absence - which can be fatal.[1]

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[1] See, for example, Esme Matshikiza on the life and death of her husband Todd, in Bernstein 1994:325-9.

Of the many losses of exile perhaps the most devastating is the loss of that which the exile did not even realise s/he had at home. Breytenbach talks of the attempt to "recapture from the outside that which [the exiled writer] possessed from the inside - which he possessed so completely that he didn't even *know* about it" (1986:75). That which makes home home, something unconscious, taken-for-granted, is at once recognised and lost in exile, its loss is as irretrievable as the desire for its restoration is insatiable. Home is never appreciated until it is lost.

At the heart of home lies the almost mystical need to belong.[2] Home is the most precious possession of those who do not belong, for whom all sanctuary and safety is provisional, who feel permanently temporary and for whom all things are shadowed by immanent peril. Home is everything that exile is not. It is, in one sense, security, a haven of the familiar; while in another it is obscene and unliveable; it is charged with meaning, a place where living on the edge can, at least from a distance, become shrouded in nostalgia.

> It struck me, after a few years in exile, that I had thrown away something
> very precious by leaving South Africa. Maybe it was just nostalgia, but in
> my memory my former life seemed somehow charged with meaning.
> Every day had been a battle against howling moral head winds. I had
> lived amidst stark good and evil, surrounded by mystery and magic...
> Nothing in America could ever compare with so powerful a set of
> intoxicants. In America, my soul was desiccated. (Malan 1991:96, also
> see 422)

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[2] "'The garden for which you are presently heading is nowhere and everywhere... It is another name for the only place where you belong... where you do not feel homeless. It is off every map, no road leads to it that is merely a road, and only you know the way'" (Coetzee 1985:228). Also see B. Kgositsile's "Where is Home" in Oliphant ed. 1992:37-42.

Home is a manipulation of negatives: a distance in space and time, an absence, a longing and loss, a disease, defined by what exile is not. But it is also much more than this.

Here, There: Everywhere, Nowhere

For the exile, South Africa is and always will be home. "I've realised that there is nowhere in the world one feels at home, except in your own country" (Moatlhodi in Bernstein 1994:414, also Ntantala 1993:189). But if home and exile are mutually exclusive, radically antithetical, seemingly irreconcilable, they are also mutually dependent, problematised, both undermined and expanded. This is true to different degrees for the expatriate, migrant and exile alike. Home may be neither here nor there (Gurr 1981:13). "The question yet disturbs: Why is it / Neither, nor any land, is home?" writes Peter Harris ("Slightly Displaced Persons", 1964:51), while David Wright states the following on his return to his adopted home, England, from South Africa, where he was born: "The scene is where I would belong / But do not, any more than there / Do I belong, where I was born" ("A Letter from Westmorland to Isabella Fey", 1980:119). Equally home may be both here and there. The migrant and exile may experience homes rather than a single home, exiles rather than a single exile.[3]

What does it mean to be homeless? Are the homeless those without a home, language or name who are simultaneously at home in many places, fluent in many languages, and known by many names? Is homelessness an essential feature of the condition of

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[3] On the above, also see Clayton ("Dream of a Small Planet" and "Double Track", 63-4,67), Harrison ("Homecoming", 158-9), and Swift ("Home Thoughts", 279-80), all in de Kock and Tromp eds. 1996. For Justin Cartwright in the revealingly named *Not Yet Home*, South Africa both is and is not home; he grapples with the meaning of South Africa as a home; states that from London, home was elsewhere although not necessarily in South Africa; claims to be rootless, to have the haunting feeling that he has lacked a sense of being home, and lays claim to "a changeable sense of home... a place which no longer exists... but might have... mythological..." (1996:99): not yet home, far from home (also see 34-5,54,80,92-3,154,164,187-8,192).

modernity? Perhaps there really is no place like home any more. If there is such a place, what makes or constitutes home? Where, in what circumstances, does the exile feel, or is the exile made to feel, at home? Is the exile at home everywhere, at home in the world; is it possible to be both a citizen of a country and a citizen of the world (Bernstein 1994:xxv)? An exile and at home, here and there, everywhere and nowhere: or is this the fate only of the migrant? Is the exile always absolutely anchored to home by politics and place?

For the migrant, expatriate and escapee, home may be left in conscious pursuit of another home or the homelessness of international belonging. Some South Africans felt there was nothing to lose and much they wished to forget, and they longed to be rid of a home associated with alienation, frustration and/or guilt. In such cases, finding a home abroad was often motivated predominantly by cultural ambitions and concerns. White writers, such as Dan Jacobson, Christopher Hope, David Wright, and Justin Cartwright, headed for their cultural centre, their metropole, and found a home of sorts. But such a quest can foster its own illusions, for home is as much a function of fate as of choice. Wright refers to a South Africa, "[f]rom which I never can depart / Without a tearing of the heart / Strings that tie me lightly to it / And irrefragably also" ("A Letter from Westmorland to Isabella Fey", 1980:116), while Hope identifies escape from South Africa as simultaneously impossible and desirable (1984:286).[4]

Internal Exile: a Home to Outsiders

Historically, as previously outlined, South Africa has produced an intricate matrix of exclusion and inclusion, exile and homecoming. Home itself can come to embody a form of exile. Few countries have so comprehensively alienated and exiled their own

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[4] Also see the reflections of the character Malcolm Begbie in Jacobson's *The Beginners* (1968a:394-5).

population as South Africa. Arthur Nortje writes: "Exile was implanted / in the first pangs of paradise" ("Questions and Answers", in Feinberg ed. 1980:156). What function does the notion of home serve for the politically disenfranchised, the worker migrant, the prisoner, the banned or banished, the person under house arrest, the removee, the guerrilla soldier? South Africa invented its own 'homelands' into which people were herded on the basis of ethnicity. South Africans became foreigners, illegal, in South Africa and citizens of a place in which they had often never lived, and which they had frequently never even seen. 'Homelands' in the sky, 'homelands' of oppression. For home to be home there must be the possibility of choice and of leaving. South Africans wanted not homelands but a homeland.

Somewhat ironically, South Africa has also been a refuge, and even a new home, for exiles, refugees and migrants from elsewhere, fleeing from persecution, civil wars, poverty, and hunger; an economic and ideological haven and a home for the world's white right wing.[5] The place that is the source of exile to one is the sanctuary of home to another. Again, there could be overlap and complexity in the relationship between the two: South Africa as both home and exile. Ruth, a South African Jew in Rose Zwi's novel *Exiles*, reflects on her movement between South Africa and Israel: "Nothing is forever... Except exile? Her parents when they came to Africa, had also said, another year in Africa, another year in exile. They sighed but remained on. Home. Der heim. Was she going to it, coming from it? Would she always be a sojourner, an exile?" (1984:181, and 16, also see Jacobson 1968a).

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See, for example, Gordimer's "The Ultimate Safari", "My Father Leaves Home", "Home", in *Jump and Other Stories* (1992:33-46,57-66,121-40) and Roberts' "Ah, Prague!" in *Coming In and Other Stories* (1993a:159-81).

The 'Many Homes of Exile'

Home can be anything one wants it to be; it is in the eye of the beholder. On being

forcibly removed from Sophiatown, Don Mattera finds consolation in the following:

"Home was where I wanted to be, wanted to remain until the end of my days"

(1987:145). Home is another country, a mother tongue, a relationship - "It's possible to

live within the ambit of a person not a country" (Gordimer 1980:302) - a family, an

exile community, a political organisation. The ANC was often home, family, parent,

guardian. Some found in exile - in the camps, for example - the home they could not

find at home. The various homes of the imagination - for the creator and audience,

through education and study - were a frequent source of solace and return for the exile,

migrant, and expatriate. Jacobson, who it has been argued created a home in fiction,

likens the "'Republic of Letters'" to a "homeland", "a place in which I could be

naturalised without seeking a licence from any authority other than that of my own

tastes or talents, inclinations or ambitions" (1985:127). The writer may find a (way)

home in writing about and recreating home, in characters who also seek a home or who

can be written home in a kind of vicarious homecoming. All art forms offer such

opportunities. For Miriam Makeba it was, "[t]he concert stage: This is one place where I

am most at home, where there is no exile" (1988:230).

The notion of home takes on a form, scale and intimacy all its own. Denis Hirson's

family reconstruct, quite literally, their old home on the kitchen table: "One by one our

hands record what we remember of the house / and garden, till everything of import is

more or less where it / should be. And when finally the wayward gooseberry bush / has

been democratically rooted, we lean back and survey our bonds and our losses" ("The

Long Distance South-African", 1992:5). Home is a nation and it is a house, a room, a

place within a room; it is in something as intangible as the timbre of a voice, a few bars

of music, a fragrance or a taste (see Berold, "Home", in de Kock and Tromp eds.

1996:42). How is home remembered and reconstructed? What are the reminders of home?

> Then the wind came at him and in the sudden gust the vanes of the windmill began to revolve; he heard their rhythmic clanging coming from beyond the barn and the sound made him pause, overwhelmed by the intensity of the feeling it evoked. He had heard it before, that sound was one he had known long ago and then forgotten, but now it was borne towards him from the past with the wind. When exactly had he heard the clanging of the revolving blades as a child, and where? And what were the feelings which now overwhelmed him? Heartache and longing and hope, a whole world waiting to be conquered, safety, security and illusion, and the turning of a windmill in the long silence of a summer's afternoon, in the vast dusk of the summer night. He walked on to the house, astonished at the emotion which possessed him, and it was as if he were coming home. (Schoeman 1978:86, also see 61, and Gordimer 1988:286)

Breytenbach has a library of reflections on home, evolving, from different times and places:

> 'Home'? How long have I been dragging my 'home' around with me?... This distance, this anticipation, the long winter are now the only things familiar, my home. And that which is there has become a subconscious, a wound which has healed, a memory, a past and a future, the blueprint of a dream, Paradise... Paradise is the unknown, remembered. (1985a:37)

Home is the only place in the world where one is not a stranger. Prison then became a kind of home and home - "'Home? What home? Where...? What a debilitating concept'?" - was never to be home again in quite the same way. France was also to become a home of sorts. More recently Breytenbach has talked of the "many homes of exile", of acceding to the "homeland of perpetual movement", of being "at home nowhere, and by that token everywhere", of the right to a home as one component of his personal declaration of human rights, of a "subconscious place" and a "free place".[6]

Home as Private and Public Property

Home is intensely private property, idiosyncratic, individual, unique. It is an absolute possession. But it is also shared, public property, reconstructed, reclaimed, defended and contested by, with and against others within the sanctuary and ghetto of the exile community and beyond. Home is talked to death, reminisced about, ruminated upon, invented, transplanted, extracted from fellow South Africans newly arrived, and devoured from the media. Shared but no longer the same.

Christopher Hope's 'Hottentot Room' is such a community, created in the author's own eclectic image. It is a place for those with nowhere else to go, unalterable exiles/ migrants who could never go home, a strange assortment of people, inconceivable back home, held together by peculiarly diasporic loyalties, interests and hopes, which make their lives tolerable. These are the Hottentots, the select members of the tribe. For the tribe: "Home was the Hottentot", a home away from home, the only home they knew, a refuge. It is a place built on illusions, where talk is "'about what might have been, or could still be. Never about what is. What might be true in the Room is not true

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    See Breytenbach 1985a:222, 1985:25-6,71,214,251,257, 1988:124, 1996:40,42,44,161.
Those who passed through imprisonment and exile typically experienced and inhabited many homes (see Lewin 1991).

anywhere else'" (1986:14,55,93,124,139). Exiles and migrants who shared a great deal

or shared almost nothing beyond "a geographically named node of feeling" (Moss

1985:239) reconstructed a shared home. Just as the group doing the reconstruction was

often one that would have been inconceivable back home, so too was the home

reconstructed.

Exile communities, as already mentioned in the context of exile politics, are often

complicated and troubled environments, savagely self-destructive, unstable, riven with

insecurity, suspicion, guilt, bitter rivalries and impotent anger.[7] Home, like all else in

exile, is a fragile and precious resource, fought over all the more fiercely for being so.

When exiles are thrown together understandings of home are as likely to be destroyed as

they are to be maintained or created. Home, furthermore, can be shared, defended and

contested by, with and against others as a form of narrow and exclusive fundamentalism:

a certain form of nationalism as the ideology of home. But as previously indicated,

nationalism need not necessarily revolve around absolute notions of the pure, essential

and authentic, and/or an intolerance of difference and fear of the 'other'. Finally, and in a

way that has a bearing on the above, home was regularly impinged upon and

appropriated by outsiders who sought to control it as image and idea(l), as political cause

and international symbol.

Home is an agent of violence. It requires the painful un/remaking of a nest of negatives.

To use Breytenbach's phrase, it is a 'debilitating concept'. Home is carried across

borders like a disease; projected onto that one place where it is impossible to be;

permeated with guilt and a sense of betrayal because it has somehow intrinsically been

wronged by departure and absence; and contested with and defended against others to

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[7] See, for example, Norma Kitson's (1986) description of the exiled political community
in London. Also see B. Kgositsile, "Exile Blues", in Oliphant ed. 1992:71. Breytenbach
and Mphahlele were both deeply ambivalent, and sometimes scathing, about exile
communities and politics.

the point of self-destruction. Home is a form of (self-)mutilation and punishment. It is that imagined destination which maintains the often violently illusory hope of a final return or arrival, and belonging.

Home is source of hope and inspiration, a question and investment of faith. It is a quest, a journey, a mission, a destiny. Where do you want to be and remain until the end of your days? "Was there, after all, a place like home?" (Zwi 1984:16). There's no place like home.[8]

*   *   *

There are as many homecomings from/in exile as there are homes. South Africa has experienced homecomings from repression and political isolation, from exile and expatriation, from prison, migrancy, removals, on military operations and from military service and combat.[9] The definitive homecoming - "that / one last journey for which we burn" (Brutus, "Snarling, the great beast hurls through the dark", 1978:54) - is to the original, primal, home from exile. This homecoming is the arrival in that home, remembered yet unknown, from which all other homes grew and to which they all return.

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[8]
 Few idea(l)s are so subject to the significance bestowed by, or the platitudinous nature of, cliché: there's no place like home; home is where the heart is; show me the way to go home.

[9]
 South African literature is littered with these various homecomings, of which the following provide merely a few examples. On homecoming from prison see Afrika's "Shacklemates" in de Kock and Tromp eds. 1996:26-7, Essop's "Home-coming" (1990:118-28), Gordimer's "Amnesty" (1992:247-57), and Langa 1987:425-7. Narratives featuring returns on opposition military operations include Gordimer, "Something Out There" (1984), Langa 1987:406-19 and 1989, Sepamla 1981,1986:110-25,162-3, Tlali 1980:262-6; while analyses of homecoming from military service are contained in Rule's "A Return" (1987) and many contributions to 'border literature'. Also, in autobiographical accounts, Norma Kitson (1986) poignantly describes her trips home to visit her husband in prison while Mary Benson was allowed home to visit her ailing father (1990:224-35).

In the Darkest Hour

"... go and see how dark is the darkest hour..." writes Daniel Kunene (1981:65).

Opponents attempted to return both legally and illegally, and were greeted with

rejection and endless bureaucratic wrangling in the first instance, and harassment,

intimidation, imprisonment, and even death in the second. Depending on the returnee's

status and aims the door home was opened in welcome, left to swing free, selectively,

randomly, tortuously, miraculously left ajar, slammed in backward glancing faces,

barred, and forced open. During visits home - due to the illness or death of a family

member, to give birth to a child, in the course of study abroad, as preparation for a final

return - contradictory reactions and emotions (validation and alienation, intimacy and

fear) were evoked in equal measure. Those who visited freely, came and went as they

wished, for whom home was a holiday, could find the experience hollow and

unfulfilling. Carol Hermer describes a trip home as "a nightmare", the reality of a

holiday home being a poor substitute for the reality of living in South Africa

(1984:282).[10] Homecoming in the darkest hour was perhaps inevitably part nightmare.

And yet for those who made it in, there was also ecstasy. "What a Homecoming"

declares Mphahlele (1984:171-95). Breytenbach is equally effusive about his arrival in

paradise:

> I am the happiest man alive. You wake up thus inside your own dream.
>
> This is the point I have been dreaming toward... How do you say such
>
> joy?... All I can say, is: even though a joy such as this may be unique,
>
> even though you know in advance it can't last, even if I had to die

---

[10] Fictional testimony complements the autobiographical in this regard. The return visits of Stacey in Roberts' "Ah, Prague!" (1993a), for example, are riven with ambiguity.

immediately afterward, even then I would wish for nothing deeper or

greater... (1985a:47-9, also see 57)

A 'Hinge of History'

Homecoming took/takes place in its own time: "The call is from afar unto afar. It

reaches him who wants to be brought back" (Heidegger in Hope 1986:206). For some

there may appear to be little logic or careful reasoning behind the homecoming: to such

wanderers comes their own realisation that the time has come to return home, and their

own reasons for doing so. For the exile, in contrast, whether and when the call is heeded

is a matter of political circumstance as much as individual choice. Some knew very

clearly why and on what terms they would return. It is not a decision taken alone.[11]

Then: "Mandela comes walking, behind him the / unsealed door of an entire country"

(Hirson, "The Long Distance South-African", 1992:6). With the door unsealed, all who

wanted to could return home. *The Rift* by Hilda Bernstein contains a remarkable

collection of interviews with South African exiles and migrants, carried out on either

side of 2 February 1990.

> From that date the status of exiles changed, for the possibility of return
>
> was opened up for tens of thousands. Before 2 February, 'going home'
>
> was a dream deferred over the years, all the more sweet because of its
>
> remoteness. Return was insubstantial, while the longing for it remained
>
> clear and unconditional. But the opportunity of return revealed the
>
> irreparable nature of exile. It exposed lesions that will never heal. For

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[11] See Cope's "A Time To Go Home" (1967), and Martins' "Time to Come Home" (in Couzens and Patel eds. 1982:357-8). Interesting meditations on it being time to go home are explored through the characters of Andrea Malgas (Brink 1985) and Rosa Burger (Gordimer 1980).

once the legal obstacles to fulfilling that dream were removed, then
ambivalence blurred the clarity of the perception. (1994:xxiii)[12]

Some exiles as an act of faith had remained confident of a permanent return to South
Africa. Others found such confidence waning over the years; came to see a lifetime as
too short a timescale for return; became used to exile (C. J. Driver, "Somewhere Else",
in de Kock and Tromp eds. 1996:103-4). Many, therefore - having become too old, been
away too long, invested in a life and career, or simply not wishing to live in South
Africa again (Bernstein 1994:xxv,9,28,251-2) - would not return, while for another exile
constituency the desire to return was taken for granted, unequivocal, instantaneous, and
its imminent realisation embraced with infectious enthusiasm and joy.[13]

February 1990 was a defining moment for the South African diaspora, a moment of
choice, of definitional clarity and self-acknowledgement in relation to articulations of
home and identity. The decisions made at the point of return - as indicated by
Breytenbach and Mphahlele - contain within them an un/remaking not just of the
possibilities of the present and future but also of the actualities of the past. Can
someone who returns too soon, too late or who does not return at all, claim to have been
an exile? If not, what were/are they and what are the implications of such a redefinition
of self? What, after years of absence, is the difference between an exile and an
immigrant and what forces/forges the changes in identity of those in the diaspora? Is the
dream of return best understood as a strategy, a source of strength when strength is

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12
   This is Tanya Hodgson: "I'm very scared of going back to South Africa - you live with
a dream for twenty years and all of a sudden it's going to be reality, and it is a bit
frightening. But I'm sure that's not just for me, I'm sure that's for everybody" (in
Bernstein 1994:493). AnnMarie Wolpe writes in a similar vein: "Going home. Those words,
once spoken spontaneously, are no longer in the same league as... 'I would love to see
what Johannesburg looks like now', or 'Wouldn't it be lovely to go and stay with my
sister, Betty, and walk on the squeaky white sands of Clifton Beach'. Going home is no
longer fantasy" (1994:18).

13
   See Ginwala, Kasrils, Moloi, Kleinschmidt, Levitan, Baskind, Masekela, M. Kunene,
Lapsley, Eggenhuizen, Vania, Moatlhodi, M. and L. T. Kunene in Bernstein
1994:13,181,185-6,263,278,320-22,344-5,358,378,387,409,414,460,463-5.

needed, or does its non-fulfilment mean that the exile has nurtured loss, place, hope, has lived, for nothing (see Rieff 1994)?

Among those interviewed by Bernstein after 2 February 1990, many expressed uncertainty about the prospect of leaving exile and return home, couching it in terms that were conditional and provisional. Both personal and practical issues had to be addressed. There was always something, and frequently a great deal, to lose or at the very least profoundly threaten and/or jeopardise: non-South African partners and friends; children in school or grown up and established in their own lives; investments in mortgages, welfare benefits and pension rights, a job/career and, more generally, in the construction of a life; a standard of living; stability and security. Commitments and responsibilities meant that the exile could/would not just up and leave as many had done when fleeing South Africa. Attachments to the places of exile were made apparent, drawn into sharper focus, at the moment when departure became possible. Some were wary of the consolations of exile that would be missed. The currency of the would-be returnee was a pocketful of difficult questions: how? where? when? "Do I want now to return to South Africa?" asks Ronald Segal: "That's a very difficult question after thirty years. Yes. For what? For how long? On what basis?" (in Bernstein 1994:9). And if South Africa failed to provide a sense of belonging and home, what then? Some were not yet ready, were waiting for things to settle and/or for confirmation of genuine, irreversible change, and/or were held back by unfinished business of various kinds. Alongside waiting and delay, there was talk, and in some cases the actuality, of exploratory visits, short term returns, international commuting, "sabbatical homecomings" (Nixon 1994:116). For many, however, there was also a strong, overarching, desire to contribute, to participate in a way that would be constructive.

