

The Perpetrator's Narrative and Myth

A study of *Country of My Skull* and *Ubu and the Truth Commission*

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



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December 2002

STATEMENT

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

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ABSTRACT

The reconstruction of history from individual narratives heard by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) urged society to reconsider the meaning of history as a construction based on personal memory. In fact, the TRC's attempt to unveil the past in order to encourage social reconciliation raised many questions of this nature. As a result, the socio-political issues associated with the hearings inspired a movement in literature that addressed these issues specifically.

This thesis investigates the depiction of perpetrators in *Country of My Skull* and *Ubu and the Truth Commission* as examples of Truth and Reconciliation literature. Apart from functioning as important sources of commentary on the socio-political debate surrounding the TRC, these texts explore a range of questions concerning the relationship between memory, history and narrative. I wish to argue that the perpetrators portrayed in the texts are deluded by myths concerning power and masculinity. Comforting self-deceptions underlie their reconstructions of history, complicating the notion of truth and effecting the construction of history in the wider TRC context. The perpetrator's narrative, as a significant component of the testimony of the TRC hearings reveals a manipulation of the truth which results in perpetrators evading responsibility for their actions. This occurrence has implications for victims as well as they try to reconcile their personal versions of the truth with alternative versions.

I conclude that the conflict between the narratives of the victim and the perpetrator is often a confrontation of cultures that exposes the myths underlying the perpetrator's manipulation of the truth.

OPSOMMING

Die Waarheids en Versoenings Kommissie (WVK) het hulle beroep op 'n hersamestelling van die geskiedenis wat gebaseer was op individuele vertellings van die verlede. Dit het beteken dat die geskiedenis gebaseer is op persoonlike geheue. In die samelewing het die behoefte ontstaan om die definisie van 'geskiedenis' te heroorweeg. Die WVK se poging om die verlede bloot te lê het verskeie soortgelyke sosiale vraagstukke laat ontstaan. Die sosio-politieke kwessies waarmee die WVK verhoor geassosieer word het 'n beweging in die letterkunde geïnspireer wat spesifiek hierdie kwessies aanspreek.

Hierdie tesis ondersoek die uitbeelding van geweldplegers in twee Waarheids en Versoenings-tekste, *Country of My Skull* en *Ubu and the Truth Commission*. Behalwe dat hierdie tekste belangrike bronne is van kommentaar op die sosio-politieke debat rondom die WVK, speel hulle ook 'n rol as tekste wat 'n verskeidenheid vrae oorweeg in verband met die verhouding tussen geheue, geskiedenis en vertellings. Ek stel voor dat die geweldplegers in die twee tekste mislei word deur mites wat magstrukture en manlikheid onderskryf. Die geweldplegers se hersamestellings van hul persoonlike geskiedenis word gebaseer op self-bedrog, wat dan die begrip 'waarheid' kompliseer en die konstruksie van geskiedenis in die wyer WVK-konteks beïnvloed. Die geweldplegers se vertellings vorm 'n noemenswaardige komponent van die getuienis van die WVK-verhoor. Die vertellings ontbloot egter 'n manipulerings van die waarheid wat die geweldplegers in staat stel om aanspreeklikheid vir hulle aksies te ontduik. Ook slagoffers word hierdeur beïnvloed in hul pogings om hulle weergawes van die waarheid met alternatiewe weergawes te versoen.

My gevolgtrekking is dat die konflik tussen die vertellings van die slagoffer en die geweldpleger dikwels 'n konfrontasie tussen kulture behels wat dan die mites blootlê onderliggend aan die plegers se manipulerings van die waarheid.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank the following people, without whose support I would not have been able to finish this:

My parents, Willem and Hildegard for their infinite love, patience and encouragement,

Hester, Ruan, Dawie and Esmé for their love and interest,

Edwin Hees for his valuable advice and guidance,

The Hof Ena crowd for perpetual entertainment,

The sisterhood here and abroad.

All my efforts would have been meaningless had I not been blessed with insight and strength by God who controls all things. Words are inadequate to express my gratitude for His love, mercy and guidance.

CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	7
Chapter 1: The TRC Debate And Literature: The Revelation and Complication of Memory	11
Chapter 2: Myths Of Manhood And Might: Analysing the Perpetrator	23
Chapter 3: Cultural Tensions: Perpetrator and Victim Face to Face	39
Conclusion	47
Bibliography	49

Introduction

If the grand public project of apartheid, and the grand public response of resistance, collectivized identity and devalued individual experience, then surely "truth and reconciliation" is primarily a matter of relocating individual and private experiences within the rubric of an epic liberation struggle... There are, after all, histories other than public ones that need to be reclaimed (Gevisser *Truth & Consequences* 14).

Gevisser's argument outlines the crux of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)'s project to uncover the past by providing the opportunity for individuals to present their private experiences of human rights abuses in public hearings all over the country. The Commission engaged simultaneously in the reclamation of history, and specifically the history that includes the narratives of countless individuals who were ignored in the past. Gevisser emphasizes in his article the role of art and specifically literature in this 'relocation' of private experience. The acknowledgement of the experience of individuals is especially significant for victims of apartheid and this fact seems to be Gevisser's focus. However, not only the narratives of victims featured in Truth Commission hearings, but also those of perpetrators seeking amnesty. Victims and perpetrators alike were given the opportunity of constructing their individual histories publicly by reliving personal memory.

Memory, even at its most reliable, will always be fiction because of the way the 'real' is altered by subjective manipulation and interpretation. The construction of history in the TRC hearings, which were based on personal memory, raises questions about fact and fiction, truth and myth, and the nature of memory, among other matters. Alongside the proceedings of the TRC hearings was an ongoing social debate about these particular issues. The significance of Krog's *Country of My Skull* (first published in 1998) and the production of *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (first performed 1997) within this context is that both texts can be described as contributions to the debate. The essence of Truth and Reconciliation literature lies precisely in its close association with the political and social context in which it originated.

Zakes Mda argues that art and life in South African society always have a close connection, because artists respond "to the prevailing political and social conditions" (Mda *Theatre & Reconciliation* 38). As confirmation of this view, we note that the

TRC's establishment in 1995 triggered a surge in artistic expression that addressed an entirely new and unique socio-political context. Truth and Reconciliation literature is an illustration of the involvement of literature in the taut political problems of the time. This literature functions as an expression of the questions society struggled with during the hearings, but also as a way of reflecting on the process of rebuilding the nation that the Truth Commission started.

The TRC was different from similar inquiries in other countries with a history of oppression,¹ in that its aim was to uncover the truth as frankly as possible by creating the possibility for individuals to testify about their personal experience of human rights abuses. Also, perpetrators were given the opportunity to apply for amnesty instead of being put on trial. What resulted was a marathon three-year inquiry receiving over 20 000 statements from individuals who recounted their tragic memories of torture and suffering.² Public hearings were held from 1996 and for two years the public was dumbfounded as the extent of the reign of terror unfolded. Simultaneously, the process challenged society to reflect earnestly on the nature of history and memory in this context.

In this thesis I will investigate the depiction of perpetrators in *Country of My Skull* and *Ubu and the Truth Commission* as they substantiate their versions of the truth by myths concerning power and masculinity. I start by outlining the social debate concerning 'truth' and 'reconciliation' that accompanied the TRC's project, the implications of the debate for the rewriting of history and the place of literature in the debate. Chapter 2 focuses on the importance of myths for various perpetrators portrayed in the two texts, as they construct their private histories and identify themselves through the reconstruction of memory. It seems that in some cases the perpetrators depicted in the texts need to sustain their belief in myths in order to deal with the reality of their identities. While all humans, in constructing their versions of truth, are guided to a certain extent by myths about their identity, these perpetrators are guided by myths regarding masculinity, power and protection that justify their involvement in gross

¹ Examples of other inquisitions include the Guatemalan 'Historical Clarification Commission' of 1996, the 'Commission on Truth' in El Salvador in 1993 and the 'Commission on the Disappeared' in Argentina in 1984 (Hayner 32-34).

² All statistics concerning the TRC's findings were taken from the Publisher's Note to Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*, vi-viii.

human rights abuses. The perpetrators' versions of truth are based on dangerous self-delusions that (for them) validate the atrocities they committed. Insight into these self-delusions provide valuable information in the context of truth-telling, because it complicates an understanding of 'truth'. Truth in the context of the TRC hearings is an unfixed and subjective entity which is subject to being *constructed* in the same way that a system of knowledge, such as history, is constructed. The end-product of the Commission's inquiry is a composite of all the testimonies heard before the Commission rather than a universal knowledge. Truth in this context embraces qualities similar to what 'memory' and 'history' denote. Myths then are not really the opposite of 'truths', but are isolated systems of belief that play a role in keeping power and cultural structures intact. I will explain this idea in more detail later.

Finally in Chapter 3 I illustrate how the confrontation between perpetrator and victim in the space of the Truth Commission hearings awakens cultural tension. The perpetrator's narrative serves to further complicate the notion of truth when it is heard either in the presence of the victim or in contrast to the victim's testimony. In *Country of My Skull* the narrator functions as a vehicle for cultural tension, as she struggles to make sense of her own cultural identity in the face of perpetrators she interviews. The text is written from the perspective of a media reporter reporting on the Truth Commission hearings, who is also a white Afrikaner trying to come to terms with her sense of collective guilt.³ Although the narrator is not a victim herself, she is forced into a process of re-identification through her confrontation with perpetrators. The perpetrators' truths that are revealed at the hearings challenge her to evaluate her own understanding of truth and what it means for her cultural identity. By using some examples of narratives or 'histories' of TRC witnesses reproduced in Krog's text I will illustrate how other individuals repeat this process of identification through confrontation, or fail to do so.

Ubu and the Truth Commission was written by Jane Taylor and produced in collaboration with William Kentridge and the Handspring Puppet Company. The production contained puppetry, animation and human actors and was first performed at

³ The author, Antjie Krog was a reporter for SABC radio for the entire length of the TRC hearings. This aspect is one of several autobiographical similarities, but because the text contains various fictional sections it is necessary to make a distinction between the author and the narrator.

the Market Theatre, Johannesburg in 1997. The first series of performances coincided with the educational theatre production *The Story I Am About To Tell* and Paul Herzberg's play *The Dead Wait*, also at the Market Theatre. All three plays premiered here during 1997 and deal in various ways with the social implications of the TRC. While Herzberg used fairly conventional theatrical techniques in *The Dead Wait*, the Khulumani Support Group used workshop theatre for *The Story I Am About To Tell*. Instead of actors, real witnesses were invited from the Truth Commission hearings to retell their stories on the theatre stage (Gevisser *Setting the Stage* 4).