Some returnees anticipate the ambiguity and difficulty of the encounter with home. "Exile / is not leaving... or coming to... or being in... but knowing / there is no easy

going / back" (Amelia House in Couzens and Patel eds. 1982:9).[14] Bernstein's

interviewees raise a number of concerns about the possibilities of adjustment and

integration. These ranged from anxieties about finding a job and a place to stay, to

apprehension about reuniting with family/community; from a desire not to return in a

vacuum, to a fatigue at the prospect of having to variously start all over again. Again

exiles faced the prospect of not fitting in, of being out of touch and outsiders; again they

would have to compromise on terms set by others. Seeing themselves as more broad/

open minded, returnees were worried about their re-entry into a society with different,

and often more conservative, values and mores. The children of exiles - born in South

Africa, born in exile; old enough to choose a homeland, young enough to have to follow

their parents - faced a 'return' to a country where they had often never lived and about

which they were largely ignorant: many, for example, had never known apartheid or

township life. While for some exiles homecoming heralded a contraction of their world,

a restriction of choice and opportunity, for others it promised a dramatic and heady

expansion. Aspects of apartheid were still in force, its legacy was pervasive, everything

and nothing had changed. There were also more overt political concerns, notably in

relation to violence. Uncertainty was compounded by a multi-faceted fear. The prospect

of return could seem almost overwhelming: "And after that, this is what we really have

to go back for... So it's going to be a long road home, and yes, I'm scared" (Ngeleza in

Bernstein 1994:441). The return home was also, at least implicitly, acknowledged as the

defining moment for notions of the essence of South Africa and South Africans, for

constructions of home and nation, brought back home from exile.[15] Return to the shrine

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14
   Also see Maphepha, "Our Home-Coming", in Feinberg ed. 1980:107.

15
   Despite the existence of communities and organisations that constructed a shared
idea(l) of home, and of vehicles for national liberation and nation-building, the
constructions and imaginings of home by those scattered throughout the diaspora (in
prison and elsewhere in South Africa) differed, within, between and in ways which cut
across and were extraneous to organisational affiliation (see Bowman 1994). What were
the implications of such differences to be?

The sources for the above two paragraphs are: Segal, Mvusi, Reddy, Vikalala, Xulu,
Gilder, Schoon, Davis/Kumalo, Mhlangu, Nchabeleng, Shearing, Strauss, Bhyat, Cawthra,
Baskind, Gwangwa, Hope, Ngcobo, Motaung, Msomi/Dumakude, Gertz-Mketo, Stevenson,
Khanyile, Mafaje, Ngeleza, G. Slovo, M. Kunene, E. O. Beck, R. and I. Beck, D. Tambo, M.
Sexwale, Hodgson, Mohamed, Vileika, Randeree in Bernstein 1994:9,38-9,52,143-4,155-

of home, that has been so obsessively nurtured over the years and whose hold remains undiminished, is inevitably an occasion for apprehension (Huddleston 1991:25, also 34,43).

Many exiles - because of the generally high levels of criminal and political violence during the transition, subject to state-sponsored surveillance/harassment and to attacks by right-wing groups and other political opponents, wary of askaris and returned ANC ex-detainees, without or unsure of their indemnity - were reluctant to return particularly to live in the townships, and therefore delayed, returned illegally, worked underground, lay low. Ronnie Kasrils returned to South Africa at the end of 1989 under the auspices of Operation Vula. Following the February 1990 unbanning of the liberation movements, Kasrils left South Africa secretly and returned publicly in an official capacity soon afterwards. After Operation Vula was uncovered, 'Red Plot' allegations depicting it as an SACP-inspired attempt to overthrow the government by force led to the detention of a number of its leading operatives in June/July 1990. In the aftermath of these events Kasrils was once more forced to live an underground existence, on the run again. Following the withdrawal of his temporary indemnity and the charging of Vula operatives with attempting to overthrow the government by force, came the November 1990 announcement that the authorities were looking for Kasrils and three others and that they were "armed and dangerous". Kasrils writes, "I was in no-man's land, caught up in a hinge of history, between two distinct eras" (1993:vi). In March 1991 charges were dropped and the Vula operatives released, but not until June 1991 were the fugitives at large indemnified. By this time Kasrils' homecoming had consisted

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6,197-8,225,264,270,286, 288-92,295,297,304-5,317,321-2,339-40,348,353-4,366-7,371-2,395,402-4,421,431,441,451,453, 462,472-7,480-1,489-90,492-6,500-1. On anxieties and misgivings about homecoming, also see Wolpe 1994:3-59; specifically on what she anticipates missing about exile: 17-18,25-9,32. In addition, on aspects of exile that will be missed, see S. Laufer, "Byebye Berlin. Home is Where the Hope is", *Weekly Mail* 26/3-1/4 1993:15-16.

of almost a year on the run from the authorities, preceded by six months of undercover activity (see Kasrils 1993:vi,1-10,301-68).

Another, much more public return, at the 'hinge in history' was that of Trevor Huddleston, who had previously stated that he would not return to South Africa until apartheid was dead and buried. But he was persuaded/decided to change his mind after 35 years in exile, and visited the country in June-July 1991 having been invited to attend the ANC National Conference in Durban. "'I still believe that apartheid will be dead and buried before I am[...] I hope I have made it clear that I do not regard my visit as a cause for celebrating the end of apartheid but for taking part in the final stages of the struggle'" (Huddleston 1991:14). The welcome, the reunions, the returns, were magical: "For that journey has been the most significant journey of my life. Everything else is certain to be anti-climax" (24); elsewhere he describes his return as "truly a kind of miracle, never to be repeated, sufficient in itself" (71, also 133). It was a moment of hope, but throughout the trip ecstasy was accompanied by agony, the two inseparable: "Egypt, the land of bondage at last left behind but no Promised Land in sight: only the wilderness" (53, also 20,122,128).

As complement and contrast, numerous returnees re-entering South Africa in the early 1990s became involved in and part of the process of political transformation, in/of the, at least partial, realisation of a vision/dream. Returning exiles moved into positions of authority, influence and power and found enormous satisfaction therein. Williams, testifying to the many textual manifestations of the self, talks of

> the varial influence that one has as an individual with an accumulated
> amount of expertise and experience in a country like this, where you can
> actually see the concrete product of what you're doing, you know, it's not
> lost in this vast old country... you get engaged in a project and its written

into the constitution, you actually see little epitaphs to yourself all over

the place. And I mean I think that, you know, it labours the self

actualisation of the species, I mean that's a very good example of it,

because you're actually leaving monuments behind you all the time.

(interview)

Exiles and prisoners returned to un/remake the nation in their individual and collective

image.

Dreams and Reality

To return, at any time and in any context, is to be poured from one reality into another:

"The transition between winter and summer, life and death, Europe and Africa, being

and alienation, castration which exile is and integration... One has to be dead first in

order to rise again" (Breytenbach 1985a:39, also see 41,58). To return home is to be

reborn. There is nothing quite like homecoming. A "humdinger" states Keorapetse

Kgositsile (1991:5), while Rian Malan, who returned to South Africa in the mid-1980s,

states:

Exile is a sweet thing to end... They say that junkies sometimes put

themselves through the cold sweats and sickness of withdrawal just so

they can start anew, and experience that wild rush of intoxication to the

brain as if for the first time. Coming home was like that. (1991:109)[16]

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[16]
On the post-1990 era of homecoming also see Mazisi Kunene 1993:14. Élation
during this period was often linked to specific homecomings, a first return, for
example, or homecoming for a particular event. One such event was the 1994
election. See Nkosi 1994a. Nkosi quotes a communication from Tim Holmes: "'I have
never felt so blessed in all my life, after 31 years away. The first impression
on the streets is that people have come alive'" (21). Homecoming was the occasion
not only of joy, but also of humour. This is Joe Slovo on his return after 27
years in exile: "'As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted[...]'"
(Slovo 1996:193).

Just as the experience of exile varied enormously, so too did that of homecoming. While some former exiles returned in the transitional phase to positions of power and influence, others returned to nothing at all.[17] Homecoming is a dream and an expectation. The dream/expectation of a rapid, military return, a return in triumph, as victors and heroes, to implement the revolution - "you know we thought we would go in the Zimbabwean style. I used to imagine myself on the plane in my combat uniform and my AK, yah, and on an airforce plane landing at Jan Smuts... but no, no, things didn't work out that way" (Mabitsela interview) - was progressively undermined, by delays, due to the difficulties of infiltration, and military setbacks/defeats, and ultimately by a negotiated settlement without absolute winners and losers, and a bewildering and violent transition. "Wonderful as the changes have been, they are not quite the changes we wanted. We have to learn to come to terms with this" (Schoon interview).

"The principal revolution has been the revolution in expectations" (Nixon 1994:115): many, like C. J. Driver writing earlier, had "the usual fantasies / Of return and recognition" ("Not Quite", 1984:275). Kgositsile suspects that the most treacherous thing about expectation is that it so quickly turns into demand (1991:6). The expectation is that something will be "made clear", "unformulated questions" will be answered, and "fragmented memories" will "cohere in a recognizable pattern". That homecoming will have meaning and lead to some kind of understanding. But, "[t]here was no answer... there was life which had to be continued, and perhaps that continuation was in itself something like an answer or as near as one would ever get to an answer" (Schoeman 1978:59,83). The deep and varied demands of homecoming swamp the capacity for supply. Homecoming, therefore, is often an ambiguous and disorientating experience,

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17
For returning exiles, Sibongile and Didymus Maqoma, in Gordimer's *None to Accompany Me* (1994), homecoming is accompanied by, respectively, political elevation and marginalisation, and by a continuity of violent threat and fear.

with joy, hope and relief tempered, even eclipsed, by other emotions such as

disappointment and unfulfilled expectations, disillusionment and anger.[18] It can be

tarnished in/from the very moment of arrival. More often than not there was no heroes

welcome, no large cheering crowd to await the exile's arrival, no ritual slaughtering of

the fattened calf. Could any welcome have compensated for the years of farewells? Was

the lack of reception and recognition liberating or annihilating?[19] Is a resolution - of

dreams, expectations, demands, and reality - possible?

Organisational and Mass Return

In the aftermath of February 1990 and its unbanning it was time, at last, for the ANC-

led alliance, the largest and most important organisation in exile, to return home. While

unprepared for homecoming, exile was becoming increasingly untenable. By June 1990

the ANC's centre of gravity had returned to Johannesburg. Homecoming on such a scale

was an enormously complex task. The ANC had to repatriate both a significant volume

of people - soldiers, students, employees, dependants - and a liberation movement and

institutional infrastructure: the ANC/South African nation/state in exile. Also relocated

onto home territory were both the strengths and the weaknesses of exile politics. The

ANC had to combine the logistical challenge of return with the political challenge of

transformation. As a liberation movement it needed to integrate the structures,

organisational cultures and leaderships from exile, prison and elsewhere within South

Africa, and to transform itself from an authoritarian, centralised and secretive

movement into a democratic political party. All this within unfamiliar and often hostile

circumstances. There was tension, to mention just one example, between key internal

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[18] There are not infrequent expressions of anger and pain at reunion and return, at a sense of futile loss and waste: why was what appears to be so easy now so hard before? had so much been suffered and sacrificed for so little? (Bernstein 1990, Lewin 1991, Ngeleza in Bernstein 1994:441).

[19] On the anti-climax and alienation of arrival, see Nkosi 1994.

players and returnees in the competition for political authority and positions of power,

in some cases to the extent of violence and killings.[20]

Significantly, the process of repatriation took place during a period when the ANC was

not in power and as a result was limited in its capacity to facilitate and resource the

process. An agreement signed in September 1991 between the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the South African government enabled the

UNHCR to establish an office in the country to assist the return of exiles. Although the

UNHCR developed a plan for the voluntary repatriation of 30,000 exiles, it soon

became clear that there would be far fewer returnees. The implementing partner of the

UNHCR, the National Co-ordination Committee for the Repatriation of South African

Exiles (NCCR), was mandated to facilitate repatriation and reintegration. Set up under

the auspices of the South African Council of Churches and the liberation movements,

the NCCR's functions included distributing cash payments from the UNHCR - returnees

were entitled to R4,250 spread over a six month period - operating a development fund

to provide loans to returnees to start their own small businesses, organising

employment, education and skills training, and counselling. The brief life of the NCCR

was tarnished by inefficiency, fraud, corruption, bankruptcy and, ultimately,

dissolution.[21]

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[20]
On the homecoming of the ANC see Lodge 1992.

[21]
For Willy Leslie, who was involved in NCCR work in Natal, the experience of
homecoming was bound up with the NCCR and the homecoming of others:

> The whole programme became a very unpleasant experience. An experience I'd love
> to remember because of all the hard work I put into it... There are those rich
> and fulfilling experiences, but what I'd love to forget is the last two months...
> became a nightmare. Where it was now evident that the UN wasn't putting in any
> more funds, where in Natal's case, we now had a situation where more than 400
> people were claiming to be exiles and we had made it perfectly clear to them that
> they don't qualify for whatever assistance. The last two months became an
> avalanche that we had to ward off all the time; that was an experience I'd like
> to forget. (interview)

Exiles were deposited in an alien environment and told to take responsibility for their lives. Paradoxically, the enveloping material security of organisational/camp exile was shattered by the myriad uncertainties of homecoming and home. Many exiles had been ensconced within a culture of dependency in which basic material needs were catered for, and, therefore, had become unused to such tasks as managing money and budgeting. They lacked necessary life skills and knowledge, and possessed skills and knowledge which were redundant in the new context of home. Aspects and periods of life abroad were unknown, unrecognised, and unacknowledged. Parallel and starkly different systems of evaluation often made the returnees feel as if they were entering the brave new world empty handed. Frustration was compounded by a sense of lost time (in a career/profession, material circumstances, education, relationships). The exile, now returned, was once again running to catch up on/with life. In this uncomfortable new world, returnees encountered a sense/glimpse, through friends and contemporaries who chose different paths, of other lives they might have lived, of lost and unlived lives that could have been theirs if they had made different choices - about political involvement, about leaving the country - if they had lived in a different country and/or in different times. Contemporaries were in various ways, particularly materially and professionally, further advanced and in a prime position to reap the benefits of political change which, often, they had done nothing to bring about:

> your ex-schoolmate is living in the northern suburbs, and you say, aiy, this
>
> is another thing that really makes us... because this person was even dull
>
> in class and she stays in Bryanston, she is big... vast difference between
>
> our dwelling places, sort of feel like, it makes you feel smallish, makes
>
> you feel small. There is some complex involved, at the same time, if I am
>
> to be honest. (Mabitsela interview)[22]

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[22] Alongside regrets, there are aspects of difference that are potentially positive, opportunities gained rather than lost. Cronin talks in this way about having children who are much younger than those of his peer group: "we are younger for it" (interview).

Large numbers of returnees remain homeless, in informal settlements and squatter

camps, having moved - because their parents/family members could not or would not

look after them or had died, because they are trying to trace family members, because

they have been displaced by violence and harassment - from place to place, between

family, friend, stranger. Unemployment became a major problem. Exiles were

victimised by employers, particularly in the private sector, because of their political

background. The majority lacked qualifications and skills - what could the former MK

soldier put on a cv for jobs outside the army or the ANC? "I mean they don't have other

skills except the gun" (Mkhize interview) - and often the educational and professional

qualifications obtained in exile were not recognised at home. Promises made in exile

were not, perhaps could not be, kept; little effort was made to assess and make use of

the returnees' strengths; their special needs were not met; they were further

disadvantaged by their lack of understanding of how to work the system. As a worst

case scenario returning exiles came home to no home, returned with nothing and were

simply left to fend for themselves. The plight of returnees has often, as a result, been

characterised by neglect, loss, and invisibility, destitution and desperation.[23]

Counteracting understandable tensions and jealousies is a pride in lives lived and the correctness of moral choices made, a desire to stress the many benefits of exile and an alternative currency for evaluating life and status:

> after all is said and done, I love the life I led, I would do it all again, even the suffering that I went through, because it made me the person that I am. I am one of those exiles that came back and is certainly living a better standard of life than 90% of exiles who did come back. I am living relatively comfortably... yes, I look at some of my comrades, friends, neighbours that I left behind, who might be way up there in terms of what I have and, you know, what they have... But they don't have the experiences I have, and they're honestly not the human being that I am, and that I can't put a price to, no-one can... (Leslie interview)

23
    In February 1993, the NCCR reported that less than 6% of returnees had been able to find jobs (SAIRR 1993/4:162). A survey of 450 returned exiles, carried out by the Human Sciences Research Council and the Pretoria Returnees Project Committee, found that 76% of returnees lived in informal settlements. A loss of status, depression and disillusionment were also prevalent(SAIRR 1994/5:323). Also see Zonke Majodina's study of black/African returnees, which examines the problems faced by returnees, and the contribution of these problems and social support and coping strategies to reintegration (1995).

There were times when the anger and disappointment of returnees boiled over. Tensions, for example, surfaced during the return and integration into the new national army of MK soldiers. The forces that fed into the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) were the SADF, the bantustan armies from the TBVC states, and the armed forces of the liberation movements (MK and the PAC's military wing, the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA)). Although estimates of the size of MK prior to integration vary considerably, even by the most generous calculations it stood to be significantly outnumbered in the new army, notably by the dominant component from the former SADF. Within the processes of negotiation and integration, many in MK felt marginalised, neglected/abandoned, betrayed, used; resentful of the imbalances and inequalities: for example, although former guerrillas had to be evaluated and trained before being placed on active duty, SADF members did not have to undergo any such process. Frustration and disillusionment became widespread.

> I see no future in the army for myself... it is so discouraging about this
> new national defence force because of all the problems we encountered
> there. I mean we are not integrating, we are being absorbed, that is our
> feeling... it is like going... with cap in hand, from generals[...]... you are
> deranked. And you feel that no I deserve this rank because of the number
> of years I have spent in the army and the ANC. You feel you can deliver
> the goods, what you just need are to do those courses, and you are
> prepared to do that. Now if you are deranked and deranked and
> deranked, and the process is slow... That is why I just got disillusioned...
> (Mabitsela interview)

> the fighting in these camps where they were training, the SADF, their
> enemies are in charge and they know very well that these are our
> enemies, and one of them, that group that defied Mandela and refused to

> go back, he said to me, what made him do it - very angry, he's one day
>
> talk about an experience - how the very commanders attacked them at
>
> Lesotho some time back, and now they were in charge. And they couldn't
>
> take that. (Mkhize interview)[24]

Once the ANC was in government, albeit coalition government, its constituency and responsibilities had changed. Those who had sacrificed so much to go into exile and in exile itself, were made to sacrifice again on their return: in terms of the lack of investment in them and their future and in terms of the calls for reconciliation. Having had to remake and reinvent themselves in exile, often many times over, they had to do so again on their return. These veterans of survival often had to build a life again, start again, in any and every possible way, from scratch:

> oh yes, starting from buying a teaspoon... Had two small pots, one fork,
>
> one teaspoon, one tablespoon, one table knife given by another comrade,
>
> and two plastic plates - so I had to start from scratch. (Mabitsela
>
> interview)[25]

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[24] Frustration and disillusionment took many forms. Former-MK members became involved in violent crime and gangsterism, hijacked Self Defence Units for their own, often lawless, purposes, were 'turned' and recruited to work for the state and other former opponents. There were also particular flashpoints. The first national MK conference in Venda in September 1991, illustrated the organisation's considerable internal problems and articulated widespread criticism of its leadership (Pillay 1991). Grievances including training facilities, procedures and conditions, and the racism of white officers, resulted in a mutiny and the subsequent dismissal of about 2,000 former MK soldiers from the army in October 1994. This is the mutiny referred to in the Mkhize quotation above. The integration, rationalisation and transformation of the various military forces within the SANDF remains one of the great challenges facing South Africa (see Kynoch 1996).

[25] The process of remaking the self on return also unquestionably had its positive dimensions, particularly if it could be done in material/professional security: "you actually have a chance to choose how you come back into that society. Exile has given me that freedom to create my own life when I go back. And I'm going to be more free in that country than I would have been if I hadn't had an enforced break" (Dunkley in Bernstein 1994:283).

The Impossibility of Return

Exile serves as interminable and yet hopelessly inadequate preparation for the re-encounter with home.[26] Propelled and lured into a return by the image of home, the exile is then abandoned to the reality of something entirely other. "Satisfaction at home could not rival the desire activated in exile... the mental energy expended on the image of home in absence proves incommensurate with the reality of home as presence" (Seidel 1986:12). There can be no return to an imaginary and imagined homeland, no restitution, redemption or resolution.

> South Africans have experienced the attenuation of exile without the fullness of return; without, that is, anything approaching liberation, deliverance, or what the Martinican poet, Aimé Césaire once called 'the rendezvous of victory'. (Nixon 1994:114)

Homecoming, like exile, combines both rebirth and death. "There we shall meet with our broken selves," writes Mazisi Kunene, selves to be brought back to life: "Giving them the fulfilling word of life / Making them climb the last hill of the sun / Certain, by such magic our triumph is assured" ("'Unfinished Adventure'", in Feinberg ed. 1980:80). Those without the magic, however, are denied the triumph and left simply with one more, and perhaps the ultimate, addition to a collection of broken selves. Homecoming is redolent with death: "Sometimes returning feels like death", remarks Wolpe (1994:31). In some cases it is the death of a dream, in others the death takes a different form.

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[26] For a contrary view – exile as preparation for homecoming – see Shearing in Bernstein 1994:292.

I remember one guy very well... I could see that [he] was suffering from PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder]. But there was just so much when coming back here: some of his comrades had been killed... we worked through that, but I could see that it was more than that specific trauma... Many people died in exile... when [the returnees] come back here to this violence, or when they see things on the TV... it triggers off their own issues. And some of them... have been perpetrators... [Others] were actually tortured... I know of so many people who have been wanting to slaughter goats and stuff, because when their parent or a sister or a brother was buried they were not involved... thinking that they can't get jobs because they have this curse hanging over them... So people now are living those experiences, it's so difficult. (Mkhize interview: Mkhize is a psychologist who worked with returning exiles)

When I came back home, I couldn't go to the beach, because when the water hit me it felt as if it cut my leg, and I could see my son coming on the waves as he used to, you know. It was very difficult. Returning, I went down hill completely. All his friends would come to see me and there was no joy in seeing them, just terrible terrible grief... I had to give up working as a lawyer... It just became more and more difficult, you know, it didn't get easier. I think it's better now that I'm writing and talking about it a lot more... (Naidoo interview: Naidoo is a former exile whose homecoming was inextricable interwoven with mourning for her son who had been killed in Lusaka by a South African agent)

The returnee is anxious to have something to show for the years in exile, "all those years of absence / varied and intricate in themselves / at once wonderfully light and horribly heavy" (Fitzgerald, "Returning Exile Psycho-Babble Blues", in Oliphant ed.