The theatre that results from actual witnesses performing on stage is a valuable recreation of the theatricality of the TRC hearings. Similarly the use of puppets instead of human actors in *Ubu and the Truth Commission* reflects on the idea of the witnesses being 'actors' themselves. Whereas the Khulumani Support Group did not face the difficulty of convincingly portraying witnesses by using the witnesses themselves, this was an initial problem for Kentridge, as he explains in the Director's Note,

There seemed to be an awkwardness in getting an actor to play the witnesses – the audience being caught halfway between having to believe in the actor for the sake of the story, and also not believe in the actor for the sake of the actual witness who existed out there but was not the actor (Taylor *Ubu & TRC* xi).

When human actors play witnesses, the audience is expected to believe in the actors as though they are the actual witnesses. The use of puppets bypasses this dilemma without watering down the issues about memory and history that a recreation of the hearings addresses.

Both techniques described above are illustrations of the way Truth and Reconciliation theatre comments on the TRC debate. Theatre is distinguished from other media that reflect on the TRC because the stage setting can be made to resemble the space of a truth hearing. *Ubu and the Truth Commission* is valuable as an exploration into the mind of Ubu the Perpetrator as he offers his version of the truth to the Amnesty Committee. His character will be discussed in Chapter 2 to clarify the social and political importance of myths in his manipulation of the truth.

Chapter 1

THE TRC DEBATE AND LITERATURE:

The Revelation and Complication of Memory

The TRC of South Africa produced an account of a national memory that is more inclusive than any other similar Truth Commission report world-wide. Although the Commission was disbanded before its work had been properly finished, and the release of the five-volume report in 1998 was shrouded in controversy, the weighty volumes still stand as the most thorough collection to date of the haunting stories of South Africa's past. Both criticism and praise of the TRC's establishment were widespread and diverse, but no one can contest the fact that its report represents a unique attempt to capture a history of a period in the life of a nation. The implications of this achievement stretch wider than this single goal. In Colin Bundy's words,

The TRC is a case study of how the past is constructed and presented, how it is contested and what the role of history is in shaping values and institutions in civil society (Bundy 10).

The TRC's task included that they establish the parameters of a history constructed by the limited section of society participating in the truth-telling process. History is a slippery concept and its meaning is perpetually in debate. The stories of a group of 'victims' and 'perpetrators' (two other problematic terms in this matter, as I will explain) uncovered the history of the chosen period to an extent. But the fact that these stories became public does not imply that all possible versions of the past have been heard, thereby contributing to an 'inclusive' account of history. Included among the 'victims' were only individuals – or their immediate relatives – who were subjected to violent crimes, tortured, raped or killed. These events were only considered if they occurred within the specified time between 1 March 1960 and 10 May 1994.⁴ Masses of people whose daily lives were restricted by the pass laws, immigrations laws, land act, immorality act and so forth were not defined as victims by the TRC. Similar limitations are evident with regard to the amnesty hearings to determine whether an individual was indeed a perpetrator or simply following orders.

⁴ These dates are included in Charles Villa-Vicencio's essay "On the Limitations of Academic History: The Quest for Truth Demands both More and Less" (Villa-Vicencio 23).

The TRC's TRUTH: Fact or Fiction?

Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert's question, "What is the notion of truth assumed by the TRC?" is one that remains to be answered beyond a doubt (Van Zyl Slabbert 68). Even after the report was released, ambiguities remained about the TRC's conception of truth and history. This much is evident from the body of criticism available on the TRC. A look at André Brink's discussion of memory and the imagination may shed some light on the difficult issue of history. Brink says,

The individual constitutes and invents her/himself through the constant editing and re-editing of memory... [F]acts ... remain forever inaccessible except through our versions of them – and these versions are dependent on memory (as the testimonies [before] the TRC demonstrate with great impact). And the workings of the imagination are at the very least inspired by memory (Brink *Stories of History* 30-31).

In this view history, as a product of the TRC hearings, is shaped by individual memories. And memory cannot be regarded as fact, because individual memory is extended and altered by the imagination. In effect, what the Commission uncovers is a 'truth' made up of subjective accounts of history or autobiography rather than factual evidence. Colin Bundy also notices this aspect of the TRC's report, but links the Commission's inability to present the country with a reliable 'official history' to a generally contradictory notion of history in the Commission itself. According to him, the TRC "embraced two very different notions of historical knowledge" (Bundy 13). While the Commission acknowledged the past as "a site of contending constructions and perspectives, a realm of subjective, partial truths", it also set out to "serve as an official, objective, impartial and authoritative source" (Bundy 14). Yet in a sense, the nature of the Commission's undertaking underscored precisely that an 'official, objective, impartial and authoritative' view on the history of the given period could not exist unless that view took into account every single member of society's version of the truth. Rather, by acknowledging every 'subjective, partial truth' heard as part of a more balanced view on history, the Commission provided an *alternative* to the existing official history, which was one that perpetuated a biased vision of the country.

In a direct response to Bundy, Charles Villa-Vicencio concedes that the Commission "saw itself as offering no more than a historical comment from its perspective on a given period of history" (Villa-Vicencio 22). Villa-Vicencio makes a valid point – the

Commission did not fail in its task of writing an official history, because it never set out to write one. Even so, Bundy's points stress important aspects of a critique of the writing of history.

Bundy suggests that if the TRC report is part of the national archive, the Commissioners function in that sense as the collectors of the archive. This process of 'writing' is one of selection, but also one of "summary [and] distillation". It is inevitable that certain parts of history are excluded or silenced, even while other parts are retained (Bundy 15). Together with the noble cause of acknowledging previously ignored voices from the past, the TRC had to silence multitudes of voices in its selection of testimonies. Although Bundy's prediction that the TRC may "facilitate social amnesia" is a rather bleak, cynical one, it does convey an important truth about the nature of history as a construction. Hugh Lewin, who was a Commissioner on the Human Rights Violations Committee, writes that the most "difficult and...painful" task for him as Commissioner was "managing the package" (Gevisser *Setting the Stage* 4). He means that the Commission exercises an authority over the construction of history when they have to choose which testimonies to hear and which ones to leave out.

The dilemma of selection that faced the Commissioners relates back to the complex relationship between memory and history in the context of the TRC. So far, quite a number of terms have been invoked that form sets of relations that are all linked with different notions of history. In the Introduction, I mentioned the idea that myths are isolated systems of belief instead of the opposite of truths. Consider that the relation between 'history' and 'memory' is similar to the relation between 'fact' and 'autobiography'. History as an official construction is supposedly based on fact, whereas memory is based on a subjective perspective guided to an extent by the imagination. The testimonies or 'narratives' that the TRC heard, that are extended in *Country of My Skull* and *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, are in essence the personal memory of witnesses. These narratives represent the 'truth' from the perspectives of the witnesses telling the stories.

I conceive that witnesses tell 'the truth' according to their memory, but that in particular cases their narratives contain 'untruths' that did not originate in memory, but were created by a separate system. In the next chapter I will outline how perpetrators, for

example Jack Cronje in the Krog text, and Pa Ubu in *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, include in their narratives certain ‘untruths’ that shape their identities and their cultural understanding. I want to name these ‘untruths’: ‘myths’ and explore how they underlie certain notions of masculinity and determine certain power structures.

Country of My Skull as a whole is a collage of fact and fiction, and contains a significant amount of material taken directly from Truth Commission hearings. One cannot differentiate with certainty in this text where fact ends and fiction begins. Poetry intersperses chunks of documentary prose and actual testimonies are interrupted by commentary in first-person narration, for example:

Oral narratives, the academics say, are driven by remembered core phrases and images that carry the distillation of the entire story. From these cores the action, the characters, the conclusion all unfold. And though the narratives may differ in the information they bear, the core elements stay the same. They overlap.

(...)

While a building is being destroyed in front of me by a beautiful, all-consuming fire – I argue with myself, I compare versions of truth.

Out of this must now be taken: The Truth?

It must be so (Krog 88-89).

These paragraphs communicate the narrator’s considerations of how narratives function in testimony before the TRC, while the style in which they are written is a collage of ‘narratives’. The ‘narratives’ of TRC hearings all come down to a choice between different versions of truth. The hearings combine ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’, as memory and history are mingled. Krog’s book is in this sense a representation of the mixed narratives of the TRC – its hearings as well as the social debates associated with it. The broader implication is that literature plays a role in the balancing of fact and fiction. In fact, in the context of the TRC, literature plays a role in the deliberate fusion of fact and fiction. In the same article quoted earlier, Adam and Adam predicate that when we refer to a ‘collective identity’ or ‘collective memory’, we do so solely in a metaphorical sense and that the real challenge would be to *interpret* this memory rather than merely identify it. The question is whether literature and theatre can contribute significantly to the important task of interpretation.

Before the hearings can be ‘interpreted’, it is necessary to consider what constitutes a TRC hearing. Njabulo Ndebele believes that the TRC presented a unique opportunity for individual narratives to be heard. He writes about the remarkable phenomenon of

people “reinventing themselves through narrative” (Ndebele 27). In this view, the actual report of the TRC is not as important as is the process that happens right in front of the Commission while a testimony is being given. Individuals who have longed for recognition of their humanity have the chance of expressing it through language in a receptive space. By telling their stories, witnesses are able to reconstruct their identity and add it to the ‘newly’ constructed South African narrative. The stories that are told represent their storytellers regardless of the nature of their notions of ‘truth’.

This aspect of the TRC hearings is also what engaged Jane Taylor most, as she says in the ‘Writer’s Note’ to *Ubu and the Truth Commission*. For her, what occurred at the hearings was that

...individual narratives [came] to stand for the larger national narrative. The stories of personal grief, loss, triumph and violation now stand as an account of South Africa’s recent past. History and autobiography merge (Taylor *Ubu & TRC* ii).

Taylor’s notion of history is one that is independent of official recognition. The ‘individual narratives’ she refers to are specifically the ones recognised and heard by the Commission, but her point implies that the merging of history and autobiography on one level reinforces their merging on other levels as well. When society acknowledges specific narratives as part of history because the Commission has heard them, the assumption is made that unheard narratives are included in this acknowledgement. The reality is that it is impossible for the TRC to hear every single account of history from every single inhabitant of South Africa. What constitutes ‘silencing’ or ‘exclusion’, in Bundy’s opinion, is in Taylor’s view rather the idea that the narratives that *did* make it to the Commission come to represent all those that were *not* heard.

In a sense *Country of My Skull* acts as a revelation of parts of the past that might still have been unknown to the general public, as it quotes directly from TRC hearings. Krog uses several different styles to recount testimonies, including dialogue form. These sections of the book emphasize the theatrical nature of the Truth Commission hearings, such as the following extract which is written in the form of a drama taking place between the witness and the leader of testimony:

MRS MALITI: The police arrived when she was burnt already. She was burnt while she was pregnant.