1992:352). The returnee brings the world, the burdens and insights of exile, back to South Africa, returns with "scars" and "precious gifts" (Breytenbach 1996:47). But there was often a discrepancy between what the exile returned with and what others expected him/her to return with. Families, for example, had specific, often material, expectations, that the exile would return with bounty from abroad.

There is also much, as has already been mentioned, that the exile returns without. Homecoming destroyed the exilic communities that enabled the experience of exile to be survived.

> You know, I've been totally thrown by the fact that there's a group of exiles here, and we've all been together for something like twenty-five years. We're a very close-knit group in some ways. And suddenly it's all over and we're all going to be dispersed! And there are people who are really important to me, close comrades; and suddenly they're going to be[...] one's going to Johannesburg; one's going somewhere else; and I just feel very disturbed by the fact that I might not see some of these people again. I hope that we do keep in touch. We'll probably have something dreadful like reunions! [Laughs] (E. Kasrils in Bernstein 1994:94, also 225,441)

Exiles marry foreigners and/or raise their children abroad, thereby, as was the case with Mphahlele, creating a family that are divided by different understandings of home. For the children of exiles the return of parents often represented another abandonment and betrayal, another disruption of their lives and division of their social world, the source of further anger and resentment, another placing of politics and place above all else

including and especially them.⁻ For the returning parents the anguish could be just as deep: "The separation will simply leave a gaping wound" (Wolpe 1994:29). Relationships and marriages between exiles were put under intense strain where the decision to return was straightforward for one and not for the other. For AnnMarie Wolpe, in ways that echoed with her past, homecoming brought with it a sense and feeling of being taken for granted, of her life and the forces affecting it being out of her control, of her life being dictated by another's wishes, of having no choice (1994:9-13,15,17,28-9,55-9). In some instances, the contingencies of exile forged and kept relationships together - in camps, for example, where South African women were few and sought after - that homecoming split apart. Considerable problems were also experienced by exiles with/and their foreign wives on return: "it was amazing to see how they were abused by families of the returning people, they were seen as intruders, people didn't want them, they were seen as a burden, with no consideration that some of them had really looked well after their sons when they were outside" (Mkhize interview). Homecoming creates a diaspora of its own.

Most importantly, while the exile may not realise it, s/he often returns without any real anticipation or appreciation of what s/he is coming home with, without or to. Exiles expect home to have been irremediably changed in/by their absence and for their return; exiles expect to go home and find it waiting, as before, as remembered, unchanged. There will be continuity and change - but the exile's absence and return will have had little or no effect on either - both having a logic of their own. The dynamic of continuity and change that is discussed below extends its influence to affect all members of the diaspora at every moment of return. In "Last Holiday Home", Jacobson writes:

27
   See Wolpe 1994, especially 12-13,25-6,32,55-7,271-2,275-6, and Peta and Tessa Wolpe
in Bernstein 1994:465-70.

There was no such thing, it seemed, as the passage of time... nothing had

altered, what was there that could alter?... So time was absent; as if it

had done away with itself. Yet there was nothing around me other than

the depredations of time. Time lived through us or on us as a flame lives

on the wood it consumes and chars.... (1985:176)

Noni Jabavu states, "I have mentioned the chasms that yawn at your feet even

while you rejoice in the framework that produced you" (1963:261). The result is a

peculiar blend of the strange and the familiar: "no, strangely familiar. Just strange little

things. The type of people you had forgotten existed, the kinds of shop assistants one

gets here... it was strange... and very familiar in ways but very strange in other ways...

(Richer interview).[28]

Just as residence abroad provides a different perspective and fresh insight on home, so

does homecoming. That which was previously subconsciously absorbed, transparent

and taken-for-granted as home, and then yearned for and recreated from a distance, is

made strange and unfamiliar, consciously seen and felt as if for the first time, in the

event of homecoming. Malan writes: "When I came home from exile, I was

overwhelmed by the feeling that I was seeing South Africa clearly for the first time"

(1991:273-4, also see 110,330-4). As the prologue to her autobiography Mary Benson

chose the famous lines by T. S. Eliot: "And the end of all our exploring / Will be to

arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time" (1990).

28
  Also on continuity and change, the familiar/intimate and the strange/estrangement,
see Cartwright 1996:63-4,75,94,101,116,118-9,166, Jacobson 1968a:14,38,43-4,47,51-2,58-
9,208,350-3,451,487, 1992:236-8, 1994:20-1,24-6,46,71,73,87,143-4,153,175, Lewin
1991:22, Wolpe 1994:21-3,39-42,47-9. In some cases this ambiguous contract of return was
further complicated by the patterns of all change/no change and the strange/the familiar
that also characterised the political transition to democracy.

Homecoming is a transition in time, a violent journey through condensed time (Peters, "Parachute Men Say...", 1981:26). It is an attempt to grasp the thread that spans continuity and change, the familiar and the strange, past and present, home and abroad; to understand the ways they coexist and are superimposed upon one another; to heal the rift created by absence. But is such a healing possible? Is it equally possible for all members of the diaspora?

> An exile never returns. 'Before' does not exist for 'them', the 'others', those who stayed behind. For 'them' it was all continuity; for you it was a fugue of disruptions. The thread is lost. The telling has shaped the story. You make your own history at the cost of not sharing theirs. The eyes, having seen too many different things, now see differently. (Breytenbach 1996:48).

In reality, both the returnees and those who remained behind have changed. People have grown up, grown old and died, lives and relationships have evolved, and those long absent have been forgotten. Absence strips away attachments and connections, makes the returnee into an outsider who has no life left in that place called home. Even with close friends and family they may still find themselves struggling "like tourists in a market place" (Wicomb 1987:109). "Here I come," writes Jeni Couzyn, "who will claim me?" ("The Return", 1973:64), while Ntantala states: "Most of the people who are dear to me are now gone... Now I ask myself: To whom am I going back, if I go?" (1993:235).

Returnees and those who remained at home inhabit different worlds. This, for example, has been the experience of some exiles who returned post-February 1990. Different experiences, social mores, interests, commitments, priorities, and horizons made integration and socialising with South Africans at home difficult. Reunited families

were fraught with disjunctures, fortunes had varied, roles had been challenged, remade and reversed, the wounds of absence festered still. Returnees encountered problems with relationships, in forming the new and rekindling the old; they harboured feelings of resentment at being misunderstood when others were not interested in their stories or the pain of their past, in their cargo of exile and return. Adaptation was made more difficult as many returnees brought home the innate suspicion of the culture of exile that made them slow to trust. In the face of uncertainty and hostility, returnees frequently withdrew and clung to a familiar reference group of former exiles for company and support. Although this pattern of social behaviour will in all likelihood break down over time, the initial social alienation, that extended into intimate social worlds, has been one of the hardest experiences of homecoming.

> I find that extremely difficult to do... Socialising with friends from school, unless its with those who are now in the struggle... But I cannot, will not, find it extremely difficult to go to a family wedding... or just an ordinary disco of coloured people, the community that I come from, I am a sore thumb standing out, so obvious. Compounding this of course I've become the focal point, because everyone hasn't seen me for the last 10, 15, 20 years, and everybody would want to know what type of car I'm driving, what type of... That's the type of crap I've got to talk if I'm with them, and I can't talk that language. I want to talk about delivering the RDP... I want to have this kind of conversation with people if they want to talk to me... I've become maybe a political animal and I expect my friends and my people to be the same. And I understand I'm selfish. I understand and I accept that. (Leslie interview)

> You know, this is funny, we find it difficult to socialise with local people... I would find myself saying 'South Africans'. I would say, 'oh,

that's us', no seriously... because I mean it is like we are operating on different wavelengths. Their priorities and ours differ. They want to live in the northern suburbs, have a good job and drive a dolphin or a mercedes... they are, I know it is not really nice to say, they are very materialistic... With you there are a lot of things that you want to see happening, like a fair deal for squatters, a lot of all round development, and you worry about Sarajevo. I mean with them... it is like it is another world, it is not happening here... we've got a broader outlook... we have been exposed to a lot outside, but here they've been confined... There are some attitudes as well: 'these ones from exile, the exiles, they think they are better - OK, don't come with your high ideas'... undertones there: 'don't think that you were the only ones who fought for this... Who was getting killed, shot here, raided, teargassed'... they have... different interests. So it is very difficult to mix with them... Not that we are hostile to South Africans, OK, we do mix with them but there is that thing, it is there, in there. We feel more comfortable at home when with comrades. Go to any party, will find exiles, anywhere, its exiles. And even with us we are too outgoing. Our girls, we are different from local girls, more assertive... [we] break social patterns... (Mabitsela interview)

Another generally encountered dynamic of continuity and change concerns place. A sense of place - there's no home like place - lies at the heart of the homecoming dream. Stephen Watson writes of one such place:

And it's always one place only, always the same place / ... nothing matters now but his desire, but this mad longing / to know that there is still a place, that it still exists / ... but to know that he can come, return to

that road's crest / ... There has to be a place. ("In Exile", in Bunyan ed. 1989:71-2)

But Hermer states that "whereas you can slot back into a true friendship instantly, a move away from your homeland changes your relationship to it for ever" (1984:282): "A napalm of the mind has hit this place", remarks Hope on a return visit (1988:125). Homecoming, for exile, emigrant and migrant alike, if possibly to different degrees, is to a home that has been rebuilt, renamed, removed, that has moved on. Kgositsile remarks on his inability to recognise, relate to, know, his physical surrounds:

> there are no memories here. The streets of Johannesburg cannot claim me. I cannot claim them either. Their names...remain, but it seems there is not much more than that for the returning one after ages and ages... Even at a very physical level, you cannot - or should I say - you should not destroy everything which connects people to history, to certain memories, to certain places, to memorial reference points... you destroy those physical points of reference, you destroy the individual, the compatriot, the son or daughter returning 'home'. (1991:6)[29]

That which is known and recognisable can be at once reassuring and unsettling: "It is not the Cape Town I used to know" writes Breytenbach, "But occasionally something I see this time suddenly corresponds to an old dream which I myself had lost, and the coincidence is confusing, and for a split second I am back where I want to be" (1985a:179).

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[29] Also see Fitzgerald, "Returning Exile Psycho-Babble Blues", in Oliphant ed. 1992:350, Huddleston 1991:30,32,37-8,61,66, Stevenson in Bernstein 1994:403, and Wright, "Notes on a Visit", 1980:112.

Returning to a focus on the 1990s mass return of exiles, there is a possibility that exile

or aspects of it will be missed - comradeship, the sense of purpose, a clearly defined

identity, certain kinds of security - and become the subject of constant reminiscence,

wrapped in nostalgia, the 'good old days'; that all the future holds will be measured,

usually unfavourably, against that period or perhaps the hopes that the period

symbolised. Some indeed have left/will leave home again and return to their previous

place of exile.

Writers testify to the ambiguity of homecoming. Feinberg talks of being "suspended / ...

with no home-coming"; "at some wild initiation gauntlet / I enter my airlock / out of

exile" ("My Airlock out of Exile", 1992:69-70). Kgositsile writes: "my return, no, not

return, *arrival* in this strange place"; "Therefore, return? Return to what? This place is

foreign..."; "at one level, my being here is a homecoming... But at another level, the

returning one has never left... I crossed borders and borders... But I never left"

(1991:7,8). Others echo Kgositsile's claim to a home always at least partially inhabited,

occupied, claimed, claiming: "So, in a sense, though I left South Africa so long ago,

South Africa never left me" (Huddleston in Bernstein 1994:257, also 238,278,344, and

Bernstein 1993:12). Finally, C. J. Driver comments: "How strange it is to be alive, and

back / Where I belonged so much, now not at all" ("Aubade", in de Kock and Tromp

eds. 1996:105, also see "Elegy", 106-8).[30]

Homecoming is to go home, to go back, to return, to re-enter (Nixon 1994:114),

although there is also no going home, no going back, no return, no re-entry.

Homecoming is to arrive, to start again, to attempt to pick up the thread in a place that

in some ways was never left and in other ways can never be returned to. The exile can

[30] Such reactions are not confined to exiles or to the moment of political
transformation. "Claimed and disowned, disowning, peculiarly / Belonging here" states
Wright: "Feeling, as always, at home and alien" ("A South African Album", 1980:63, also
88).

"never, never, never come back... In all the places where we have been, we have left little pieces of ourselves" (Langa interview). The exile returns as a divided self, as is poignantly illustrated by Barry Feinberg on his return after thirty years in London: "London / where home was home / for real / if not at home / in my soul"; he refers to a tongue that "seems / still steeped / in London" ("My Airlock out of Exile", 1992:69). Homecoming represents another division of a multiply divided identity, not a reunion of the self, a making whole. The fragments of the self are scattered along the trajectory of lifetime's journey, yet again reformulated into a self at once augmented and diminished.

Those at home take on unfamiliar and unsettling roles in honour of the returnee: full of hope and expectancy at the prospect of a homecoming; host - "Can you deal with that? Hosts! In my own country" exclaims Kgositsile (1991:6); driven by the desire to make return wonderful and memorable; driven by resentment at the return of the prodigal son or daughter. The returnee is also relegated to unfamiliar and unsettling roles: a traveller on a foreign passport, refugee, stranger, outsider, tourist, and even an exile: "Past days of anguished pain, / Relentless memories of exile / In foreign lands! / (We never believed it possible), / Overlaid / By new pain, new uncertainties. / Comrades all, / Exiles in a strange land, / Our Motherland!" (Mudaly, "Homecoming", 1991:13).

Homecoming, like home, can be anything one wants it to be. Kgositsile found that younger writers, cultural workers and activists knew his work and could even impersonate him reciting it, and declares, "Perhaps *that* was my Homecoming!" (1991:10). Rose Moss in her autobiographical story "Stompie" describes voting in the 1994 South African election in the U.S.A. as a kind of homecoming which, like the story itself, would "knit my divided countries" (1994:11), enabling her to transcend rifts in time and place/space.

Homecoming, across eras and categories of migration/displacement, precipitates something. Sometimes it is a further homecoming or a final and permanent return that is precipitated. It can also facilitate a release from exile, a liberation from home, an exorcism that allows the returnee in some way to move away and move on. Homecoming can be the point at which looking back to where one has come from transforms itself into planned arrival at those places to which one wishes to go.[31]

Ironically, for the writer, homecoming, like migration/displacement, can herald either imaginative renewal or imaginative death (as return, for example, destroys the security of exilic and anti-apartheid imaginative obsessions). Lindfors has asked the question: when exiled black South African writers return home, what kind of literature are they likely to produce? Drawing on the examples of Peter Abrahams and Es'kia Mphahlele, he predicts a future of celebratory and heroic effusion, autobiography and biography, but then disappointment, disagreement, disillusionment followed by protest and repression. He concludes by arguing that if the returning exiles live to see this dark day, they will feel horribly betrayed, "for their homecoming will have turned out to be merely another sort of alienation, another erasure, another extinction, another inglorious death. In the end they will still be exiles, cut off forever from the promised land of their dreams" (1994:162, also see Hope 1993). While some of this prediction has already come to pass, it is too soon to assess the validity of its conclusion.

Homecoming is another autobiographical moment: a moment in which memories of a past home, long dormant, will germinate; in which a sense of closure can be established enabling coherence and structure to be imposed on the past; a moment that will enable exile to be laid to rest; and lives to be told, made known, rescued from past misrepresentation, written into the official record. Andrew Gurr has stated the

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31
    See Breytenbach 1988:130, 1996:48, Hoffenberg and R. Slovo in Bernstein 1994:380-1,442-3,450, Hope 1989:103-4, and Wright, "A Voyage to Africa", 1958:14.

following: "Homecoming as an ideal of course does not respond readily to being deployed in literature. The twentieth century has found it easier to celebrate dystopias than to welcome utopias" (1981:142). What is interesting about the growing South African literature of homecoming is that it has been forced to engage with the fact that homecoming does not usually correspond to the envisaged ideal, elements of dystopia and utopia coexist as return generates a bewilderingly wide spectrum of experiences and responses. The most overt collaborative violence of the apartheid state in the lives of its opponents, and the narration of their life stories, perhaps ends with the experience of homecoming, with the rupture of return and its unexpected un/remaking of selves and worlds. What was written into the script as the culmination of exile, of oppositional victory and apartheid decline, has had to be rewritten in the light of its paradoxical and complex reality.

Like exile, homecoming is both a beginning and an end: "So although my homecomings were a beginning of sorts, they were also a culmination of movements, actions, decisions and realities that went far back in the echoes of time" (Chabani Manganyi 1983:30). It is also a continuation. Homecoming provides a different, more complex, perspective not only on home, but also on exile; the divided self projects one onto the other, qualifying, overlaying, re-evaluating what has gone before. Going home precipitates a continuation and further evolution of the dialogue between home and exile.

and return is unbitter only for the yet unborn

So what can he be doing now
awaking from a dream of returning
or dreaming of that time away from home.

(Fitzgerald, "Returning Exile Psycho-Babble Blues", in Oliphant ed.
1992:352)

"Yet - are we really home?" (Wolpe 1994:278). Show me the way to go home.

SECTION 3 - THE WITNESS

Chapter 7: The Witness: Imprisonment and Exile as Symbol

> ... what could be truer, after all, than a subject's own account of what he or she has lived through? (Scott 1991:777)

> ... they all had a story, and... were driven to tell it... their story was always there and it was always the same: it went, 'Put yourself in my place'. (Herr 1991:29-31)

> ... you don't know what I saw, what there is to see, you *won't* see... I could formulate everything they were, as the act I had witnessed; they would have their lives summed up for them officially at last by me... I could have put a stop to it, the misery; at the point I witnessed. What more can one do?... I drove on... I don't know how to live in [this] country. (Gordimer 1980:208-10)

The following was a common scenario in apartheid South Africa: a crime took place in broad daylight, in full view of crowds of people; and nobody saw anything. There were no witnesses. What if a person felt that they had lived their entire life on one or other side of such a crime? What if lives are destined to remain at the scene of the crime until a witness is found?

To be a witness, to testify, as their legal connotations imply, is to take responsibility for, to provide a signature for, the truth (Felman in Felman and Laub 1992:204-7, 265-7,276-80). What could be more authentic or persuasive, indeed what could be 'truer', than the testimony of an eye-witness? The visual is both evidence and explanation, it renders meaning transparent and irrefutable. Seeing is believing, and such belief can be persuasively shared. This is the power of the witness (see Ginzburg 1992). And yet the visual is also riven with ambiguity. The most transparent of the senses is simultaneously the most opaque, profoundly susceptible to manipulation and illusion. Nor can it be assumed that the word unproblematically reproduces or transmits the visual.[1]

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[1] For Michel Foucault's reflections on this ambiguous relation see, for example, 1973:9 and 1983. Also see Deleuze 1988:47-69 and Rajchman 1988.

The eye is a window and a mirror. Ways of seeing cohabit with ways of being. What I am determines what I see as much as what I see determines what I am; I am changed by what I see just as what I see is changed by my having seen it. An eye for an 'I'. And somewhere between the window and the mirror is you. What if I can formulate, 'officially', everything you are in the act of witnessing; if, essentially, I witness and you are witnessed? What if this translates into lives being told by me and your life being told for you? What if the process of witnessing is both a form of oppression and resistance? To witness: potentially, another violently collaborative intersection, and one that extends beyond state and opponent to condition interactions between subjects. An eye for an 'I': a contest over identity, another relationship at the juncture of truth and power.

Power visualises itself and constructs the terrain of visibility. Who witnesses what and why? This is in part a political question relating to the production of identity and knowledge, truth and power. To truly bear witness is to recognise that there is more to any given situation than meets the eye. Apartheid precluded the possibility of a "*community of witnessing*" (Felman in Felman and Laub 1992:211), and created stark divisions between notions of insider and outsider; an infinite terrain of the 'other'. Such a society, "surgically and scientifically divided" (Malan 1991:413), (chiefly) along racial lines, was predicated upon a clear distinction between that which could be, or in fact had to be, seen, and the unseeable, the unsightly, the invisible (out of sight, out of mind), upon its many ways of looking at itself - "of explaining, rationalising, and forgetting" (Lelyveld 1987:25) - and on its multiple forms of ignorance, blindness and (d)illusion. In part, for those complicit in oppression, particularly whites, not seeing or seeing differently was contingent upon the practice of collaborative unknowing, or "willed ignorance" (Steiner 1974:35, Levi 1989:65);[2] and the equally collaborative

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2
    Primo Levi denounces the majority of Germans during the Holocaust for, "deluding themselves that not seeing was a way of not knowing, and that not knowing relieved them of their share of complicity or connivance... It is enough not to see, not to listen,

failure to imagine: 'put yourself in my place'. This too was a form of violence. In this

domain of annihilation - "'Our eyes did not meet. He never became human'" (Malan

1991:207) - witnesses testified from opposing positions (victim, perpetrator, observer...)

and to lives and worlds that were both dependent upon each other and seemingly

irreconcilable. Apartheid became a peculiarly contested event, beyond unanimous

corroboration.

This chapter argues that witnesses' accounts, like autobiographical accounts more

generally, gain their authenticity through an immediacy and a contagious self-belief.