ADV NTSEBEZA: What do you mean by that?

MRS MALITI: When the police came in, they could – they were trying to find out where she was, but they could hear her crying. They saw her in the main road, she was already alight (Krog 35).

In other cases the events at the Commission's hearings are described from the perspective of Krog's narrator:

The man sits alone. He is wearing a cheap jacket. In a formal, old-fashioned Afrikaans he says he cannot tell the story of how an ANC bomb wiped out his family and friends. (...) The translation is channeled to our tape recorders. (...) I write the news copy. I decide on a sound bite. I dictate the hard copy over the phone. (...) I sit down on the steps and everything tears out of me. Flesh and blood can in the end only endure so much (Krog 48).

In this extract the narrator describes her subjective interpretation of the events the witness remembers and her emotional response to hearing it. The narrator fulfils the function of *interpreter* of the past being uncovered. Thus, in the extract she portrays how an individual is 'reinvented' through his narrative, according to Ndebele's theory, while at the same time interpreting the memory, as Adam and Adam encourage. In the unique account entitled "The Shepherd's Tale", Krog uses dialogue style similar to the first example, but the typography of the words on the page is reminiscent of poetic verse:

LEKOTSE: (...) I was a shepherd.
I cannot write
and I forget all these days, (...)

On that day
it was night,
a person arrived and he knocked (Krog 211).

This technique has a specific function in conveying the type of speech Mr Lekotse uses in his testimony. Because the words are translated from the original Xhosa, many of the idiosyncrasies and idiomatic language in Lekotse's testimony are lost. Krog attempts to retain his unique speech by using a particular writing style. In this way Lekotse's testimony at the TRC hearing is perpetuated as a moment when he 'reinvented' his identity through language.

Ubu and the Truth Commission as a 'text' that participates in the TRC debate has an entirely different point of departure. William Kentridge explains how they attempted through their production to illustrate the same kind of 'interpretation' nonetheless:

The origin of our work is very different [to that of the ‘theatre’ of the Commission] and even if in the end it links directly to the Commission, this is secondary rather than primary. Our theatre is a reflection on the debate rather than the debate itself. It tries to make sense of the memory rather than be the memory (Taylor *Ubu & TRC* ix).

It can be said that the play “tries to make sense” of the memory of the perpetrator specifically. Pa Ubu acts as an interpreter of perpetrators’ speeches at the amnesty hearings in his frantic scrambling to hide from the ‘all-seeing eye’ of ‘the Truth’. In his conversations with Niles the Crocodile, Pa tries to grasp the concept of the TRC and his chances of escaping the inquest:

NILES: I’d advise you, speak before you are spoken to.

PA UBU: Never! A man is a man of honour, or a man is not a man.

NILES: A man is not a man when his necktie is made of rope.

PA UBU: WAAAAH! Save us (Taylor *Ubu & TRC* 19)!

From this extract it is clear that Pa has a cowardly attitude, but more importantly, an understanding of truth and honour that is quite problematic. In the play his character is amusing because of the strange ideas he has about manhood and his consequent reaction to the TRC. Yet if one considers that he resembles real perpetrators who reacted disturbingly similarly when they were telling ‘the truth’ to the Amnesty Committee, one realises that his character serves as a powerful key to the understanding of their motives and their consequent notions of truth. *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, in Kentridge’s term, ‘reflects’ on the TRC debate through its direct concern with the effect of the TRC’s inquiry on perpetrators as they try to make sense of their memories. Apart from Pa Ubu’s character various other elements in the production are employed in the play’s contemplation on the memories uncovered by the TRC. The mechanically manoeuvred vulture, for example, provides rather cynical ‘commentary’ on issues happening on stage. Whenever the vulture squawks and flaps its wings forbiddingly, text messages appear on the screen as if to give voice to his warnings.

During Pa Ubu’s conversation with Niles, from which I quoted above, Pa says, “I still have friends in high places,” after which the vulture immediately ‘replies’, *More killers than saints have dined with princes* (Taylor *Ubu & TRC* 19). The phrase obviously refers to Pa Ubu being a killer himself, but it is a social comment as well, emphasizing the corruption of the apartheid government who employed killers to ‘protect’ the public. Later, when Ma is alone on the stage lamenting her husband’s absence, the vulture’s

comment reads, *The game warder's wife wears a fur collar* (Taylor *Ubu & TRC* 37). Again, it refers to an ironically malignant truth underlying benign appearances – Pa Ubu is employed as a ‘peacekeeper’ who protects families, while he corrupts the state so that his own home can benefit from his corruptions. Ma Ubu is hereby implicated in the plot of corruption and evil, even if she is unaware of what her husband is up to. The vulture, being an outsider to the action, is able to objectively notice the ironic aspects of the situations on stage. At the same time its commentary places the social context of the TRC hearings in a critical light.

The vulture has the last word, so to speak, in the closing scene of the play. As Pa and Ma Ubu float away in their boat, the text on the screen reads, *My slice of old cheese and your loaf of fresh bread will make a tolerable meal* (Taylor *Ubu & TRC* 73). The crux of *Ubu and the Truth Commission* is contained in this ironic phrase. The Ubus’ unwillingness to change or to be part of a national renewal is mocked, but the mockery can be extended to all amnesty applicants invoked by Pa Ubu’s character. The play is deeply involved in a debate about the ethical reasoning and the logic behind amnesty. In this sense the play is not simply an interpretation of the content of the TRC hearings, but it presents a challenge to the audience to question the hearings. Brink is adamant about the importance of literature in this respect. He writes that

unless the enquiries of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are extended, complicated and intensified in the imaginings of literature, society cannot sufficiently come to terms with its past to face its future (Brink *Stories of History* 30).

Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert distinguishes research, drama, literature, journalism and film as the valuable media whose task it is to expose the public to those aspects of the past that the TRC did not reveal (Van Zyl Slabbert 71). Because of the real limitations to the TRC’s inquiry, revelation through literature remains crucial, but even more powerful than revelation are what Brink refers to as ‘complication’ and ‘intensification’.

A trademark of Truth and Reconciliation literature certainly is the kind of challenge that *Ubu and the Truth Commission* poses to the audience. If the audience can be challenged into social awareness through the complication of the ‘theatre’ of the TRC, then Gevisser’s definition of Truth and Reconciliation literature as a “[relocation of] individual and private experiences” rings true.

Reconciliation: the Myth of the 'Rainbow Nation'

'Coming to terms with the past', 'facing the future': these phrases, and others that convey similar ideas became clichéd during the height of the TRC. What started out as important beacons in the campaign to raise awareness in the public of the TRC hearings, were soon commonly used by the media and in every-day conversations. The tragedy of this is that even the term 'reconciliation' started to lose meaning for many. The concept of reconciliation was watered down, to the point where it seemed to be a utopian ideal. Dennis Walder cynically refers to the 'World Cup Nationalism' that emerged from the 1995 South African Rugby World Cup victory (Walder 15). The 'performance' of Nelson Mandela before and after this event signalled a point of post-apartheid national unity for the exhilarated fans across the country, while it made no difference to the lives of the millions of poverty-stricken citizens.

Society remains divided after the TRC hearings and it is easy to write off reconciliation as yet another failed catch-phrase. But this is only one side of the critical perspective. Charles Villa-Vicencio, in the book that he edited together with Wilhelm Verwoerd, encourages a very different understanding of what reconciliation means in South Africa. He points out that the TRC did not set out with unrealistic ideals, and rather "defined itself as simply contributing toward the laying of a foundation on which national unity and reconciliation could be built" (Verwoerd & Villa-Vicencio 199).

When it comes to criticism regarding the TRC's handling of reconciliation, reactions are as mixed and diverse as criticism on the Commission's handling of truth. Firstly it is important to realise the full extent of what reconciliation denotes from different perspectives. The South African TRC chose their particular route as one where justice is not necessarily an outcome of revealing the truth, and amnesty relies on individual applications rather than blanket amnesty. Van Zyl Slabbert addresses the problem of accountability and the position of beneficiaries in his discussion of the relation between truth and reconciliation. He emphasizes that reconciliation could never take place without forgiveness, which in turn demands confession. He describes the way political leaders from the old regime did not set an example by confessing so that the leaders of the new government can truly forgive (Van Zyl Slabbert 65). The outcome is that

countless beneficiaries feel no obligation to participate in the national task of reshaping the future.

Adam and Adam point out a conflict in the TRC mandate, when they say that “the focus on gross human rights violations freed the many beneficiaries of apartheid from responsibility” (Adam & Adam 34). Just as the TRC had to limit the events covered in testimonies to a specified time frame, the nature of the events was specified and given the title ‘gross human rights violations’. The term disregarded any violations not included under murder, rape or violent torture. Adam and Adam’s concern is that the limitations that this term implied for victims isolated beneficiaries as well, because responsibility was limited to the minority group involved in violent crimes.

Underlying the argument that the specifications for testimonies hindered reconciliation, is the opinion that the TRC did not clarify the relationship between truth and reconciliation. In the introduction to their book, Ifi Amadiume and Abdullahi An-Na’Im note that the TRC falsely assumed that truth would lead to healing. They state that “truth does not necessarily lead to healing, and reconciliation does not mean that there is social justice” (Amadiume & An-Na’Im 8). Reconciliation in the TRC’s sense of the word meant that society would be able to see the past unveiled and then become inspired to forgive, or confess, so that the divisions in society could be bridged. According to Van Zyl Slabbert it is imperative for social healing that agreement be reached as to what truth means. In order to reconcile differences there must at least be agreement about the truths for which forgiveness is being asked (Van Zyl Slabbert 68).

Villa-Vicencio distinguishes between three levels of ‘connectedness’ between members of society, namely peaceful coexistence, reconciliation and forgiveness (Verwoerd & Villa-Vicencio 208). Rather than simplifying the act of reconciliation, he sees it as something that can only come from mutual trust and understanding and from hard work. This is a state of affairs that cannot in any way be brought about by force. No one can impose trust, or forgiveness for that matter. According to Jakes Gerwel (as quoted in Villa-Vicencio), South African society has done surprisingly well at the level of peaceful coexistence, which is the first step toward reconciling. Just as the TRC did not have the right to convince anyone to forgive, they (nor any other organisation) could not force people to reconcile.