Moving beyond this argument, however, it will also be suggested that the witness

produces a "testimony which is inadvertently no longer in the control or possession" of

its author(s),

> which exceeds the testifier's own awareness, to bring forward a
>
> complexity of truth which, paradoxically, is *not available as such* to the
>
> very speaker who pronounces it... [the reader is urged] not simply to see
>
> the testimony, but to see *through* it: see - throughout the testimony - the
>
> deception and self-deception which it unwittingly displays, and to which
>
> it unintentionally testifies. (Felman in Felman and Laub 1992:263)[3]

In addressing these issues, the chapter will implicitly address much of what has gone

before in relation to imprisonment, exile and homecoming, while explicitly focusing on

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not to act"; and states that, "Most... didn't know because they didn't want to know.
Because, indeed, they wanted *not* to know... those who knew did not talk; those who did
not know did not ask questions; those who did ask questions received no answers..."
(1989:65-6, and 150,170, 1987:386, see 382-6; also see Gordimer 1989:265-6,303).

To see/know in such a context can be profoundly unsettling. See the narrative thread of
visualisation for the characters Elizabeth Curren and David Miller, in Coetzee 1991a:90-
1,95,100,116-17,123,129,159,163-4, and Moss 1981:33-4,39,59,96-7,111-12,126,141.

3
   Scott states: "Experience is at once always already an interpretation *and* something
that needs to be interpreted... is... not the origin of our explanation, but that which
we want to explain" (1991:797, also see Coetzee 1992:251-93, and Loftus 1979).

Rian Malan's *My Traitor's Heart* and the collaborative narrative, *Poppie*, by Elsa Joubert and Poppie Nongena. Neither Malan nor Nongena were prisoners or exiles in the conventional sense; symbolically, however, they were both prisoner and exile: in that confinement and blinding proximity interwoven with estrangement and unbridgeable distance structured ways of seeing and being. These two narratives recount lives lived on different sides of the apartheid crime and represent a community of witnessing only in the sense that, both within and between texts, they contribute to the development of what Felman calls a "community of testimonial incommensurates which, held together, have an overwhelming testimonial impact" (Felman and Laub 1992:279). As life stories, they acquire additional narrative power when superimposed – as layers of experience and interpretation, complex interpretations themselves in need of interpretation – one on another. The result is that apartheid and lives lived within it can be both seen and seen through.[4]

Rian Malan: The Journalist as Witness

> But, before he said any more, he wanted to know if the journalist would be allowed to tell the truth.
> 'Certainly I shall,' Rambert replied.
> 'I mean,' Rieux explained, 'would you be allowed to publish an unqualified condemnation of the present state of things?'
> 'Unqualified? Well, I must own I couldn't go that far. But surely things aren't quite so bad as that?'
> 'No,' Rieux said quietly, they weren't so bad as that. He had put the question solely to find out if Rambert could or couldn't state the facts without paltering with the truth.
> 'I've no use for statements in which something is kept back'... (Camus 1960:12-13)

> I was there to watch.
> Talk about impersonating an identity, about locking into a role, about irony: I went to cover the war and the war covered me... I went there behind the crude but serious belief that you had to be able to look at anything, serious because I acted on it and went, crude because I didn't know, it took the war to teach it, that you were as responsible for everything you saw as for everything you did. The problem was that you

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[4] The arguments outlined above clearly also apply in a sense to my own analysis. I do not intend to imply that a complexity of truth, not available to the witness, is somehow uniquely available in its entirety to me. My interpretation is also in need of interpretation, in turn requires seeing through.

didn't always know what you were seeing until later... that a lot of it never made it in at
all, it just stayed stored there in your eyes. (Herr 1991:20)

The journalist is society's witness: professional witness, witness as a job.[5] The journalist

is primarily an observer - Crary notes: "Though obviously one who sees, an observer is

more importantly one who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is

embedded in a system of conventions and limitations" (1990:6) - but an observer who,

ideally, cultivates a kind of required intimacy that verges on self-obliteration (Hart

1979:203): the intimate observer. Herr writes, "I stood as close to them as I could

without actually being one of them, and then I stood as far back as I could without

leaving the planet" (1991:67).

Was such a stance possible in South Africa, and if so, what were its objectives? To

convey both the veracity of the eye-witness and the fact that such testimony is also,

always, an interpretation in need of interpretation; to see and see through apartheid as

lived reality; to move within and between variously constructed worlds, of insider and

outsider, self and 'other', the blind and the invisible, and create a dialogue between

them, a community of incommensurates; to make a greater part of South Africa

imaginatively, yet tangibly, available to its inhabitants; to inhabit and communicate a

sense of not-knowing?

New journalism would appear to be one way into the labyrinth. Such narratives are

often structured as a transition from innocence to experience. They capture a

fragmented, fluid, complex and volatile reality - typically war, violence and political

events - by combining a content based on experience and witnessing with fictional

technique and a self-conscious obsession with style. Events and experience are shaped

and patterned, given meaning, by the pervasive and sometimes self-indulgent presence

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5
 Of the numerous journalistic accounts about South Africa, in my opinion the most
powerful are those by Lelyveld 1987 and Malan 1991.

of the author. The genre is disdainful of the pre-packaged insights of the mass media and the guardians of political correctness, and favours a/any more original perspective often typified by parody, satire and cynicism.[6]

The journalist as witness: intimate observer and new journalist. These are useful concepts with which to frame a discussion of Rian Malan, a member of a famous Afrikaner family, a liberal(ish) new(ish) journalist, and a self-conscious guru of political incorrectness.

In the beginning...

To be a Malan is to be "poised... on a cusp of history": "a Malan has been present at all the great dramas and turning points in the history of the Afrikaner tribe" and yet, or probably and so, the name was chanted by black comrades as among those who would die "when the day comes" (Malan 1991:13,15,174). Lives lived on the cusp of history readily become symbols, "myth made flesh, the destiny of a nation embodied in the fate of a single man" (16). Dawid Malan's is presented as one such life; Rian Malan's is another.

In 1788 Dawid Malan fled the Cape with a neighbour's black slave named Sara and disappeared "into Africa, where he was transformed" we are told "as all white men who went there were transformed" (21). He re-emerged 25 years later, not as the man who had given up everything for the love of a black woman, but as a white supremacist and participant in the Slagtersnek uprising against the British. For Rian Malan this seemingly inexplicable transformation, this wilful self-blindness and annihilation of the 'other', lies at the root of South Africa's agony because it is symbolic of what befell

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6
    On new journalism see Carlean's "A Case for a South African 'New Journalism'"(1990); also Hellmann 1981, and Wolfe and Johnson eds. 1990.

Afrikaners as a whole. And yet he is "one of them": "I am a white man born in Africa, and all else flows from there" (29).

In the beginning it was all so simple. Rian Malan's Johannesburg youth was a world of self-indulgent, largely abstract angst and adolescent political posturing he later reflects upon as self-righteous and characterised by "callow acts of self-aggrandizement" (63). He loved 'natives' indiscriminately and smoked dope with wise old 'Afs'; sprayed the title of the James Brown song, 'Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud', on concrete in white suburbia; and at 16 lost his virginity to a black woman. He was the Just White Man and a communist, "whatever that was supposed to be" (43). It didn't really matter that few whites seemed to share his views, nor that nobody, black or white, was impressed or even particularly interested. In part, Malan shared a blinkered world view and certainty - an unconditional and indiscriminate faith - with those Afrikaners he sought to oppose. He simply reached different political conclusions. Malan was blinded by the necessity to choose sides, in his case by the desire to side with the opposition, to be on 'their side'. But he knew nothing of 'their side'.

As a politically credible calling and the first staging post on the long journey of avoiding military service, Malan became a journalist, working for *The Star* (with its corporate slogan: '*The Star* tells it like it is'!), covering the magistrate's courts and then as a crime reporter.[7] He was soon moving too much and too quickly between radically different worlds, from suburbia to torture chambers to drinking holes; trying to choose between military service and leaving the country; dealing with the silences and ambiguities in his relationships with his first black friends, fellow journalists; torturing

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7
  Working as a journalist introduced Malan to what, in South Africa, was 'news': the search for the unusual, usually white, angle; which things (a scream in the night from a police station, a trip in a lift with two white policemen and their savagely beaten black quarry, crime or violence perpetrated by blacks on other blacks) were not a story but just one of those South African things to be ignored, put on the inside page or hopelessly homogenised in a brief statistical summation.

himself over what was to be done; 'jolling', seeking solace in the shared haven of the

drunk and the stoned; and passing out at night with a pistol and knife to hand - yawing:

"the shuddering of an aircraft in a dive too steep and fast for its design; an aircraft that's

shaking itself to bits? I was yawing in that time, going too fast, propelled by fuels too

volatile between points immeasurably distant from one another. It was too far..." (82).

There was a marked divergence between Malan's politically correct explanations -

Soweto was an apartheid aberration - and the way he actually felt - it was "charnel

house" (87) and scared him stiff. He was always relieved to leave and fearful on his

return, ashamed of his racism:

> I loved blacks, and yet I was scared of them... It was a most paradoxical
>
> condition. One minute, you'd be harrowed with guilt and bleeding
>
> internally for your suffering black brethren. The next, you'd recoil in
>
> horror from the things they did... You yawed between extremes.
>
> Sometimes you completed the round trip in just fifteen minutes. (88)

The black world, the 'other' side to which Malan sought access and claimed allegiance,

was simply 'too far'. Then came June 1976. Malan's adolescent fantasy of being the Just

White Man leading the blacks to the barricades died in the aftermath of the uprisings.

He feared being consumed, obliterated, by that which was 'other', by the indiscriminate

black tidal wave of rage. Face to face, daily, with murder, brittle ideological certainties

simply failed to contain or account for reality as witnessed. Why did blacks murder

fellow blacks in such numbers and with such cruelty? Why did blacks murder whites

without finding out which side they were on first? "Was I really on their side? Were

they really on mine?" (90). Malan testifies to an ideological breakdown and bankruptcy.

He had looked up to, looked down upon, and looked on with horror, but he had not truly

seen. Could he otherwise have loved or feared in a way that was simultaneously so

indiscriminate and discriminatory? It was time to run.

Malan embarked upon a race against the multi-dimensional spectre of death, running from, trying to outrun, his incapacitating personal paradox: scared of the coming changes and yet scared of the consequences of not changing; unable to carry a gun for or against apartheid; he hated Afrikaners and loved blacks and yet he was an Afrikaner and feared blacks. He ran because in South Africa's polarised society he was stuck in the middle, in-between, unable to commit himself either way. Malan ended up in Los Angeles. As the would-be-but-not-quite exile he could be the Afrikaner rebel, unwilling to fight on the side of apartheid and, therefore, liable to be imprisoned were he to return. As the escapee he could actually return whenever he wanted to. Flight took its toll; the paradox remained.

> I had been running for eight years, and I had to run to the far side of the planet, but I hadn't outrun the paradox. It still had its claws in my brain. I had been running all my life, and each flight left me weaker, more diminished, more deeply dishonored... I had no idea what my role was, and felt I would never be whole unless I found out. I would live and die in LA and be buried under a tombstone that read, 'He Ran Away'. People would ask, who was Malan? Ah, a South African. And what did he stand for? He never really knew. (102)

As a crime reporter in South Africa Malan had been granted access to "all those extraordinary places" (102) where he had learnt about the paradox. He had been in a position to ask the right questions but had not waited for the answers. Fearing death in a foreign land, Malan went home to the South Africa of the mid-1980s, the South Africa of States of Emergencies, P.W. Botha's 'reforms', the UDF/ANC rendering the country ungovernable, and a virtual state of civil war, to be a crime reporter again: "to seek a

resolution of the paradox of [his] South African life in tales of the way we killed one another" (103).

You can tell the enemy by the colour of their skin

By now Malan was without faith. The main political options seemed, to him, absurd and he took up his place, full of scepticism and doubt, within his own particular "circle of hell... the circle of bourgeois leftists, white-suburban division" (166). Malan describes this circle, with acidic scepticism, as having been born again through socialism - which he decries as an opium of the elite - in which whiteness was theoretically irrelevant, and one could change sides and join the masses, thereby gaining immediate relief from racially derived guilt and complicity. He himself, however, was heading in another direction entirely. In answer to the question, what does race mean in the South African context, everything or nothing, Malan increasingly answers, everything: "In the end, all South African issues merged into one - the race issue, the issue I had come home to resolve" (271, also 303). Added to his own "secret racist heresies" are a shared white "genetic complicity". The world according to race is a bleak place: you could tell the enemy by the colour of their skin (112); "'every white man we see is an enemy to us'" (287). And the bottom line? - when "the killing started, there were no whites on the black side of the barricades. None. Ever" (170, also 177).[8]

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[8] This is Simon Dunkley, in 1985, at the start of the clearance of Crossroads squatter camp outside Cape Town, where he was working as a journalist:

> We had to come in from the police side... And I was just saying the whole time: I'm not these people... And then there was a stalemate... and there was a kind of no-man's territory... I had this feeling, 'This is South Africa. You've got to take your side now. You've got to make a statement. For myself, find out where I stand.' So I started walking out across this like no man's land. Later that whole year we worked every day... But that first experience for me was the key moment... Here was this young white guy walking out across this bullet- and rock-strewn territory, across the line. The police were all shouting at me saying, 'You're taking your life in your hands' and 'We're not going to help you.' And I'm trying to ignore them. I got to a certain range, the rock range, and there were kids on the other side in the mass of black faces, saying 'Come! Come over - we're not going to hurt you. Come and speak to us.' I thought, 'I've got to go; there's no question about it, I have to do it now, I have to!' And I went; and the moment I got within range, a shower of rocks came at me, and these people were all stoning me. And that for me was the whole situation - that I wasn't allowed to cross... I retreated

On his return to South Africa, Malan "seemed to be seeing... for the first time, and finally understanding" (110, also 273-4), particularly what it meant to be white. The reality was one of darkness and fear on all sides. Malan writes of seeing his white darkness for the first time, about the night that changed his life, but it all sounds remarkably familiar.

> A lone white man on foot in Soweto in the middle of the night in the
> midst of the black uprising, looking for a car parked hundreds of yards
> away. Maybe it was paranoia, but I figured my chances of reaching the
> car alive were less than even... I was out of my mind with terror, and in
> that moment, in that moment, it came to me: This was *it*: the unseen
> force that obliterated reason in South Africa; the force that held the
> white tribe together, and kept our sweating white fists locked in a death
> grip on the levers of power. (289)

In this context to see clearly was to convert the enveloping 'other' of race into a pattern of meaning, a desperate kind of faith. That which was 'other' had been clearly identified: 'Africa', also the townships, all things black and alien (see 25,43,62,110,194,234-5). 'Africa', typically, was entered 'into':

> approached... in fear and trepidation, or better yet, we didn't approach
> Africa at all. It seemed to me that this was surely our central problem.
> We had yet to come to terms with Africa, and doing so was not going to

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at that point... that first day just remained with me. Because if you want to ask, 'When did you confront that point of who are you in South Africa? Where do you stand?'... it was that pure moment. (in Bernstein 1994:280-1)

be easy. I mean, how do you come to terms with something you don't

really understand? (180)

In reality Malan uncovered little that was new on his return to South Africa. All the

ingredients were there from the beginning, characteristics of his quintessentially

tortured relationship with the 'other': blindness, fear, yearning, eagerness to please, love,

guilt, disappointment, distance, tension. As for the generation of younger Afrikaans

writers within the 'border literature' movement, the confrontation with the 'other' - "that

shadow from the unconscious, that object which is the target of your bullets, the one

that is trying to kill you" - was traumatic (du Plessis 1987:38). Malan was seeing,

clearly, but through eyes forged in the violently collaborative cauldron of apartheid.

"And now you must steel yourself, for what is to come is hideous" (1991:132)

"'Can you imagine... how many people are going to die in this country?'" (139), Malan is

asked at one stage. He returned to South Africa to catalogue its murders. Lives and

deaths are depicted as representative, parables, revelatory and prophetic, tales of

"ordinary life and extraordinary death" (181), "ordinary murder in this extraordinary

country" (279). The destiny of a nation - of Malan himself - is embodied in such life and

death.

Dennis Moshweshwe's brutal murder was a traditional South African death at the hands

of whites, within the "quintessentially South African tableau of *braaivlies*, rugby, sunny

skies, and torture" (137); Moses Mope, aged 13, died as the result of being beaten by

drunken white police while on his way to church. "With the killers of Moses Mope and

Dennis Moshweshwe on one side" writes Malan "how could anyone but a monster not

be on the other?" (152, also 161). Again, things were so easy in the beginning.

But other deaths were more difficult to categorise, more unsettling in their implications. Simon Mpungose, the Hammerman, attacked whites at night with a claw hammer. He personified the worst fears of the collective white unconscious about the 'other' because he raised the spectre of indiscriminate black retribution. Life became thick with terror and hysteria until he was caught. His hatred, and murder, of whites had its source in witnessing: "'It is because of what I had witnessed happening to my fellow black men and also to me, because of all that was done to us by the white people...'" (203). So Simon Mpungose fulfilled the murderous prophecy of a dream he had had several years before in Barberton prison, a message from his ancestors that he tried to escape but ultimately could not ignore. He wanted to die and be free of his life of torment, and through hanging he got his wish.

> It struck me as a remarkable parable of life in a country where blacks
> were being kept down lest they leap up and slit white throats. This was
> Dawid Malan's law, and it fulfilled its own grim prophecy: If you treat a
> black man that way, he will indeed leap up and drive a hammer into your
> brain. That seemed to be Simon's message. I heard no hatred or despair...
> just clarity, which he seemed to be offering as a man offers a gift - a gift
> of understanding, I thought, and a warning... I presumed to know exactly
> what Simon meant... As it turned out, I presumed a great deal. (204-5)

This clarity did not last long into Malan's subsequent investigation. Simon Mpungose's own version of his life was a fiction. In the eyes of his own people in rural Zululand he was an abomination whose family had been cursed by the ancestors. The familiar 'other', black as victim of apartheid, was replaced by an altogether more unsettling spectre of the 'other'. In this world Rian Malan was lost: "I was deaf in Simon's language, and blind in his culture" (224). "So what was the truth of Simon? I was so certain in the beginning... Who was the Hammerman? In the end, I couldn't say " (222).

Themba Ngwazi was a miner on Randfontein Estates, near Johannesburg. Again Malan was plagued by not knowing. He could say few things of significance about Ngwazi with any certainty: he was an angry man, he wasn't afraid to die, he hated whites. This is, at least initially, a story of industrial relations, of workers and management. Ngwazi was at the forefront of a union recruitment drive that was in turn agreed to, obstructed and - with workers divided and the mine sliding into chaos - repressed. But when, one Sunday, the whole thing started again it originated from an'other' black world, of *inyangas* and battle medicines applied to incisions in the skin to turn bullets into water. Ngwazi led a group of renegade black miners into the first clash in which the main weapon of riot control used was a water cannon. Inexplicably or predictably, depending on which side you were on, it inspired elation among the miners. The scene was set for a final showdown. Gunfire was met head on by totally unafraid miners. The result was carnage. But for the first time during the mid-1980s uprising white police were killed in action. Police reprisals claimed the life of the leader of the revolt, Themba Ngwazi, in circumstances that like so much else remained unclear.

And the reader is assailed with yet more conflicts - like the one between AZAPO and the UDF - and yet more murders. How, Malan asks, do you assimilate the fact that even actively anti-apartheid blacks were killing each other? The catalogue of death goes on and on.

What, if anything, was Malan discovering here? That in such a divided society a sense of the 'other' was a limitless kingdom, containing the familiar and the unfamiliar/ unsettling. That worlds contradictory and incommensurate to him were inhabited simultaneously, and sometimes unproblematically, by others? That South Africa encompassed worlds within worlds, some of which had nothing to do with apartheid? That people died, tragically and brutally, due to the misunderstandings, hatreds and

fears generated at the interstices between worlds? That for many South Africans the choice of which side they were on, which world they inhabited, was a matter of life and death? Malan accelerates the narrative into that archetypal media product, a frenetic and superficially motiveless litany of murder:

> Am I upsetting you, my friend? Good. Do you want to argue? Do you want to tell me about the evil of apartheid... Okay. Let's open my bulging files of tales of ordinary murder. You choose your weapons and I'll choose mine, and we'll annihilate the certainties in each other's brains... I'll hold you down and pound these images into your brain... and I'll keep on pounding until they poison you the way they poisoned me... I dunno what to say any more. When I came home to face my demons, I heard a song... and its chorus had a line that broke my heart. It ran, 'How do I live in this strange place?' That seemed a very valid question to me. I had never learned how to live in my own country. I ran away because it was too strange to bear, and when I came home, it was stranger than ever. Everyone had blood on their hands... The time had come to make choices, but there was nothing on the market but rival barbarities and absurd ideologies... there were no rational choices at all... South Africans... grow numb and blind, but if you leave long enough to detoxify and come back with clear eyes, your skull gets fractured. You see too much, and it makes you sick... Blindness and lobotomy. These were not metaphors, my friend. They were physical conditions in my country, in the winter of 1986. You could not afford to see everything. You could not afford to go from... grave... to... grave... Such pilgrimages made you sick. They forced you to your knees, begging an accommodation with the howling ambiguities; begging for your eyes to go blind. (330-4)

Finally, Malan could find no theory to contain or explain what he had seen. The apparent clarity of race as 'other' had been overwhelmed by a completely saturating 'otherness' that affected everyone and everything. 'Seeing clearly' became a source of terror. The result was the further epistemological breakdown described above. In such a world to be blind seemed a blessing, even a self-preserving necessity. An eye for an 'I'. In a hopeless frame of mind Malan set out for Msinga in KwaZulu.

Seeing through African eyes

Searching for a way to live in South Africa, Malan went to a "very strange place indeed" (344), certainly given the terms in which he describes Msinga. On the one hand, "Msinga is... Oh, God, how do I explain Msinga?... It is a place of head-spinning contrasts" (354), "an intoxicant" (359). On the other it is "an ecological Hiroshima" (339), "the ultimate apartheid horror story" (342). It is also a swirling vortex of violence and war, a seemingly endless site of carnage. Compounding Zulu factional warfare is war on the frontier dividing KwaZulu and 'white' South Africa - "another front in the war without end" (365) - between blacks and whites.