As a former Commissioner, Alex Boraine writes with authority from an insider's perspective on the TRC. In his view, like that of Villa-Vicencio, critics are too quick to judge the TRC as a failure because reconciliation has not taken place at all levels of society. His defence of the TRC is that "while truth may not always lead to reconciliation, there can be no genuine, lasting reconciliation without truth" (Boraine 74). The Commission's task was merely to *promote* forgiveness. And, as Boraine argues by referring to specific cases, numerous individuals and groups took the path of reconciliation even before the TRC came into existence. However influential the TRC hearings and their report may prove to be in time, it will do no good to try and establish 'one truth'. Boraine warns that Archbishop Tutu's reference to a 'Rainbow Nation' should not be interpreted as 'cheap rhetoric' and that Tutu was "speaking the language of potential" (Boraine 80).

Essential to the Truth Commission hearings is the publicising of private histories that have not been acknowledged before. In literature it is just as important that a new history that includes private experience should provide the foundation for reconciliation. In the early days of the TRC's activities, Zakes Mda was optimistic about the role the arts will play in the quest for mutual forgiveness, eventually leading to reconciliation:

Now that the culture being cultivated by the dominant political structures is that of reconciliation, the arts will play a role in reflecting that situation, and in mobilizing people for reconciliation (Mda *Theatre & Reconciliation* 38).

Mda's view was a fair prediction of the involvement of the arts in reconciliation, although he did not establish exactly how a reflection on the political situation will achieve the 'mobilizing of people' for reconciliation. Adam Small is quoted by Antjie Krog as having said, in the course of his own appearance during the process of choosing Commissioners to serve on the TRC, that "Only literature can perform the miracle of reconciliation" (Krog 18). Unfortunately, Small's claim is somewhat of an exaggeration of the reality. By playing a role in the revelation and interpretation of the past, poetry, drama and prose can expose individuals to different cultural perspectives on the past. In other words literature can act as a mediator between conflicting ideas of history by promoting understanding, and hopefully tolerance of difference. Actual reconciliation would require more than just these factors.

The theatre is an effective medium for addressing social issues because of the immediacy established by the presence of the audience. Mda refers to the Theatre of Reconciliation when he writes:

This is a theatre that contributes to the process of healing, for it confronts the pain rather than denies its existence. Its audiences are active participants in the performance – creating and distributing their own messages – rather than mere consumers of messages created by those who are deemed to have superior knowledge. The audiences are transformed into dramatic actors, and the dramatic actors are transformed into social actors (Mda *Theatre & Reconciliation* 45).

The absence of a 'grand narrative' in the TRC hearings dictates an absence of a common truth or 'superior knowledge' in the Truth and Reconciliation theatre as well. The audience members are free to interpret the past using their personal perspectives on it. And if what they have been exposed to is an extension of the truth-telling process of the TRC and its effect on witnesses, they are actively participating in the reconstruction of a national memory. Plays like *The Story I am about to tell* and *Ubu and the Truth Commission* that make use of real witnesses' testimonies expose audiences to the 'theatre' of the TRC, because of the way producers in both plays have attempted to recreate the setting of actual TRC hearings. Audiences are exposed in this theatre to the possibilities of people of different races, cultures and religions living in tolerance with each other, thereby suggesting the potential of bridging present divisions in actuality.

Ubu and the Truth Commission makes a rather pessimistic comment on the possibility of reconciliation, however. The play essentially asks how reconciliation can be possible at all when countless perpetrators have been freed from responsibility for their actions in the past. There are no indications that the Ubus have any comprehension of what reconciliation means, let alone a desire to participate in it. Pa Ubu's ability to remain untouched by the TRC hearings, as I will argue in the next chapter, stems from his delusions about what constitutes masculine honour and power. These delusions are based on myths that enable him to manipulate the truth in such a way that he always evades responsibility.

Chapter 2

MYTHS OF MANHOOD AND MIGHT: Analysing the Perpetrator in *Ubu and the Truth Commission* and *Country of My Skull*

In *Country of My Skull*, the narrator is amazed by a friend's claim that 'Maids don't feel like other people about their children. They like to be rid of them,' and that 'Maids don't get cold like white people' (Krog 190). Words like *meid* and *kaffer* refer to concepts that exist only in the imagination of the individual or group who make use of the terms. It is a false assumption that black domestic workers have other basic needs than their white employers. But in the mind of the speaker, the terms *meid* and *kaffer* trigger systems of meanings that are true for them and no one else. In her attempt to make sense of the motivations behind this kind of belief, the narrator offers the following explanation:

A myth is a unit of the imagination which makes it possible for a human being to accommodate two worlds. It reconciles the contradictions of these two worlds in a workable fashion and holds open the way between them. (...)

Myth makes it possible to live with what you cannot endure. And if the myth has been learnt well it becomes a word – a single word that switches on the whole system of comforting delusions (Krog 190).

It seems that the belief in an 'untruth' is necessary for the individual in order to keep intact her vision of reality. If one assumption turns out to be false, an entire belief system is obliterated along with it. Mahmood Mamdani says, in different terms, "[M]yth decontextualizes the truth [and] presents a version of truth as the truth" (Mamdani *Truth according to the TRC* 177). The individual who chooses to believe in a myth is replacing 'the truth' of reality with his/her own set of meanings that come to represent the truth. Which means that for that particular individual, myth is truth and s/he is unable to distinguish myth from truth. Krog's definition makes it clear that for the individual it is advantageous to believe in myth, because myth conveniently eradicates contradictions that might exist in reality. While I do not assume this definition to be the only possible one, I wish to relate it to my own definition that I explained briefly in Chapter 1.