Malan went to Msinga to visit Creina Alcock, wife of the late Neil Alcock, who lived on the last farm in 'white' South Africa. Due to their desire to live among Africans, like Africans, until they saw through African eyes, the Alcocks had, according to Malan, "penetrated deeper into Africa than any other whites in our time" (343), and Africa returned their embrace, they belonged (see 342,367,381,397,408,413). They seemed to have crossed over to the other side, into another world, and Malan wanted to know: what had they learnt? what was it like?

The Alcocks established an agricultural development project called Mdukatshani, the Place of Lost Grasses. Their fate reads like something from the Old Testament: wars and terror; failed rains interspersed only by floods; pestilence and famine; hated by their own kind. Chaos and disaster followed in each others footsteps with no end in sight. "Beyond a certain point, Neil and Creina's lives seem to assume the quality of myth or fable" (379). While trying to mediate between warring Zulu parties, Neil was killed by the Ndlela faction. Neil Alcock - the famous liberal; completely at ease in the world of Africans on whose behalf he undertook numerous crusades; the secular saint ("'He's your Jesus'" (393), said a policeman after his death) whose disciples saw into his "half-black and half-white" heart (395) and followed him - had been killed by Zulus in broad daylight, on an open road, in a densely populated area, and nobody saw anything.

Staying on seemed to be the only way for Creina Alcock to salvage meaning from Neil's life and death. Life was bitterly hard for a lone white woman who had mastered neither Zulu nor farming. Farm labourers, and even some who had been virtually members of the family, her adopted Zulu 'sons', turned against her: "the darkness seemed to close in on Creina... was there anyone in the valley whom she could trust? Suddenly, every sign seemed ominous... For the first time in her life, Creina grew afraid" (403). Then goats invaded her land. "Like [Dawid Malan], Creina entered Africa an enlightened creature... She had always tried to love, but now it was time to kill" (407), and her dogs set to work. Creina thought that she had won, finally found a language Msinga could understand, but it was also the language in which Msinga would reply. She could not sustain this communication through violence and her subsequent vulnerability was further exploited.

For Malan this was confirmation of his darkest fears: "I didn't want to hear any more... If you loved you were vulnerable, and if you were vulnerable you were weak, and if you were weak in Africa you got fucked, and fucked again, and again, until you could no

longer stand it" (408). Creina felt she could not stay in Msinga because she could not live by its rules; she felt betrayed by loving. Malan felt like he was "staring into hell" (409).

Malan concludes that it was only the Msinga experience that took him beyond what he already knew. Initially its implications seemed desperate. He was briefly a totalitarian, nine generations of Boer blood commanded that there was no middle ground and he had only one choice: "A white is a white against the black" (414). He wanted to become deaf and blind to all other dissenting evidence. Then his blood lost its hold, and Malan formulated a different understanding of what he had seen. At one stage he states: "Is this beginning to sound like hell to you? It sounded that way to me when I first heard it, and yet it was really a love story, a story about two whites who loved Africa... to hear Creina tell it, it was often a life of unbearable ecstasy ..." (380). Ultimately, incredibly, the Alcocks' story becomes a kind of prophetic vision of the future. They "were pioneers in the country South Africa will one day become - a truly African country, where whites have no guarantees... It was a worst-case scenario... and yet, and yet, and yet: It was not entirely bereft of hope..." (422, also 413). There was, according to Malan, just enough light to show the rest the way. Creina Alcock stayed on amidst a continuing catalogue of disasters:

> 'I think you will know what I mean if I tell you love is worth nothing
> until it has been tested by its own defeat. I felt I was being asked to try to
> love enough not to be afraid of the consequences. I realized that love,
> even if it ends in defeat, gives you a kind of honour; but without love you
> have no honour at all. I think that is what I misunderstood all my life.
> Love is to enable you to transcend defeat'. (409, also 423)

To go forward into the unknown with no guarantees is a telling summary of the challenge confronting, particularly white, South Africa. But to do so purely on the basis of love? Is the choice really between opening one's arms to Africa or taking up arms against it? The parable of the Alcocks is a revealing conclusion to Malan's story. They had come to terms with what Malan conceived of as 'other', had seen, in his terms, through African eyes. But they had done so in a particular way. The text is littered with phrases such as the following: Neil Alcock came to heal the land, "to show homeland Africans how it could be done" (352), and, blacks would say, "'We are weak, but when Neil is with us we feel strong'" (371). In Neil Alcock, Malan found himself a surrogate Just White Man, a man who made his dream of leading blacks to the barricades seem possible again.

Life history as crime, as the annihilation of the 'other'

So, what is the truth of Rian Malan?: "I'm so deeply enmeshed in half-truths and fictionalizations of myself that I'll never escape until I simply tell the truth... I am not sure I'm any of the men I have pretended to be" (410). This is a roller-coaster ride of the self, a schizophrenic, fractured self and/in text caught in an ambiguous embrace with a similarly divided country.

> My people were still standing guard with guns at the ready and jackboots
> on Africa's back, and I was one of them. I didn't have to dig in the
> archives for Dawid Malan; I looked in the mirror and there he was. His
> frontier had moved inside my head... If Dawid Malan had a disease of
> the soul, then Rian Malan had it too... So I threw away the book that was
> to be and set out to confront this thing in a place where I knew it lay - in
> myself. I have told you several murder stories, but the true subject of this
> narrative has been the divided state of my own heart. I have always been

two people, you see - a Just White Man, appalled by apartheid and the cruelties committed in its name, and an Afrikaner with a disease of the soul. (411-12)

Caught between these two selves, and between the 'I' and eye, the window and the mirror, was the 'other'. "This is the trouble with white people in my country. Our eyes are sealed by cataracts against which our white brains project their chosen preconceptions of Africa and Africans. Some whites see danger, some savagery, some see victims, and some see revolutionary heroes. Very few of us see clearly" (227, also 189). Initially a function of race,[9] the 'other' was inflated into an infinitely elastic domain which simultaneously shaped all meaning and eliminated all possibility of meaning.[10] On his return to South Africa, Malan thought redemption lay in "the acquisition of certainty, in the act of joining one side or the other" (418). But he repeatedly moved from certainty and clarity to a state of radical unknowing, journeying towards a complete epistemological breakdown in a country for which he came to have no explanation or theory. His faith became his complete lack of any faith(s).

Malan sought to resolve the paradox of his South African life in tales of murder. But the narrative, unfolding in a country where "anything", any act of horror, "could be true" (114), becomes a frenzied catalogue in which everyone is guilty and everyone has blood

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[9]
The text is full of unanswered questions and forlorn quests that centre on the question of race. Malan came home to face his demons, to "resolve" the issue of race: "Where do we stand in relation to one another, 'bra?" (274); what is to be done? how is he to live in this strange country? how is he to come to terms with the 'other'? In a pre-election article, Malan described himself partly, but only partly, with tongue in cheek, as an "ethno-fascist" ("Confessions of a White South African". *Sunday Times Magazine* 27/3 1994:9 (8-13)). There is, however, something about the issue of race in South Africa that Malan captures: its ready decline into stereotype and caricature; the relationship between not knowing, fear, guilt, projection and racism in the South African psyche; its pervasive reality. What the text grapples with is the question of what function the concept of race performed/performs among white South Africans.

[10]
Lewis Nkosi has noted that incoherence about blacks eventually renders whites incoherent about themselves (1965:124).

on their hands. All are aggressors and all are victims." Chaos and darkness reign. There

is no-one to blame and no political solution. Apartheid is so pervasive it has become

invisible. Seeing clearly is accompanied by obfuscation and terror. The eye sees more

than the 'I' can understand or bear. Self-blinding is the price of self-preservation.

Confronted by this abyss Malan turns back, unable to bear the world as he finds it, that

he feels partly responsible for creating, and finds refuge in (d)illusion.

Malan moves from innocence to a radically unsettling unknowing and back again to a

kind of naive innocence. Felman asks: "What does it mean to *inhabit history* as crime,

as the space of the annihilation of the Other?" (in Felman and Laub 1992:189). The

secular faith Malan discovers in Msinga is an opiate, an opiate for those who inhabit

(life) history in this manner. He attempts to answer crime (the annihilation) with crime

(his investigation of murder in which everyone becomes both a murderer and a victim),

and then to resurrect both himself and the 'other' - to create meaning - through the

exchange of love. He sees with his heart: "There is a Zulu saying 'I see you with my

heart'" (1991:373). The final epistemological collapse is, paradoxically, this desperate

search for meaning, this wilful self-blinding in a vain search for redemption.

Malan's story presents a profound act of witness to apartheid precisely because of its

congregation of seemingly disparate elements. The main themes running through the

book - the processes of fragmentation and 'othering'; the search for meaning/faith and

recurrent epistemological collapse; paradox within and paradox without; the attempt to

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    As has been discussed previously in relation to Breytenbach, Coetzee and 'border
literature', attempts to dismantle or traverse the dichotomous division between self and
'other' can result in the arguably irreconcilable becoming or appearing to become the
same: in his case, the oppressor rendered victim and the victim rendered oppressor.
Malan also deals throughout with what he depicts as a country of extremes and he is
paralysed in the middle trying to reconcile and/or mediate and/or simply survive/escape
the paradox of his self-definition. Again, on various levels, the hybrid and the in-
between are shown to be hazardous products, particularly in relation to constructing a
sustainable identity and cogent political analysis and action/resistance. There is no
clearer example of the untenability of the in-between than the form of liberalism, of
which Malan is at least in part a supporter, which enabled its adherents to
simultaneously perpetuate and disown apartheid.

transcend the distance between divided worlds - provide an extraordinary 'community of testimonial incommensurates' from the scene of the crime, which itself unfolds over time, voicing a commentary of interpretations of earlier interpretations. The evolving commentary, however, is ultimately incomplete because the narrative harbours a complexity of truth not available to its author; the testimony eludes and exceeds its author's grasp and control. Malan's incapacitating vision provides an opportunity to see and see through his own sense of self and important aspects of apartheid's dehumanising essence: its pervasive and internalised violence; the fact that the crime is eventually, inevitably, inflicted upon the self - "'The crime that is latent in us we must inflict on ourselves...'" (Coetzee 1982:146) - the triumph of the 'other' over/as meaning and the 'other' as both annihilated and annihilating. This is a violently collaborative life story, where the agents of violence are not only the apartheid state but also the society that apartheid had attempted to remake in its image.

Malan ends up where he began, pondering whether to leave or stay, and concludes: "This is where I come from, and this is where I will stay" (1991:422). Rather like Camus' Rambert, the journalist trapped in Oran by the plague, it is the process of witnessing that marks Malan, that inscribes him as irretrievably South African. He returned to try and understand South Africa, and South Africa wrote itself all over him: "'now that I've seen what I have seen, I know that I belong here whether I want it or not'" (Camus 1960:170).

Extraordinary combinations of suffocating intimacy and alienating distance, confinement and estrangement, were variously reproduced in lives under apartheid: Rian Malan's is one such life, Poppie Nongena's is another.

Poppie Nongena: Witnessing as Life

Bearing witness can also be a way of life, the attrition of day to day existence. The position of apartheid's most obvious victims was that they inhabited it and its various notions of 'otherness'. It was not something they had to enter 'into'. They inhabited history as crime, as the space of the attempted annihilation of themselves. This self-obliterating intimacy precluded any possibility of being simply an observer. It meant that the witness testified to a blindingly oppressive and enveloping inside and to an outside, or 'other', that was usually perceived as the source of the crime or, sometimes, was barely conceptualised at all.

In many ways *Poppie,* is generically a *testimonio.* Like new journalism, the genre of *testimonio* emerged in the 1960s in response to particular social and political circumstances, notably in Latin America. It is a form used by/with regard to marginalised groups often in a situation of political urgency and it implies the need for social/political change. *Testimonio's* situate an individual life within a collectivity of voices and identities creating a shifting, plural subject that transgresses any simplistic private/public divide. As a collaborative enterprise the form represents the "staging of social difference" (McClintock 1991:223) in which a privileged scribe records, packages and presents the oral testimony of an'other'. Experience and/as interpretation are layered, shared, separate. Collaboration necessarily encompasses an uneven solidarity across a complex matrix of sameness and difference and the numerous complications and contradictions implied in such a representation of 'the popular voice'. Notions of 'the author' are replaced by the more neutral categorisation of collator/compiler.[12] *Poppie* both consciously and unconsciously subscribes to these generic criteria, perhaps the most significant of which is the process of collaboration.

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[12] On *testimonio* see Beverley 1989,1991, and McClintock 1991:222-4.

Collaboration or Annihilation?

"'Whose book is this?'" (Malcolm X to Alex Haley: in Sanders 1994:456)

On Boxing Day 1976, with the uprisings that began in Soweto still reverberating through South Africa, the woman who came to be called Poppie Nongena arrived at the home of Elsa Joubert, an established Afrikaans writer. The two women were drawn together as women and mothers, as Afrikaners and first language Afrikaans speakers, driven by the reciprocal urges to tell and to listen to a story, a life, that through its telling would bear witness. "Her need to talk was as great as my need to listen", writes Joubert (1984:60). It is equally clear that there were fundamental differences that divided the two women, notably, race and class.[13] Power relations between the women and between each of them and the structures of apartheid were fundamentally unequal. In this context, a collaborative creative relationship was destined to both challenge, as a form of counter-visibility, and reproduce, the structural inequality inherent in the society.

At one level, for example, it was agreed by the two women that the proceeds from the joint initiative would be divided equally between them. But there are many other layers of collaboration: can the collaborative act, involving participants from such radically different yet interdependent worlds, resurrect anything from the scene of the apartheid crime? For Joubert the book represented if not the end then at least a significant staging post in her quest to bear witness. Describing her mood post Sharpeville, she talks of having felt it "vital... to 'bear witness'". Through Nongena and her story she found "a kind of peace" (59,61). For Joubert the act of collaboration provided access to the

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[13] Cope states that Nongena was employed by Joubert as a domestic worker (1982:194).

'other', a means of trying to see through African eyes. An eye for an 'I'. And for

Nongena?

This discussion situates the various claims made with reference to the authorship and

genre classification of the text. *Poppie* has been marketed as a novel, *by* Joubert, *about*

Nongena, with the latter denied the status of collaborator or co-author and the former

elevated above the status of collator or compiler. Yet what the 'author' denies the text

reveals by tracing the contours of its own telling. It is scarred by the process of its

collaborative genesis and construction, by the lives told and voices heard, on unequal

terms and in unequal times, through one another. The text was reportedly read back to,

and checked with, Nongena; questions and corrections are preserved within the text. It

reveals pervasive imbalances of power while simultaneously containing a corrective

and undermining component (see McClintock 1991:208,214-7,224-8).[14] Furthermore,

Joubert is among those to have stated that this generically complex text is a novel. In a

preface she writes the following note to the reader:

> The novel is based on the actual life story of a black woman living in
>
> South Africa today. Only her name, Poppie Rachel Nongena, born
>
> Matati, is invented. The facts were related to me not only by Poppie
>
> herself, but by members of her immediate family and her extended

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[14] McClintock writes: "the reader is obliged... to experience the discomfort of these imbalances as a central experience of the reading itself, and to be conscious at every moment of the contradictions underlying the process of narrative collaboration... the imbalances... are inscribed in the narrative itself... [they] are flagrantly there, unavoidable and vexing, contradictory and irresoluble, insisting on interpretative contest and political analysis" (1991:228). The book's reception indicates that many, less perceptive, readers found it only too easy to miss/ignore such imbalances. Various commentators have noted that Poppie Nongena's life story pre-dated the oral history movement in South Africa by several years. Oral historians have invariably attempted to render themselves invisible, to erase contradictions and their interventions in the narrative process, and constructed an artificially pure narrator's voice. While granting "executive authority" to the invisible historian" such texts practice the "politics of concealment" (McClintock 1991:228). The demands of political correctness have overcome those of accurately describing the power relations of the narrative process itself. The tale erases its own telling. The historians become what I have described elsewhere as a "ghost in the autobiographical machine" (Gready 1994). On the politics and violence of collaborative narrative, in part predicated on the translation of the oral into the written, and residues of resistance, see Sanders 1994.

family or clan, and they cover one family's experience over the past forty years.[15]

Joubert claims to have 'authored' the narrative, yet it is openly based on interviews and what she has written betrays its collaborative origins; it is a novel, but one based on an 'actual life story' in which only a name has been invented. What are the meanings and implications of this inter-textual matrix?

The 'staging of social difference' within collaborative narrative is a process rather than a single event. The layering of, and potential fracture between, experience as interpretation and narration, and (re-)interpretation by others, spans the telling and the representation and reception of the telling: it is a process without end. Within the production of the text and the narrative itself experience and/as interpretation were/are, to a degree, negotiated. What was already an unequal contestation over meaning, however, became more one-sided during and after publication. Because of Elsa Joubert's structurally privileged position and also because Poppie Nongena wished to remain anonymous - her views are therefore not known - beyond the evidence of the text itself, the finished product, the dynamics of the process of creation, in short the entire enterprise, were presented on Joubert's terms. The narrative could be what she wanted it to be. As the chasm grew between experience as interpretation/narration and subsequent interpretations, the need for an interpretation of these interpretation became all the more pressing.

What are the consequences of this pattern within the 'staging of social difference'? In this instance, Joubert could claim for herself a kind of 'ownership' of both the text and

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    She has also stated: "I knew at once: no travelogue, no allegory, but the stark truth, the story of this woman's life... I checked and rechecked her story because no error, however slight, could be allowed to slip in and jeopardise the truth of the whole stark tale" (1984:60-1).

the life/lives it is about. Through the lens of one reading this, in conjunction with the changing of Nongena's name, makes the latter strangely invisible - fictional as a character and non-existent as a collaborator/co-author - within her own life story. Identity within the collaborative representational act is woven from what Michael Taussig (1993) refers to as mimesis and alterity. The mimetic faculty grants the representation (but also the representer, driven by the desire to yield into and become 'other') power over the represented. But what if the representer who shares in, extracts, captures the power of the 'other' is guilty of annihilation in the process? As with Malan, the narrative and political space in which an attempt is made to resurrect both the self and the 'other' becomes, at least in part, the site of a further annihilation; a life told through the lives and deaths of the 'other'. In the case of Nongena, it was one more annihilation in a long line of annihilations of her self and identity; another journey through the 'space of death'. In this context, the collaborative narrative space was unequivocally resurrective only for Joubert. An altogether different sense of 'put yourself in my place'; an eye for an 'I'.

This collaborative process exhibits unsettling parallels with the characteristics of the life story genre at the interface between an oppressive state and its subjects: life stories as battlefields over who gets to say 'I'; the violence of collaboration; the simultaneity of narration and being narrated; author-/owner-ship of the text as the subject of, often protracted, struggle; meaning as contested and inter-textual. Being a component of witnessing/being witnessed as an act of violent collaboration, it can be argued that these characteristics permeated apartheid society to the extent of even polluting attempts at collaborative political/narrative contestation and redress, including much more conscious and overt attempts than this endeavour. The collaborative creative process is one of numerous 'communities of testimonial incommensurates' relating to the production, content, presentation and reception of *Poppie*, which are themselves

interpretations in need of interpretation. The construction of identity in *Poppie* is another such community.

'I saw the sides of life, like wings, moving, and fear came over me'

This is a story predominantly told by and about women. The family genealogy is traced through the mother's line, and within this matrilineal genealogy Nongena (whose - fictional? - Xhosa name, Ntombizodumo, means "girl born from a line of great women" (1980:13)) takes her place. She also takes her place within what McClintock describes as a "dynamic, collective continuum of voices and identities... distinct and... inseparable" (1991:216). The narrative is a swirling cauldron of voices, identities and narrative viewpoints, over and above the dominant coupling of collaboration. Voices merge and divide like a maze of railway lines, there are no quotation marks to designate proprietorship over speech; Nongena herself does only about a third of the narration; identity and narrative perspective are constructed as multiple, shifting and unstable, as collective, familial, female:

> one hears a polyphony of female voices, the ancestral reverberations of
> great-grandmothers, grandmothers, and mothers, mingling, redoubling,
> and echoing almost indistinguishably within each other. (McClintock
> 1991:209)

This wonderful collage of voices and identities - presumably the result of Nongena's telling, the telling of other family members interviewed by Joubert, and Joubert's (re)telling - constructs a community of lives told through one another, into an arena dense with prior versions. The community flows around, within and through Nongena herself; the various tellings and retellings consist, in part, of the many voices against/through which Nongena speaks/is made to speak, narrates and is narrated.

Nongena moves in and out of, and often occupies simultaneously, a variety of subject

positions. Born the youngest of four children in 1936 she left school to look after her

mother's younger children at the age of nine; by thirteen, she was working in a fish

factory as a cleaner. By her mid-teens Nongena was married, to Stone Mqwati (later

tata-ka-Bonsile). Their first son died of whooping cough. A second son followed shortly

afterwards, called Bonsile. Nongena was not yet 20 years old. Later in her life Nongena

juggled roles, in the face of enormous social and political pressures, in an attempt to

keep her family together - "One day, I promise you, we will live together again"

(1980:245) - as it became her personal domain, her arena of struggle and the bedrock of

her identity.[16]

A kind of structural fragmentation forged a many-sided life for Poppie Nongena and her

family. They were dispersed and redispersed - largely between Mdantsane in the Ciskei,

Herschel, the home of her husband's family, also in the Ciskei (and later the Transkei)

and Cape Town - and lacked the sanctuary of a real home.[7] Nongena was torn within

and between her urban family and the rural family of her husband; she was both

dependent and asserted a form of independence. She was an Afrikaner and a Xhosa, a

Christian - a Methodist and later an Anglican - but adhered to Xhosa beliefs and

customs. She resided within an apartheid world but also worlds that had little or nothing

to do with apartheid. Nongena inhabited a many-sided South Africa, negotiating its

diversity. She had a sense that her immediate family, which ultimately consisted of six

children, needed to inhabit all these worlds to be whole: "They must not be children

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[16]
As David Schalkwyk (1989) has illustrated, domestic struggle lies at the centre of Nongena's life.

[17]
Mdantsane, for example, was a totally new and unfamiliar world: "I felt very heartsore... I felt, really, I'm now quite thrown away... We had been put in a desolate place. Loneliness was all around us... it seemed to Poppie as though she had come to lie down in her grave... she felt the emptiness of being completely alone, discarded. She felt some part of her had been lost" (200-2).

who lack something, they must not be half of a whole; I must make them a whole" (270). This conception of human wholeness perhaps provides a different perspective on that which was experienced by Malan as an unsettling expansion of the racial 'other' beyond the familiar confines of black as victim of apartheid.

Are these multiple identities and worlds a contradiction or a reflection of lives built upon a more collective construction of the self and the flexibility needed to survive? Nongena's is a life folded intricately into patterns that create their own chronology, logic and constructions of identity. It is only by fulfilling a multitude of roles - being an adult almost as soon as she became a child, still young after having grown old, daughter-wife-mother-single parent-sister-grandmother - and by trying to inhabit a multitude of worlds, that Nongena could attempt to hold the lives of others, and through their lives her own life, together, and seek to become whole. It was an awesome task: "I saw the sides of life, like wings, moving, and fear came over me" (262). Life was a maelstrom - of voices, identities, relationships, worlds - within, through and against which she sought to acquire certainty, to locate that domain which could be absolutely, irrefutably hers. The social maelstrom that characterises the narrative, however, also masks a sense of loss - the situation, for example, which is significantly a function of loss, where "[g]randmothers are mothers, cousins are sisters, brothers are forgotten, there is no father, mothers are strangers, then they are mothers again. Together and apart..." (McClintock 1991:213) - created by apartheid.

Inhabiting apartheid's structural violence

Analysing the initial rapturous reception received by Poppie Nongena's life story, David Schalkwyk describes being "struck by urgent and systematic attempts to depoliticise the

work" (1986:186).[18] The reader is not 'obliged', as McClintock claims, to experience the imbalances inherent in the collaboration process, or indeed the evils of apartheid, as part of the experience of reading. They could all too easily be overlooked and denied. Elsa Joubert led the chorus of voices denying that the book was political. It has never been banned. For the text to be read as literary/aesthetic to the exclusion of the political, certain attributes have to be highlighted - the twin pillars of individualism and universalism: the main values attributed to Nongena are a Christian faith ("The church is my mainstay, Poppie thought. As long as I remain true to the church, the Lord will be with me" (1980:172, also 257-9)) and a related fatalism ("So it had to be, it could have been no different"; "What has to be, has to be" (231,296, also see 76,298-9)), a concern for family, an almost endless capacity to endure, and a general conservatism. Other attributes have to be defined as apolitical or outside politics (such as a woman's attempt to keep her family together) and further characteristics overlooked altogether (notably the structures which governed Nongena's life and the social and political nature of her identity and story).[19]

To apply this narrow reading, however, is a way of seeing that needs to be seen through. The divorce and overlap between experience as interpretation/narration and subsequent (re-) interpretation by others, can also be seen to extend into the post-publication phase through the reading process. Poppie Nongena's story reveals the "'structural violence'" of apartheid (Degenaar in Schalkwyk 1986:192) - the pass laws, forced removals and 'homeland' policy, the disregard for black family life, the inherent discrimination and violence - as lived through an individual life. Nongena and her family, for example,

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[18] Interestingly, such a reading was not characteristic of its few black reviewers (190). Also see McClintock 1991:198-204. For a response to Schalkwyk, see Carlean 1989.

[19] A narrow conception of what constituted the political was not confined to readers/critics from the right: see, for example, Carlean 1989, also McClintock 1991:199-205, Schalkwyk 1986. Ndebele's (1994) argument for an expanded definition of the political and the relevant provides an important counter-discourse (also de Kok and Press eds. 1990). I am grateful to Daniela Volk for these observations.

were constantly on the move: "They were like a stone you picked up in one place and put down in another" (1980:197). Her experience in Cape Town, in particular, provides powerful testimony to life under the pass system for a black woman. The Cape was a 'coloured' labour preference area and while Nongena's husband could remain to sell his labour, she and her children were constantly harassed to leave. As he came from the Ciskei this was the family's designated 'homeland'. At times, life was so unbearable that it made leaving seem preferable: "For close on ten years I struggled to get my extensions to stay in the Cape, says Poppie... If I have to leave, I'll not weep... Does mama think this is Heaven that I'm being sent away from" (179-80, also see 89,189-92,230). As an exile within her own country, time and again Poppie Nongena was reduced to anger, despair and resignation by the injustice (and arbitrariness - see 141,207,255-6), of the pass system.

> What then have they got against me?... It was for seven years now that she hadn't known longer ahead than two months or sometimes three that she could stay in the Cape. The longest extension had been six months. Sometimes she got nothing... More than once I hid because I did not have an extension... Luckily I was never caught, but this always running to hide was no life for me... Mr. Steyn [at Native Affairs] was a believer, religious man, a man of much faith. He told me: If it is the Lord's will that you stay, then you will stay, and if it is the Lord's will that you go, then you will go... The big boss can't help it that he can't give the extension, Mr Steyn told us. It's not him that wants the people to leave. It's the law. (168-70)

> Poppie went to Native Affairs in Observatory... A nausea rose in her, she had difficulty in lifting her feet, in pushing on... The dates, carved on the ridges of the stamp, can be turned by a twist of his fingers without him

having to give it a glance, he knows the feel of the dates, extension for

one month, two months, three months, a year. Or nothing... spasms

passed through her body... she doubled up retching... Mr Stevens pointed

to the map with a stick. Now you must choose... I do not know these

places, said Poppie... We will give you a house... There will be a school

for your children. Is it all right so... It is all right. Then we put down your

name for a house in Mdantsane... What can I do?... I can't break the law

with my hands? (184-5)[20]

To overlook the centrality of politics to this life story is an extraordinarily powerful

illustration of self-delusion and blindness. The Soweto uprisings also provide an

eloquent illustration of apartheid's 'structural violence' underpinning and undermining

Nongena's life.

'Through this I can find no way'[21]

Initially the Soweto unrest of 1976 seemed very remote, but it later became clear that

like other troubles before them they would spread to Cape Town where Nongena was at

this stage living.[22] In their wake they brought riots, marches, boycotts, funerals, the

shutting down of services and consumer outlets and the isolation of townships. The

youths' wrath focused on beer halls and shebeens, buses, schools and other government

buildings; Christmas was to be a time of mourning for those who had died, there would

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[20] Also see 140-3,151,154-6,158-63,178-80,182,187-92,196-7,210,240,300.

[21] The already mentioned post-Soweto novels by black writers cover some of the same terrain to that discussed below, but from a different ideological perspective.

[22] This was not the first time that Nongena had been caught up in political events that shook the fabric of the country. The late 1950s and early 1960s was a period of considerable political unrest. Nongena's story, for example, mentions the potato boycott, the introduction of passes for women, and, in particular, the 1960 strike against passes and for a pound a day. Around the time of the Soweto uprisings, 'homeland' 'independence' also became a significant issue.

be no celebrations, no gifts, nothing new; parents were told that children at school in

rural areas had to return home so that no one would write exams. There was also

random and opportunistic destruction of property and vehicles, and looting. In the end

the unrest and violence, in the words of Maria Tholo, "was all the way around us"

(Hermer 1980:172).

Within the black community attitudes to the unrest varied enormously, unity of purpose

combined with sharp divisions. Migrants were in conflict with residents, there were

class cleavages within the black community, divisions between different ethnic groups,

tsostis/skollies took advantage of the situation to loot and steal, and families were torn

apart. Parents and children represented two different political generations, with often

very different political ideals. Adults were condemned as too compliant and submissive

- the youth actively sought to break the law with their own hands - as complicit in the

problem rather than the solution. "Your time is past: When we speak, you must listen"

(1980:314, also see 325). Dismissive and afraid of informers the students did not talk to

their parents, nor did they listen to advice. "The children didn't want advice. They didn't

talk things over with us, says Poppie... no one knew what they wanted" (314, also see

310).[23] Parents struggled to enforce old codes of discipline as the youth/events provided

a radical challenge to the prevailing social structure. The power, courage, and autocratic

ruthlessness of the youth generated admiration, fear, tension, frustration and resentment.

They were seen as cheeky and rude - Nongena says: "The children have no more respect

for us. They mock us" (322) - but they also acquired respect and a higher status within

their communities. Poppie Nongena's family reflected these divisions within the black

community, spanning from her conservatism to her step-brother Jakkie, one of the many

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[23] The lack of information fed by distrust was compounded by rumour: "Nobody had news, everyone heard something different" (312). In *The Diary of Maria Tholo*, another collaborative narrative, the following remarks are relevant: "I wish I knew the truth" (Hermer 1980:56); "The children make so many demands, one never knows how serious they are" (74); and, "[i]n this situation you never know whether you are doing the right thing" (164).

school students in their early twenties, who was a leader: "I am fighting for you and your children, sisi. It's for you that I fight" (313, also see 319). We're waiting to die, he said.

The students saw drink as the scourge of the older generation and the black community in general. Migrant workers in particular resented what they saw as interference in their affairs and this resentment escalated into widespread violence between the migrants or homelanders in the special quarters and the other residents or city-borners. The police pursued tactics of divide and rule, siding with the migrants. Poppie Nongena saw trouble brewing on Christmas day while at a friend's house located near the migrants' quarters. This was what she witnessed:

> I saw it all... I could see the city-borners stand in a line in front of their houses to protect them from the migrants. It was just like... a hand dropping... and the special quarters men shielded themselves behind the riot squad to break through our lines... I saw the bottle coming. I saw the arm with the white cloth round it that threw the bottle which burnt Mamdungwana's house... we ran out of the back door... into another house... We were standing in the woman's house... when the first stone came through the window... stones came through the kitchen window. Our children were in the kitchen... I heard Vukile give a cry... Better outside... Better dead outside in the street than being burnt to death... At that moment you couldn't stop to look at a corpse... to see who it was, you just had to run for your life... Everything that happened... had made me so stupid I didn't even know how to get to Mosie's house... When we got to my brother's house everybody was out in the street... he said to me: Sisi, why is your child so quiet? I answered: Maybe sleeping. I have seen too much fighting to think of other things; my child is next to me, that is

all... The child is dead, Rhoda [Poppie's sister-in-law] said... a stone... I did not want to believe that the child was dead... For what, I thought, all this for what? (331-6).[24]

Many of Nongena's responses to the unrest were unsympathetic and plagued by misgivings: "Poppie had no heart for what was happening in the location", people were "stirring up a trouble that would get too big for them to control"; "When will this trouble come to an end? Poppie said to Mosie" (313). She was against the Christmas ban and critical of youths "who stay away from school doing nothing" (338). Jakkie, whom Nongena had loved like her own child, she felt was "wasting his life with the Comrades" (325); and he participated - let the youths into the house and held him down - in what she saw as an unforgivable beating of buti Plank for drunkenness. Nongena felt that smashing buses and burning schools was simply wrong, and was indignant that many actions seemed to mean more suffering for people like her. When buses were smashed she had to walk: "Now but why do they do it?" (310). She found it difficult to make the students' demands and actions her own: "Why didn't you fight for me when I was made to suffer so?" (313): "This trouble is not mine..." (318).

The ongoing disturbances on occasion drew Nongena into a sympathetic response, when they touched upon her experience and main terms of reference: her family and children. When children were shot, for example, that "worked on" her (306), affected

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[24]
   Nongena had witnessed traumatic events, and experienced a similar sense of disorientation, during previous political unrest in Cape Town:

   The second week of the strike the hate and death came to Poppie's street. She saw it with her own eyes. It came during the night... She saw they were young fellows, all carrying kieries. They went across the street to the house of Mr Mfukeng, the shopkeeper... Come on outside, Mfukeng, we'll burn down your house over your head... The next morning they were back... Poppie heard the shouting and came out to see... the young people took him... *I cannot move, my feet are stone. I can see blood on the road, but I cannot do anything...* She had drawn the curtain in front of the window, because she did not want to see Mr Mfukeng's house. All day long the curtains remained drawn... I have seen a lot of ugly things but this was the first time I had seen people kill somebody with their bare hands... It was the worst thing I have seen... (126-30)

her badly, because she also had children to whom such things could happen. The church women were glad that the children had taken a stand against drink: "My children don't drink yet, thought Poppie, but how do I know that they will not one day do like the other children do. I must join the women in their gladness that the children have turned against liquor" (318). When the violence erupted between residents and migrants, Nongena's response was similarly conditioned by the horizons and experience of family: "They are our people... tata-ka-Bonsile lived with the migrants... when I was sent away. If Bonsile stayed behind, he would also have lived there. They marry our girls, there are location women and their children who lived with them... Why must we turn against each other?" (324). Although on occasion Nongena recognised that she had grievances ("I must be honest. I have my grievances too. If I had the strength I would try to do something to change matters but now I don't have the strength... I am tired. I want peace now" (318)) and knew that they were shared with others ("Now she knew: The trouble is not only mine, it has come over them as well" (187)), her chief concern was that her children not be caught up in the revolt and that her family domain remain intact.[25]

As Nongena's story draws to a close the voices, identities and narrative perspectives of others assume a more central role, providing new, more radical political perspectives.

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[25]
Such an ambiguous set of attitudes to the political situation was by no means unique. See, for example, *The Diary of Maria Tholo* (Hermer 1980). Initially, there was great excitement – "It is difficult to describe or understand the kind of excitement everyone is feeling. There is danger around but you still want action all the time... Everyone wants to know what's new, what's happening" (52-3) – and a groundswell of support: "I get the impression that most people sway more towards the continuation of the struggle than the ending of it without proper results" (55-6). Maria Tholo's own views, however, and those she ascribes to others, are fascinatingly mixed: "Once it touches *you*, you don't like it... But if *they* go on fighting, O.K. let them. I think this is the way everyone is feeling" (52); "There is a policeman's wife living next door. When I talk to her about the riots, of course, I am against the children. You've got to take sides with the right people. When you talk to the children you are with them. When you meet somebody who is opposing them you also oppose because really you don't know where you stand" (108); "I can't help wishing I had never been born to live through this" (113, also see 55,56,68-9). Tholo's mixed reaction was in part a function of the contradictions of her being both middle class and black. Like Nongena she resented the way her everyday life was continually interfered with. She felt that the tide was turning against the students – "People have begun to turn against the students. I think it is because they went beyond what it was all about in the beginning. They should have stuck to the education issue and not interfered with other activities in the township... We are the sufferers..." (116) – as people grew tired of the tension, the breakdown in essential services, the suffering, and resentful of the loss of education and earnings.

While Jakkie was from a different political generation, Nongena's brother, Mosie was not:

> I don't like these riots. You and I are the Lord's people, his church-people. I don't like it that the children tease the government and get hurt, or that they stop my car with stones and shout: Donate! Donate! till I get out and tap off petrol for their petrol bombs. But... I cannot help it, deep down in my heart I hear: At last! I suppress this thought 'cause why, this violence is not the way of the Lord. But then again I hear deep down: At last! (311, also 313,320-1, 339-40)

The effect of these multiple, competing voices is to reduce Nongena's own centrality and to vocalise a fracturing of the black, and more specifically the family, voice. It is also to voice counter-arguments to the views expressed by Nongena herself. An apolitical reading of *Poppie*, therefore, not only rests upon a blinkered and partial focus on Nongena as an individual, but also on the exclusion of other, more militant, voices.

Finally, Poppie Nongena's family was drawn into the conflict. Jakkie shot a policeman attempting to arrest him and, like so many of his generation, went on the run. Later Nongena's mother and the mother's youngest child, Baby, were arrested. She "felt everything in her die" on hearing that Jakkie was going to Bonsile: "Why must my children come into this thing?... Why can't he leave my children out of this? They have done nothing. They know nothing of all this" (349). Nongena said to herself that her children were safe, they had done nothing wrong. But others who had done nothing wrong were taken in and tortured. Children who had been detained came out changed, hard, nothing was the same again, they could not forget what had been done to them. Nongena's mother and Baby were released. Jakkie had gone to Mdantsane and then to

Herschel so as to cross the border into Lesotho. He escaped, but Bonsile and his sister were arrested.

> Bonsile, Nomvula, Thandi, Fezi... whom I had to leave without a mama; has it finally caught up with you? What have I done wrong, where have I sinned? I who thought: You're free of it all... For you I have suffered hard times that you could live in peace and go to school, away from all this... Now the time of trouble has come down upon us all, as Jakkie said to me: Let the roof of the gaol cover the whole of the location, let the whole of the location become a gaol, because, why, we are born to die. Let them put you all in the cells... It was as if her face had melted, as if the cheeks and corners of her mouth could not stop trembling... the hardness of heart that had come into her, she knew, would be there for always. I have found my way through everything, she thought, but through this I can find no way. Because this has been taken out of my hands, it has been given over into the hands of the children. It is now my children who will carry on. Peace will not come... Even those that wish for peace will be dragged into the troubles... About that we can't do nothing. But God is my witness, Poppie said, I never sought out this trouble... Lord, Lord, where, at what place, did I turn from your path? She wiped her eyes, still dry, with her handkerchief, as if she wanted to wipe away the unclearness. If the Lord wants you to go, you will go; if the Lord wants you to stay, you will stay, goes through her mind. If the Lord wanted Jakkie to go, it had to be so, she thought. And if my children had to be drawn into this thing, then that is what they were born to. And who can take from their path that to which they were born? (353-5)

Nongena previously had repeatedly engineered resurrections - from the grave of Mdantsane, from the death of her husband which occurred on the same day as the birth of her son's child, Vukile, meaning arisen - simply in order to survive. But the incredible piece of prose quoted above, Nongena's glimpse into the abyss of chaos and darkness as fate, concludes the book with a sense of overwhelming loss. Who - Poppie Nongena or Elsa Joubert - chose such an ending is impossible to know, but there is, more generally and in any event, a terrifying prophetic quality to this life of pain which provides no resolution or redemption.

> ... she felt the strength in her... I am stronger than buti Mosie or buti Plank or buti Johnnie Drop-Eye. I am bigger than them. Because in her heart she knew that what she had undergone would come their way too. I have gone ahead of you, buti Mosie, she said. Your feet too will be set on the road that mine were put upon. That you cannot escape. (299)

Life history as crime, as the annihilation of the self

In a way that strangely parallels the experience of Malan, Poppie Nongena had seen so much - 'I saw it all' - and yet she had seen nothing at all. To inhabit apartheid was to inhabit an inside that could be overwhelming in its oppression, obliterating in its alienation and intimacy. Due to the full range of 'structural violence', Nongena was unable to situate and contextualise her inside. Hers was, to use Margaret Lenta's phrase, a "life... almost entirely without theory" (1984:152). As a result, the outside, or 'other', of apartheid was barely conceptualised let alone seen through or challenged. It was through this identity without theory that Nongena identified the cause of her final collapse within herself. Insidiously, apartheid, again so pervasive as to be invisible, obscured the source of its own crime.

Apartheid was the taken-for-granted that structured Nongena's experience and delimited her horizons, making life within it seemingly inevitable and even preferable to the alternatives. She was able to create an ambiguous niche of independence within and between the uneven and sometimes contradictory impacts of the structures - apartheid, capitalism, patriarchy - that oppressed her. The break-up of the family brought about by apartheid, for example, gave Nongena a greater degree of independence in the domestic realm. But it was an independence that was accompanied by tremendous poverty and isolation, and which remained confined to her role as an, eventually, single parent with children. It challenged neither apartheid nor patriarchy. Schalkwyk describes Nongena as being caught in a "double bind": "she cannot oppose the system that is palpably the cause of her suffering because that would mean the negation of herself as a product of that system, and it is not possible for her, as an individual, to transcend the social and historical conditions in terms of which she has struggled to forge an existence" (1989:271). A fragment of freedom provided a vested interest in the status quo and the little autonomy Nongena had within the only life she knew. The result was an identity - drawing on the opiate of religious fatalism and the seemingly uncollapsible categories typical of those who know life only as survival and lack the resources with which to imagine anything else/different - better suited to trying to survive the system than seeking its overthrow.

This is a life story scarred by layers of annihilation. "Let the roof of the gaol cover the whole of the location, let the whole of the location become a gaol, because, why, we are born to die". Nongena inhabited history as crime, as the space of the annihilation of herself. The story ends with Nongena in a state of collapse as the 1976 uprisings fracture the foundation of her identity - the possibility of a coherent family over which she could preside and in which she could trust - and with her voice being increasingly crowded out by the voices of others. Rather than seeing with her heart, Poppie Nongena is left with a hardness of heart which, she knew, would be with her always. In the end,

she was stripped of everything, including her own story. These repeated annihilations are symptomatic of a society saturated with apartheid's essential violence, to the extent that a life story that is in part a form of counter-visibility to apartheid is simultaneously marked by the brutality and blindness of its living, telling and reception. Important questions remain to be answered. What does it mean to come from the 'other' (wrong?) side of the narrative tracks? What can be resurrected, how, and by whom from the scene of the apartheid crime? And what of the juxtaposition of compromised narrative creative process with powerfully illuminating narrative product?

<p align="center">*   *   *</p>

The notion of testimony as no longer in the control or possession of its author(s), that articulates a complexity of truth not available to its narrator, and, therefore, that needs to be seen and seen through, returns, albeit from a new trajectory, to the struggle for textual ownership, the absence of any monopoly over the political function of writing, and to the inter-textuality and context-bound nature of meaning. The political abuse of narrative meaning is not the sole preserve of the state. It potentially extends from the collaborative narrative enterprise to the reader and beyond. This discussion of Rian Malan's *My Traitor's Heart* and, *Poppie*, by Elsa Joubert and Poppie Nongena, attempts to do justice to the dominant intention, purpose and truth of the author(s), even when as in the latter text this is so difficult to establish, *and* to provide an interpretation of their interpretations, a seeing through of their seeing.

From anywhere within such a divided society, from both sides of the apartheid crime, from within history as the space of annihilation, life stories were/are told through the lives and deaths of others. Lives are superimposed as inter-linked layers of experience and/as interpretation, one on another. When a witness is found to such a life, as these two life stories illustrate, the possibilities and dangers are immense: of a meeting and/or

missing of the self and the 'other' (where the 'other' can be anything from overwhelming to beyond conceptualisation), and of both shared and contested experience and/as interpretation; of visibility, invisibility and counter-visibility; of seeing clearly, blindness and delusion/illusion; of reworkings and replayings of interactions between the powerful and powerless; of projection, transference, appropriation, resurrection, and annihilation; of the healing and (re)opening of wounds. The resulting 'communities of testimonial incommensurates' provide interpretations in need of interpretation due to the manner in which they are, both consciously and unconsciously, understood and misunderstood, revealed and concealed, imposed, negotiated and contested, interpreted, misinterpreted and reinterpreted. They are so explosively revealing because they capture something about lived life and/in its apartheid context.

What this chapter has sought to illustrate is that narrative and power relations between an oppressive state and its opponents variously infect similar relations within society as a whole, and more specifically that the act of witnessing and bearing witness, as, for example, made manifest in narrative collaboration, is an often violently collaborative contest over identity and meaning. The lives of Poppie Nongena and Rian Malan are symbols of apartheid - albeit perhaps not the symbols their creators would have chosen - of its imprisonment and exile, to different degrees and in different ways, of an entire nation; of its conditioning of seeing, knowing and being and, therefore, of pasts lived and remembered, presents/realities inhabited, and futures hoped for and imagined. They raise a final, even definitive, question, about how to reclaim and preserve a more complete picture of the past for the future?

Conclusion

In this thesis I have described the nature of detention, political imprisonment, exile and homecoming within the context of apartheid South Africa, the more general dynamics of repression and resistance, and the role of the life story, particularly auto/biographical counter-discourses, within these contested arenas. To this end, and in an attempt to make a distinctive contribution to the relevant areas of study, the thesis is run through with a number of central themes which are summarised and concluded below.

The first concerns the dynamics of oppression, articulated through the prism of apartheid. The oppressive state violently un/remade the oppositional, subjugated subject. The incarcerated and exiled self was fragmented - body from mind from voice, in space (inside from outside) and in time (present from past and future) - isolated, stripped bare of contact and connection, incarcerated within/expelled into an alien world. The state attempted to recast all dimensions of this recalcitrant self in its image. In a way that appears inimical to apartheid's more essentialist fervour for categorisation and boundaries, but which is in fact illustrative of the manner in which this was permeated by pragmatism, the truth and power of state violence ultimately resided most profoundly in its capacity and intent to blur, erase and redraw, boundaries, to respect no border or threshold, and, thereby, to unsettle and manipulate reality. Violence, for example, could be a servant of racist ideology and/or of random terror, legal and/or the extra/illegal, marshalling the physical and/or the psychological, truths and/or lies, in an overt/spectacular and/or covert manner, across a range of geographical terrains. This dynamic, affecting methods/means, agents/perpetrators, targets, objectives and results, underwrote state violence. Examples of its operation included the mechanics of torture, the relationship between court room and torture chamber (torturer, lawyer and doctor), and the operations of the special forces throughout southern Africa. A further blurring and unsettling occurred through the proximity of control and order to chaos and

rebellion. Oppression functioned through simultaneity, cumulatively towards a whole that was greater than the sum of its parts; the un/remaking of reality was deliberate, unconscious and unintended, and undertaken in error. Apartheid oppression was, therefore, inherently, out of control. The absence of definitive closure or easy resolution to its effects, as illustrated by the (non-)resolution of return (permanent exile/ retrospective migrancy and ambiguous homecoming), provides a further example of this phenomenon.

The second general argument of this study relates to the dynamics of resistance. In outlining the profile of both sides of the oppression-resistance equation, I have placed more emphasis on the latter component, and attempted to establish that the relationship between the two was an extraordinarily complex one of mutual dependence - the one implying and creating the conditions for the other - of complicity (of mind, body and voice in torture, of state witness and askari, of self-censorship; and also complicity in the more fundamental sense that the violence of oppression, for both oppressor and oppressed, was ultimately, inevitably, inflicted upon one's self), and of course of animosity and contestation.

In a terrain characterised by enormous inequality in relation to power, resistance nevertheless attempted to take advantage of the contradictions and imprecision within apartheid's oppressive design. In a world where everything became a weapon, the weapons of oppression were double-edged, available to both sides, could be turned against their original author(s) and primary objective. I have examined the word, writing/autobiography, and being a writer; complaints and safeguard mechanisms and the classification system/privileges for the incarcerated; the documentation and records of a conscientious bureaucracy; the courts/law and medicine; aspects of the conditions of imprisonment; the body and the senses, space and time; other people, including fellow detainees/prisoners and exiles, the community of activists, family and friends. As

noted in the introduction, such weapons were subject to mimicry, distortion, management, contestation and reversal. The detainee/prisoner and exile reworked their intended/dominant meaning and purpose to retain/regain access to a chosen self, voice and world, to the ability to reassemble themselves in an image other than that of state, and, thereby, to agency and power.

To cite an example of weapons turned against their intended purpose, the prisoner/ detainee and exile contrived ways to un/remake the undifferentiated, infinite, empty/ blank time and space of incarceration and exile. They showed a similar disregard for boundaries and thresholds to that shown by the state. The landscapes of time and space were marked with horizons and landmarks, in turn inscribed and erased, and thereby transgressed and un/remade in a relentless mapping towards release, return, and home. The exile and the detainee/prisoner were strung between a present without past/future and a past/future without present, and between various insides and outsides. To transgress and un/remake time and space was to reunite these territories, to embrace the full temporal/spatial range, and to reactivate the movement of time and the journey across space towards the place of home. Communication was one weapon in this endeavour. It bridged/breached divisions between inside and outside and between territories of time, establishing their simultaneous coexistence, enabling self-extension into, contact and connection with, familiar worlds. Similarly, autobiography, and writing more generally, were a 'guide-line across the [temporal and spatial] chasm', which in their composition and subsequent fate forged links and reactivated motion across the landscapes of time and space/place.

A third set of issues relate specifically to the life story as a discourse and agent of oppression and resistance. A major preoccupation of this thesis has been with the articulation and application of a theory of the life story in the context of political struggle, the chief components of which are outlined below. The oppositional self

carried the inner tension of a desire for an uncompromisingly unified and pure identity that was continually underscored by the need to be partial, provisional, contingent, strategic, inventive, by the necessity to be continually un/remade, adapted, in its imposition and self-construction, to suit an evolving political purpose and context. This pattern of identity formation has been illustrated by a diverse array of examples in previous chapters: the use of 'legends' in interrogation; the juggling of assumed names; the 'management' of accounts from statements/confessions to 'half-told' and 'half-known' autobiographies; the inventive use of components of identity such as when the body is surrendered to save the mind/soul during torture; the marshalling of narrative devices such as repetition and the orchestration of a cast of characters and selves in the service of survival.

State and opposition shared the desire to document lives at the critical junctures of repression and resistance, which, as crucibles of struggle, unmasked the essence of apartheid's various possibilities and potentials. What was fought over within the contested texts and archives of the self was the right to say 'I' and/or 'We'. The central characteristic of the construction of identity was violent collaboration. Incarceration, exile and homecoming, as well as the structures of apartheid more generally, introduced a violent component into the collaborative relationship. Political opponents wrote and were written by/with/against/through the apartheid state. The most illuminating forms of the life story genre were those created at the interface between state and opponent, between rival powers of writing, during moments and encounters when lives were contested in and through a range of texts and when the violence of collaboration was most apparent: narratives such as the confession/statement, the tortured body, incarcerative and exilic time and space, and the censored/self-censored text. At an individual level illustrations of this theory range from the violence of Breytenbach's hidden contestatory dialogue, engaging invisible and implied voices, to Jacobson's modes of apprehension, formed in the violent and non-violent collaborative embrace

of/with a South African past. Most perniciously of all, narrative and political violence pervaded apartheid society, influencing interactions between subjects, including those devised as acts of resistance such as oral histories and *testimonio*-like collaborations.

As this discussion implies, under apartheid a diverse textual congregation expanded the conventional range of life-story forms. Texts that were articulations of life stories or impacted on their narration included the oral, written and somatic, the bureaucratic and legal, documents of the torture chamber, the court room, and from the medical profession, public and hidden transcripts, those insistent on and/or promiscuous with the truth, realist and other fiction, and more conventionally auto/biographical texts (narratives of witness, *testimonio*, new journalism, and more). Proliferation, diversity, juxtaposition, superimposition and repetition, encompassing voids of silence and arenas of saturation, created a palimpsest of lives variously and irreconcilably told, without completion or consensus; a 'community of testimonial incommensurates'.

Authorship and meaning in this circulating, active, inter-textual narrative network were provisional and contested, subject to manipulation and appropriation in unintended and unexpected ways. Narrative interpretation, alongside and inextricably interlinked with narrative construction, was violently collaborative in nature. The absence of any monopoly over political function was a characteristic of texts which was open to tremendous abuse by/in an oppressive state. The use of autobiographical accounts within interrogation, to which I refer in the opening chapter, was a poignant example of this form of barbarism. The final chapter of the thesis adds a further dimension to this narrative violence. Both the possibilities for interpretive violence and a central characteristic of testimony - understood as intrinsically exceeding the awareness and beyond the absolute control of the testifier - were accentuated within such a divided and political society as South Africa. As a result narrative abuse was endemic and extended beyond the immediate intentions and range of the state. Hence the importance not only

of seeking to redress state (and other) discursive and interpretive violence, but also of attempting to do so, self-consciously and -critically. I have tried to do this by articulating ways of interpreting testimonial interpretations, of seeing through conscious and unconscious deception and self-deception, *and* by identifying a dominant narrative and political trajectory. This strategy provides a means of anchoring in the particular perspective of the original author the potentially endless proliferation of equivalent interpretations implicit in the former strategy and of avoiding and unmasking the potential excesses of interpretive violence. Ultimately, in relation to the state, and other sources of narrative violence not all so readily identified as the enemy, the already quoted words of Breytenbach retain their force: "It is possible to falsify for some time the thrust of one's words by inserting them in an environment controlled by the enemy, but eventually - if what you write is 'true' to yourself at that moment - it will become evident and be rectified" (1985:158). The power of the life story is that no amount of political and narrative violence can ultimately divert it from its meaning and task, even if this particular homecoming is only achieved in the context of apartheid's demise.

A fourth concern of the thesis has been the relationship between the triumvirate of incarceration, exile, homecoming and theories of creativity. At one level the relationship circles around the overtly auto/biographical. All three experiences were autobiographical moments in the sense of being occasions when life for the prisoner, exile, and returnee could appear to be patterned by order and structure, delimited by closure, and when life stories provided a bridge, or 'guide-line', to survival, normality, and home. A second dimension of the relationship relates more to fictional narratives. The incarcerative, exilic and homecoming rites of passage were creatively enabling and compulsive, because they provided a metaphor not only for power relations within an oppressive state but also for the creative act. The repressive cycle may unmask something about the workings of the literary imagination given the essential unreality of its components, the coexistence of intimacy and distance, attempts to transcend

divisions and divides, and the embrace of violence and the unknown. But it is important to register an element of paradox and contradiction in this scenario, to recognise the co-existence of creative life and death, and to break down generalisations with patterns of difference.

The moments/encounters provided the subject matter for creativity in their own right and destroyed the terrain of experiential and imaginative familiarity. They were redolent with death: almost all political prisoners were not allowed to engage in creative writing, while the work of exiles was banned and censored. The encounter/moment and its aftermath need to be creatively distinguished. With regards to their creative implications and potential, components of the triumvirate were similar but also different (the prisoner had neither means nor audience, the exile had the means but no audience, the returnee sometimes had both means and audience), internally differentiated (Breytenbach as a prisoner was allowed to write), and harboured more positive implications and potential for autobiographical writing than for fiction. It is not possible for the experiential troika to be seen as creatively stimulating, equally stimulating and/or stimulating in the same way, for the writer who engaged with them only at the level of idea, theory, imagination, for the activist who became a writer only in writing about these experiences, and/or for the writer who they reduced to silence. If the passage through apartheid's various 'spaces of death' harboured the potential for a life-affirming transformation, and the life story was an agent of transformation, for whom? in what form? and at what price? While those who have undergone incarceration, exile and homecoming inhabit a kind of experiential privilege when it comes to their representation, those lacking this privilege have the problematic task of balancing questions of authority and responsibility. J. M. Coetzee's in some ways understandable intimation that it is obscene to make suffering such as torture the occasion for imagining and his reluctance to give his voice to and speak on behalf of the 'other', for example, not only reproduces the violent silencing of repression but also has

unsettling parallels with the collaborative failure to imagine ('put yourself in my place')

that contributed to the structure and longevity of apartheid. The terms of creative

engagement are perhaps best understood as another double-edged weapon in the

armoury of struggle. This brief concluding overview, alongside the treatments of this

issue in previous chapters, establishes the existence of a complex and nuanced

relationship between repression and creativity.

A fifth argument that recurs throughout my analysis addresses the profound ambiguity of

postcolonialism's method and central tenents, especially construed as universal reality and

unqualified good, when applied to contexts of political struggle.[1] One example of this

ambiguity is the postcolonial blur which generalises heterogeneity and homogenises

difference. The postcolonial blur, as discussed in chapter 3, merges categories of

displacement/movement. A further dimension of the same pattern deconstructs

distinctions between self and 'other'. For Breytenbach the self and/as 'other' operates as a

component of the dictum - deny opposites, read one in the other, and go beyond; in

analysing how to go beyond cliché in the representation of the torturer, J. M. Coetzee's

main strategy is an attempt to deconstruct the dichotomy between self and 'other'; and

this creative strategy functions similarly for 'border literature' with regards to the

self/'other' distinction as manifest in the divide between black/white, perpetrator/ victim.

A meeting of various selves and 'others' is clearly of inestimable importance in South

Africa. In isolation, however, this particular gesture towards the 'other' - from whites,

from the disenchanted within the realm of power/perpetrator, facing an uncertain

future at a time of ideological crisis and decline - can give the appearance of

prioritising the world of ideas over reality/practice, and of advocating an identity politics

of self-preservation and an ideology of reform rather than resistance or more

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[1] Whether apartheid South Africa was historically/politically postcolonial is open to question. By nevertheless applying aspects of its method I have sought to question what is specifically postcolonial about many of its central ideas (see Ranger 1996), and to test their efficacy in the context of political struggle, a number of characteristics of which arguably transcend the specificities of historical and political circumstance.

substantial change. Excess identification with the 'other' by the oppressed is incapacitating with reference to the choices required for political action. These attempts to traverse and dismantle difference result in the arguably irreconcilable being construed as the same: all are human, all aggressors, all guilty, all victims. Such a blurring of boundaries obfuscates the sources of oppression and resistance, and blurs lines of contestation.[2]

Another, overlapping, example of postcolonial ambiguity concerns a basket of its central concepts: the negotiation of binaries, hybridity, the in-between, difference, plurality. Across arenas as diverse as identity construction, political strategy/action, and modes of analysis, such concepts can be contentious, detrimental and dangerous in a politically contested environment, especially for the oppressed. Providing an example of mimicry, reversal and distortion, both repression and resistance wielded as a weapon a lawless disregard for, and the capacity to erase and redraw, thresholds and boundaries. But, equally, for both camps there were times and places when/where lines had to be drawn, when/where it was imperative to join one side or the other, and know which side one was on. To occupy the space in-between, to be neither one thing nor the other, to embrace hybridity and difference, was to occupy a battleground. Illustrations of this point - individuals/authors, fictional characters, countries - litter the chapters of this study. Breytenbach at his trial, in prison and exile, lived out the paradox of his identity as an Afrikaner and maverick dissident, on both sides and neither, regarded as contaminated by all. Rian Malan went from seeing the imperative to choose sides to a belief that there were no rational choices available. In a polarised society he was incapacitated in the middle, unable to commit himself either way. Other examples of the in-between, isolated, ostracised, and alienated include doctors and magistrates

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2
  Paradoxically, some of the rhetoric of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation
Commission (TRC) - all suffered trauma, all need healing - runs the danger of repeating
this blurring. This is not to deny that perpetrators and victims shared not only some
experiences but also certain responses to them, Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome being one
obvious example. On the psychological experiences of white conscripts in the townships,
see Sandler 1989.

presiding over the complaints and safeguard mechanisms for detainees, caught in-between detainee and state; Coetzee's magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*; Modisane as eccentric intellectual and cosmopolitan, a 'situation' stranded between racial and political worlds; and the Frontline States, geographically and politically caught between the main players in struggle for South Africa. The study of writers like Breytenbach and Modisane illustrates the profound ambiguity of an uncritical acceptance of key tenents of postcolonial discourse across identity, culture and politics, in a context such as South Africa, and the centrality of components of its vision to alienation and political incoherence/incapacitation.

The truth-power dynamic, or societal 'regime of truth', constitutes a sixth, and final, set of concerns, and it is with an examination of these concerns and their current manifestations that I will conclude.

Magical Truths

> Every government assumes political responsibility for the deeds and misdeeds of its predecessor and every nation for the deeds and misdeeds of the past. (Arendt 1977:298)

> Later we can expect the unravelling, the recriminations, the not-so-guilty confessions, the church-run commissions, the government-sponsored investigations, the arrests of tense and unyielding men in uniform, and finally the optimistic reports... After the fall, after the aberration, we expect a return to the normative, to peacetime sobriety, to notions of civil society, human rights, the sanctity of the person... *habeas corpus*, and the unalienable rights to the ownership of one's body.
> But here I intrude with a shadowy question. What if... (Scheper-Hughes 1992:219)

> One of the things that is remarkable about the stories of both Brazil and Uruguay is the way in which, to a large degree, the rehabilitation of the torture societies, to the extent it has occurred, was accomplished by the torture victims themselves. These victims - hollowed-out, burnt-out shells - came alive once again by testifying to the truth of their own experiences. And that truth, to a degree, has set both themselves and their societies free. (Weschler 1990:246)

> Our land holds its hard / Wooden truths like a peach / A pip... This unfinished task.
> (Cronin, "Our land holds...", 1987:57)

The quotations above indicate not just that societies such as South Africa have a responsibility with regards to their violent past, but also the tremendous accompanying potentials and pitfalls. Political transition and democratisation confronted and continue to confront South Africa with divergent demands in relation to its apartheid past, to be prioritised and/or reconciled. Should the emphasis be placed on the past or future; on amnesty and forgetting, on the need to know the truth and acknowledgement, or on accountability and justice; on the rule of law and the morally desirable or on the politically feasible and an acceptance that the political constraints may preclude optimal solutions? What is the best route to consolidate a still insecure democracy, developing under siege from the past and the future, within the context of a negotiated and incomplete transition? Transitions generate demands and expectations on numerous levels, all of which, simultaneously, seek to be addressed and satisfied. Broad official/political agendas coexist alongside intimate private memories and needs. Can any process achieve healing, catharsis and reconciliation at the level of the individual, the community and the nation?[3] An increasing stock of experience of transition management from around the globe provides some useful indicators but no definitive answers or universally applicable models.[4]

At its most stark the debate is about whether to prosecute or pardon. Neier argues that "in some circumstances it is only justice that can be an appropriate acknowledgement of the past" (1994:7).[5] Using the analysis of previous chapters, it can be argued that

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[3] Michael Ignatieff asks: "What does it mean for a nation to come to terms with its past?" (1996:110). Can we talk of psyche, trauma, identity, reconciliation, healing for nations as we do in relation to individuals? Can nations act, be responsible, bear guilt? Ignatieff's negative answers to the latter two questions draws a more absolute division between individual and nation than I would want to support.

[4] See, for example, Hayner 1994,1996, Méndez 1997, Steiner and Alston 1996:1084-1109.

[5] To date Argentina is the only example of a country that has gone the route of prosecution. What was initially intended to be a limited, circumscribed process of prosecution focusing on those who gave the orders for, and those who committed excesses in implementing orders within, the 'Dirty War', proved difficult to contain. Judicial proceedings were terminated after a series of rebellions by junior army officers (see Méndez 1994, Dworkin/Neier, in Steiner and Alston 1996, and also Manguel 1996). In "To Prosecute or to Pardon? Human Rights Decisions in the Latin American Southern Cone", Pion-Berlin (1994) examines factors which influenced the different paths taken by Argentina, Chile and Uruguay during their respective political transitions. On the

blanket amnesty and systematic forgetting repeat the silencing/silences of torture,

incarceration, exile, and oppression more generally, whereas the pursuit of truth, and

more particularly of justice, restores the voice, self and world to the victim of abuse and

ultimately, perhaps, to the national community and its past; or, in a related argument,

that a state-sanctioned amnesty and forgetting is a collective suicide note for the past,

and one which unlike the autobiographical suicide note does not even constitute an

historical record. Can historical time be cut loose from the past into a blank present and

future? Will such a moment of erasure and release inevitably carry a hidden and

subversive baggage into the future? Can a secure future be built by perpetuating an

official sanctioning of the collaborative unknowing or 'willed ignorance' that has often

been complicit in past violence?

Decision-makers are faced with a range of imperfect solutions, and each solution has

its price. Zalaquett states that politicians "are dealing with an exercise in

maximisation [achieving the best that is possible in the circumstances], not simple

righteousness" (1994:9-10). Elsewhere, he talks of life under a newly established

repressive regime in Chile in 1973 and a realisation that courage "was just another

name for learning how to live with your fears" and, almost two decades on, under

equally new but changed circumstances, of a further realisation that a less striking

form of courage was called for: "It is the courage to forgo easy righteousness, to

learn how to live with real-life restrictions, but to seek nevertheless to advance one's

most cherished values day by day to the extent possible. Relentlessly. Responsibly"

(1992:1438). As the life of Albie Sachs illustrates, a softer form of heroism is not

unrelated to a soft vengeance; nor is it unrelated, to the ongoing evolution, in

changing circumstances, of the truth-power dynamic, to a new 'regime of truth'.

transformation of the dominant oppositional vision of democracy and justice during
political transition, see Vergara and Estevéz 1994.

South Africa has chosen/created an innovative and complex path through the past into the future. The main institutional manifestation of this path is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.[6] The truth within political transition has a magical quality and power (Weschler 1990:4,217). Truth Commissions are potentially the institutional embodiment of the magical quality and power of truth, a benchmark counter-inscription to the previous state archive of oppression. They represent official recognition of the right to know and to mourn, both of which have in the past been denied to varying degrees by both sides in the apartheid conflict. Through a Truth Commission the new state sanctions, acknowledges and 'owns' the past and rewrites official history within a different 'regime of truth'.[7] As a result of the TRC certain claims and assertions - that there was no torture, for example - will be impossible to make in the future in South Africa. In this process of truth-telling, credibility is restored to the state and meaning/integrity is restored to official language and discourse. As torture epitomises the structure of oppression as the detainee is stripped of voice, self and world, while the interrogator gains a corresponding self-extension, the Truth Commission, like the life story of which its message is essentially composed, contains within it the possibility of a redistribution of voice, self, world, and ultimately power. Each testimony is potentially an act of rescue from anonymity, misinformation and forgetting, a reclamation from the state of the right to say 'I' and 'We'. Some, situated within this new 'network of writing', may be "mended by the mention" (Weschler 1990:74), for others, the truth and its

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[6] On the establishment/operation of the TRC see Boraine, Levy and Scheffer eds. 1994 (second edition 1997), Boraine and Levy eds. 1995, du Toit 1994, Garton Ash 1997, Sarkin 1997, Simpson 1994, Simpson and van Zyl 1995, Wilson 1996; also see the regular contributions by Antjie Krog in the *Weekly Mail and Guardian*.

[7] It is worth noting that within the TRC as elsewhere there are different kinds of truth in circulation. Ignatieff (1996) proposes a useful distinction between factual truth (what happened) and moral truth (which attempts to explain why things happened and who is responsible). The latter is much more difficult for a Truth Commission to establish or achieve shared agreement on. In some contexts, he argues, shared moral truth -- the path from truth to reconciliation - is impossible. Is shared truth possible where a version of truth is inextricably linked to identity? Where to refute your own truth is to refute your identity? "The problem of a shared truth" argues Ignatieff "is also that it does not lie 'in between'. It is not a compromise between two competing versions" (114): such compromises are unlikely to be credible to either side. It remains an open question whether truth in such contexts heals and reconciles.

acknowledgement may even set them free. Such commissions announce a new relationship between state and subject, one in which lives can be told, and thereafter hopefully lived, through a more co-operative collaboration between the two.

The task of collaborative healing, like the past reach and present ramifications of the violent collaboration it seeks to redress, extends beyond state and subject to affect the relationship between all citizens of South Africa. Life stories, told by and to the entire national community, can, ideally, be heard and recognised as authentic for the first time. In South Africa, witnesses have been found from various sides of the apartheid crime; testimony has been shared about what it meant to inhabit history as crime, as the space of the annihilation of the 'other' and self. Individual stories - of state and subject, victim and perpetrator, black and white, male and female, self and 'other' - have again been juxtaposed and superimposed, narrated many times over into an arena already dense with prior versions and/or into an arena best characterised as a void.[8] This process begins the multi-dimensional process of filling

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[8]
   The TRC's Committee on Amnesty was assigned the power to grant amnesty conditional upon full disclosure and political objective/motive. Provision was made for perpetrators not to be granted amnesty for particularly brutal, heinous or barbaric crimes. Rather than a blanket amnesty, therefore, the granting of amnesty was individualised, available only to those who personally applied for it, and made part of the truth telling process (the implication being that those who do not follow this route, or who do not successfully apply for amnesty, will be liable to prosecution). This direct link between amnesty and truth is the most original and creative aspect of South Africa's transition management process. Among the problems encountered by the amnesty process are that tension, hostility and obstruction have characterised the attitude of the courts to the TRC with regards to the perpetrators of apartheid violence. The acquittal of former defence minister, Magnus Malan, on charges of murder, is in many ways emblematic. A series of actions by the courts have undermined the TRC's amnesty procedure, which relies on the threat/fear of prosecution in the absence of an application for or the granting of amnesty. As a result amnesty applications have been patchy – while senior police officers have applied for amnesty, the top military have not – and the success of the provision as a whole is still an open question. This uncertainty is due in part to the operation of the TRC alongside institutions (specifically the courts and judiciary) and within a society that are still significantly unreformed and unchanged.

Despite these shortcomings the amnesty provision promises greater, if partial, detail and knowledge of that most impenetrable terrain: the psyche of the perpetrator. Perpetrator history is a particularly difficult field of study. Few torturers, for example, confess to their crimes (Stover and Nightingale eds. 1985:7, also 13). Among the issues to be addressed by perpetrator histories are the following: how to go beyond organisational/institutional, ideological history and the history of leaders to an experiential understanding of the oppressor in all his/her guises and a history of all levels in the oppressive hierarchy? how to deconstruct binary oppositions and stereotypes without suspending all distinctions and judgement? and, what are the implications of the quest for understanding and the inevitable conclusion that the enemy were human too? (on the problems inherent in writing perpetrator history in relation to the Holocaust, see Browning 1992). In this context, the TRC and the amnesty provisions in South Africa are enormously suggestive, because truth-telling was at least arguably in the interests of the perpetrator.

out the 'half-told' and 'half-known'. A 'community of testimonial incommensurates' has been formed by superimposed layers of experience and lives, interpretations, subject to re-interpretation, counter-interpretation, and still in need of interpretation.[9] Within this montage of lives, this new inter-textual archive that both builds on and departs from the old, the partial and fragmented will begin to constitute a greater whole, a convergence that will never be without dissent, a consensus that will never be complete."[10]

Truth Commissions are potentially transformative institutions. In chapter 2, I argued, drawing on work by Veena Das, that pain and its effects on the body and/as memory can both destroy (torture) and engender (initiation rites) a sense of community. The TRC, as a potentially therapeutic space, raises, and perhaps in time will answer the following question: is it possible, through a process of sharing and acknowledgement, to begin to transform the former into the latter, or in other words, a pain and suffering that was world-destroying into the possibility of a new moral, social and political order? (Das 1995:190-6). Another transformation is required in the temporal realm. Apartheid crimes remain locked in the "eternal present"; there is a simultaneity of the past and/in the present which means that the past is "not past at all" (Ignatieff 1996:121, see 119-22). There is a need, while acknowledging an inevitable and desirable temporal simultaneity, to liberate the present and future from the burden of the past which threatens to overwhelm them. To come to terms with the past means superimposing

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[9] In the context of interpretations requiring interpretation, the following point is also worth noting: those who most need to testify are also potentially those - having been caught in an environment calculated to deceive, having lived lives without theory - "at the mercy of their persecutors in all ways - even in their attempts to testify against them" (Young 1987:417). But it is also worth reiterating that the 'higher' truth of such testimony lies precisely in its theoretical unselfconsciousness and intimate knowledge, in the textures and grounding of lived experience and the manner and circumstances of narration. Such observations have profound implications for the TRC and its interpretive and analytical ethos.

[10] The following quotation from an article by Antjie Krog illustrates this point: "After the first political submissions last year I interviewed Tutu. 'Weren't you irritated that you had to listen to four versions of South Africa's past?' He spreads his four skinny fingers under my nose. 'Four versions[...] four[...] exist of the life of Christ. Which one would you have liked to chuck out?'" ("Unto the Third or Fourth Generation", *Weekly Mail and Guardian* 13-19/6 1997).

serial time on simultaneous time, it means reactivating the movement of time. The

TRC, like the life story, is potentially one component of the motor moving time

forward. These urgently necessary transformations illustrate the way in which South

Africa's political transition is itself a journey through the 'space of death' where reality is

'up for grabs'."

Another dimension of a reality/past being 'up for grabs' is that political transition, and

the TRC in particular, will create, impose, transform memories and the dominant plots

of recall; and do so within the constraints, agendas, priorities, demands, needs and

contexts of the present. The dominant trope of the transition in South Africa is the

powerful state-sanctioned drive for reconciliation and forgiveness. Just as the past

informs the present, so the present influences the recollection and narration of the past.

To what extent, and by which constituencies - state and subject, perpetrator and victim,

beneficiary and non-beneficiary of transition - are the demands and needs of the present

shared? What are the counter-demands and needs to those sanctioned by the new state

and how will they find expression? What will happen to the narrative structures and

central plots of remembering which conflict with those of the dominant ethos of

transition? Memory is the way in which the past erupts into contemporary life and the

present. To articulate the past historically is "to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up

at a moment of danger" (Benjamin 1973:257).

For this and other reasons attempts to circumscribe memory, to artificially constrain or

impose closure on the processes of remembering would be counter-productive. Firstly,

diverse textualities of the life story and of memory - oral, written, somatic, of the

senses; public and hidden; legal and bureaucratic; of the state and of the opposition -

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11
    Alongside its enormous potential, there have also been a range of questions raised,
problems encountered and controversies generated in relation to the TRC in South Africa.
These include allegations of political bias, legal challenges, criticism of the emphasis
placed on forgiveness, and questions about the form of reparations and who will pay.

are inscribed with versions of the past, each with their own avenues of remembering/ recall and silence/forgetting. They constitute another 'community of testimonial incommensurates', the components of which are unique, contradictory, complementary, subversive, containing histories and identities yet to be made; there are memory worlds as yet unknown and untouched.

> Contrapuntal sensory histories can be recovered from the scattered wreckage of the inadmissible: lost biographies, memories, words, pains, glances, and faces that cohere into a vast *secret museum of historical and sensory absence.* (Feldman 1994:415)

The second reason to resist calls for closure is that it is impossible to over-estimate the scale of the task of healing and reconciliation in South Africa - the already mentioned imbalance between needs/expectations/demands and the potential to deliver - the major burden of which has been placed on and indeed accepted by the TRC. There is evidence, however, that the TRC is not intended to tackle the task alone or in isolation.[12] Truth Commissions are most appropriately envisaged as neither a beginning nor an end but a significant moment within an ongoing process of dealing with the past in a way that embraces the future. Testimony at the TRC narrated individual and collective memory into (official/national) history. "The collective memory thus becomes a collected memory, at once a private and a public legacy..." (Hartman 1994:38).[13] While the TRC has facilitated this imprint of memory on history, it has also enabled history to

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[12] Truth Commissions are too often set up and assessed in isolation. South Africa has a range of institutions dedicated to contributing to a 'rights culture': the Gender Equality Commission, the Human Rights Commission, the Public Protector and programmes instigated by the Ministry of Justice. It also has a Day of Reconciliation on December 16, which commemorates those who died at the hands of fellow South Africans. Other initiatives could include national monuments, memorials and museums, as well as legal and educational reforms aimed at enhancing the promotion and protection of human rights and an understanding of the past.

[13] It is worth noting that it is equally important to see memory as active and alive as well as an object of collection, to find ways of making it serve multiple purposes.

inform memory.[14] Testimony, therefore, occupies a complex position emphasising the rupture while contributing to the process of convergence between the two. Memory and history remain multi-vocal and their relationship remains one of negotiation, but, such engagements, by leading to a greater memory-history coincidence, also facilitate a greater societal sense of a shared past. This is one, pivotal, way of beginning to build a more corroborative memory and history of apartheid - Hilda Bernstein talks of "a history that has thirty years of torn and missing pages" (1993:12) - and a more comprehensive 'community of witnessing', based on a collaborative and willed knowing and imagining, in a deeply divided society.[15] Without this sense of a more shared past there can be no shared identity or nation building. The creation and inscription of memory and history, the past and identity, however, is a process that will engage all the energies of society for generations; it is a process without end.[16]

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[14] Nowhere is this latter process more crucial than in the imperative that South Africa, and particularly white South Africa, 'own' its apartheid past. How many white South Africans will now admit to supporting apartheid? This is a joke told by émigré Jews who had returned to Germany: "A Jew enters a Munich train station, and joins the ticket line. He asks one neighbor if he had been a Nazi during the war. 'No! Never! What do you take me for?' 'Forgive me,' cries the émigré, all meek apology. He asks another neighbor, and receives the same reply. Finally he turns to a third, and the man shrugs and says, 'Of course I was.' 'Ah, wonderful!' cries the Jew. 'I was looking for an honest man I could leave my bags with'" (Heilbut 1983:470). On paradoxical, self-interested flux in (ideological) affiliation, on all sides, that often accompanies political change, see Lelyveld 1987:213-14.

[15] Typically, Breytenbach provides a voice of dissent: "Is full memory a mantra of public protection? Or just the mouthing of self-indulgence? May it not be argued that the more fulsome the memory the less scope we have for pain and inventive recollection?" (1994:160).

[16] Healing and reconciliation are not only legal, quasi-legal, and psychological phenomena, but also require political, economic, and social change. This is Charity Kondile: "'It is easy for [Nelson] Mandela and [Desmond] Tutu to forgive[...] they lead vindicated lives. In my life nothing, not a single thing, has changed since my son was burnt by barbarians[...] nothing. Therefore I cannot forgive'" (Krog, "The Parable of the Bicycle", *Weekly Mail and Guardian* 7-13/2 1997). Furthermore, there is no absolute safety from forgetting, refashioning or distortion in relation to the past. "No memory can ever survive the death of its original holder without the collective will to keep it alive" (Jay 1992:107). Maintaining historical memory is an ongoing, collective task. So long as such a process achieves a momentum and structure that is both individual and institutional, within civic society and the state, there will be a co-operatively collaborative and corroborative body of truth against which to critically judge reconstructions of the past. Given such a context, no individual will be able to impose their will on history. There is a considerable literature on reactionary revisionist rewritings of Nazi history and the Holocaust. See, for example, Funkenstein 1992:76-81 and LaCapra 1992. Much can be learnt by historians of apartheid from the issues confronting their colleagues working on Nazi and Holocaust history, from debates involving revisionists and counter-revisionists to the issues raised by the approaching death of the last survivors.

A third reason to resist an arbitrary announcement on the end of memory/remembering relates to the structure and dynamics of memory and forgetting. Traumatic events can be shrouded in a sense of unreality at the moment of occurrence; what it is not possible to integrate, transmit, bear witness to at the time can sometimes only later, with the therapy among other things of time, be made one's own; literature on traumatic memory and sequelae and their various treatments is laced with concepts such as repetition, delay, and latency.[7] It is, therefore, impossible to dictate a moment of catharsis, during political transition or at any other time. The passage of time brings recall and remembrance as well as distortion and forgetting.

With concerns about memory and closure still firmly in mind, a final set of questions about the implications and possibilities for the life story of the arrival of a new political dawn in South Africa will be addressed. Counter-discourses of resistance, specifically the life story written on return/release or unbanned and thereby otherwise returned/released, can be seen as a form of "re-incorporealisation" of the missing and 'disappeared' into South Africa's official discourse and literary history (Lindfors 1994:161). Texts and lives can, furthermore, be put back in touch with, situated within, their dominant intention, purpose and truth. With the decline of apartheid, therefore, life stories are being both inserted into a different context of interpretation and told in a different context of narration:

> Personal testimony is piecing together the chronicle of an era torn apart by silencing decrees, which without this witness would remain blown about in the gutters of time. This is not so much an alternative history as a gathering-in of what was missing in South Africans' *perception* of their country, the actual

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[17] On the relationship between trauma and truth, see Caruth 1991.

context of their lives... this testimony is the liberation of openness. (Gordimer 1995:22-3)

Gordimer goes on to state the following of Ronnie Kasrils' autobiography *Armed and Dangerous*: "his testimony provides a dimension of the life of a fellow South African that was unknown and unimagined but that, nevertheless, belongs to us; what we have been and are" (1995:28: on Carl Niehaus' *Fighting for Hope*, see 34). A changed context - with reference to secrecy, censorship, misinformation - has led to different modes of telling. Such testimony, told against the backdrop of shredding machines, convenient forgetting/erasure, and closure without resolution, is not only an investment against forgetting and a reclamation/rewriting of the apartheid archive, but, as Gordimer reminds us, also an articulation of what was never known, and/or, in other circumstances, 'half-told' and 'half-known'.

The different context of interpretation/narration also offers new possibilities for reflection. Gordimer argues that testimony creates the conditions for reflection: for a re-examination of moral positions and easy judgements, for a questioning of the self-justified limits to opposition by those who claimed total condemnation (1995:29-30). Another possible form of reflection is suggested by Kobus in Jacobson's *The God-Fearer*: of a life that when folded back on itself, to the loss of a unique chance to make something of life, is seen in a new light; of 'unspent possibilities, lives denied, stories never told, breaths never taken, souls forever houseless, hopes forgotten...'; of the unlived life/lives of oneself and others to be mourned. A final example of the altered conditions of reflection returns to the realm of 'half-told', 'half-known' lives. Perspectives on, and representations of, solidarity and division within the white political prisoner community were determined by personality, political affiliation/ beliefs, the era of imprisonment and, crucially, the time of writing. More recent accounts can take advantage of the fact that the prison community has ceased to

exist. Baruch Hirson, for example, is more critical than others in his analysis of personalities and political differences (1995:2-4,139-42,161-2,246-9,265-6,340-1,346-9, also see Niehaus 1994:127-9). Similarly, Lewin can now take on a novel including elements - strengths, weaknesses, possibilities - left out of his original prison account, *Bandiet.*

Beyond their potential in the spheres of knowledge and reflection, testimony and the life story, again as illustrated by the TRC, will be required to play an important role in mourning, healing, catharsis and the redemptive un/remaking of the self. Survival is a creative act. The ability and inability/refusal to mourn through self-narration impacts on the un/remaking of identity.

> In my experience, repossessing one's life story through giving testimony is itself a form of action, of change, which has to actually pass through, in order to continue and complete the process of survival after liberation. The event must be reclaimed because even if successfully repressed, it nevertheless invariably plays a decisive formative role in who one comes to be, and in how one comes to live one's life. (Laub in Felman and Laub 1992:85-6)[18]

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[18]
A contributory factor to the absence of healing which kept alive the many deaths of resistance was their politicisation by the liberation movements. Death became public property at funerals which were vehicles for political mobilisation rather than private grief. The bereaved were urged to carry on, to find solace in action, rather than to mourn.

> you know, you have no idea what death does to you, I certainly didn't, and I've buried hundreds of comrades. But when it is you it's a different kettle of fish. One of the things I took issue with Oliver Tambo, he sent me a telegram: 'Don't Mourn, Mobilise'. This was one of our slogans. And I said, that bloody slogan is wrong. Because if you don't mourn, if you don't give vent to these feelings, then you just stay bottled up with it, and you're crippled by it, you know. And I think that is what's happened to me.(Naidoo interview)

> [there was a] strong sense in the ANC and I think it is still there – captured in the slogan 'Organise Don't Mourn' ... the rallying cry in late 70s and 80s when anyone got killed in detention or... around funerals and so on... people never really acknowledged and dealt with death and loss in the way I think people need to in a very personal, private sort of way. Very much the unwritten rule, unstated rule in the ANC, was that you have to just continue, and if you don't continue the struggle, somehow... And I think it has affected people...(Richer interview)

An impediment to creative survival is that here are violations and experiences for which there are no words, no categories of comprehension or means of assimilation, violations that challenge the culture and categories of knowing:

> testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference. What the testimony does not offer is, however, a completed statement, a totalizable account of those events. (Felman in Felman and Laub 1992:5)

Participants and commentators at the TRC were reduced to silence, without language, struggled for words, but also, remarkably and poignantly, found words and language (see Krog, "Cry, Beloved Country", Guardian 18/1 1997). The limits of language provide another reason to include the many texts of memory and the life story in the process of healing. Due to the extraordinary human range and capacity in the realm of communication, the tendency to reify and aestheticise the limits to representation that characterises some literature on atrocity, trauma and representation should be treated with caution. Of greater importance is the need to develop creative forms of 'listening', to extend the range of 'hearing', so that they more adequately cover the spectrum of communication. Ultimately to claim that crimes are incomprehensible and unrepresentable aids their denial; refutation becomes rational. As an outsider in the midst of a squatter settlement in the process of being destroyed, racked with violence, Elizabeth Curren, in Coetzee's *Age of Iron*, states: "'To speak of this... you would need the tongue of a god'" (1991a:91). The only spoken response is a challenge - "'Shit'" - another person turns and walks away.[19]

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[19] While there is a kind of multi-faceted urgency to testimony in the context of transition, it is interesting to speculate about the long term fate of such narratives and about the creative media through which apartheid will ultimately be remembered. See, for example, Gordimer's claim that poetry has a longer historical reach than testimony (1995:41-2).

This discussion of memory and the life story suggests that healing and reconciliation will overflow beyond the temporal confines of the present and the institutional arena of the TRC. The life story, that was central to the dynamic of repression and resistance, is equally important in their complex and uncertain aftermath as a source of knowledge, understanding, reflection, survival, healing, and creative un/remaking. Its role is nothing less than contributing to forging the link between a liveable past and a future that can be embraced.

APPENDIX

Listed below are the names of those interviewees quoted within the text along with the date and place of interview. In the thesis they are refered to simply by name and the designation 'interview' (eg: Cronin interview).

Jeremy Cronin - 6 February 1995 (Johannesburg)

Mandla Langa - 21 February 1995 (Johannesburg)

Willie Leslie - 13 February 1995 (Durban)

Hugh Lewin - 7 February 1995 (Johannesburg)

Lineo Harriette Mabitsela - 8 February 1995 (Johannesburg)

Hlengiwe Mkhize - 10 February 1995 (Johannesburg)

Phyllis Naidoo - 13 February 1995 (Durban)

Lauren Richer - 11 February 1995 (Johannesburg)

Sunny Singh - 15 February 1995 (Durban)

Marius Schoon - 11 and 20 February 1995 (Johannesburg)

Rocky Williams - 9 February 1995 (Johannesburg)

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