I conceded that the distinction between 'myth' and 'fiction' for this discussion is that myths underlie certain notions of masculinity and determine certain power structures that guide the behaviour of the perpetrators in *Country of My Skull* and *Ubu and the Truth Commission*. This distinction relates to Krog's definition of myth in that the

perpetrators, on whom I focus later in this chapter, need to maintain systems of myth in order to “live with what [they] cannot endure”. Many assassins employed by the state had to find some way of coping with the double lives they led as killers who also had families and ordinary households. In this sense they relied on myths about masculinity and honour as their justifications for violent torturing and killing of innocent victims. I will first examine Ubu as a representative of these perpetrators who revealed their narratives to the Amnesty Committee, and try to clarify how myths function in his understanding of reality. *Country of My Skull* deals extensively with the narratives of perpetrators and the narrator’s response to them. I will discuss sections of the book that reveal perpetrators’ notions of masculinity that are embedded in myths.

UBU and Myths of Identity

Ubu and the Truth Commission is significant in the process of ‘writing history’ not for adding content, but for broadening comprehension of this undertaking. The satirical exploration of the mind of a perpetrator offers an alternative narrative to those of victims heard by the Truth Commission. Pa Ubu represents actual figures in South African politics, but he also embodies the stereotypical identity of a perpetrator. He is highly amusing as a foulmouthed delinquent flaunting irresponsibility and using scatological language, but underlying his dramatic persona is a more serious and valuable element for the understanding of the real perpetrators that have applied for amnesty.

Most people find the motives of perpetrators of human rights violations difficult to understand and such motives are in most cases unknown. Researchers are just starting to unravel the mysteries of death squads and state-employed assassins in the hope of understanding the past, and more importantly, understanding what perpetrators are driven by. The blanket of secrecy still covering the involvement of the state in torture and assassinations by apartheid activists complicates this task. In addition, the number of amnesty applicants and subsequent testimonies heard was appallingly small. Even after many feared assassins have opened the lid on the dark pit of murders and raids that they were involved in, and some have testified to the Amnesty Committee, the connection between their actions and those who ordered them is still unclear. While

convicted murderers like Eugene de Kock claim to have simply been following orders, their high commanders have fallen into a deathly silence.

It is unreasonable to expect of playwrights and authors to solve the mysteries of the past, and neither is it their job to try the previous government on accounts of murder and torture. However, the involvement of literature does begin at the point where truths have been uncovered already. The portrait of a perpetrator has never been more prominent in the minds of South Africans than during the trial of Eugene de Kock, former Vlakplaas⁵ commander. The documentary *Prime Evil* by journalist Jacques Pauw that was broadcast in 1996, about the life of Eugene de Kock, shocked the South African public with its revelations of covert atrocities committed by the state-employed Special Branch of the police force. These revelations confirmed the rumours that the government established a secret third force to ensure an ongoing war inside the country. Although De Kock remains a feared and loathed man in the eyes of millions of South Africans, it is impossible (especially after the publication of his biography in 1998)⁶ to ignore the much vaster and darker reality behind his actions. De Kock, like many other perpetrators, was following orders from government-employed commanders and believed that he was fighting '*vir Volk en Vaderland*'.

The character of Ubu in *Ubu and the Truth Commission* represents a somewhat cowardly version of this portrait of a perpetrator, but nevertheless one who is deluded by his loyalty to the cause he is fighting for. Although the play approaches extremely grave issues humorously, it does so without simplifying the very complex personality of Ubu the Perpetrator. And although Pa and Ma Ubu have almost caricature-like qualities on-stage, prancing around in their underwear and using exaggerated language and gestures, their performance is nevertheless part of an engagement in the TRC debate. The play is based in part on the *Ubu Plays* of Alfred Jarry dating from late nineteenth-century France. The anarchic character of Ubu has appeared in several guises in various

⁵ Vlakplaas is the name of a farm outside Pretoria that was used as the headquarters for a group of Security Police officers who were employed by the State to commit various murders and interrogations in their search for 'terrorists' during the apartheid regime. Details about this feared death-squad became known only in 1989 when first Almond Nofemela (former policeman) and then Dirk Coetzee (former Vlakplaas commander), decided to reveal its secrets.

⁶ Eugene de Kock told his story to Jeremy Gordin, who wrote the biography called *A long night's Damage: Working for the Apartheid State*. (See Bibliography for details of the publication.)

productions after its very first appearance as a puppet in Jarry's childhood marionette playlets that he (Jarry) staged with his friend Henri Morin (Taylor *Ubu Plays* 11).

Jarry's Ubu embodies everything that respectable society disapproves of – bad manners, foul language, disrespect for authority and arrogance, but he is also a coward. As Todd London puts it, “[t]his bestial, anarchic heap of a man [Ubu] steals, kills, and plunders when he feels like it, runs and hides when he's threatened, and stuffs his piggy face with food and drink through it all” (Doepel 5). Ubu reappears in *Ubu and the Truth Commission* as a perpetrator who is offered the chance of applying for amnesty in exchange for a full disclosure of the truth. The chilling implication of using the fictional character of Ubu in this context is that Ubu's personality traits are observable in real people even today. William Kentridge speculates,

I think there is an Ubu in all of us. (...) Ubu has become a familiar historical figure, an agonizingly intimate Everyman. He has been, variously, Nero, Hitler, Idi Amin, Saddam Hussein and the corporate fat cat. (...) Today, when you look at Chief Buthelezi opening his evidence at the truth commission by singing a hymn, and F.W. de Klerk standing behind the commission without ‘arrogance’ or ‘shame’, you know that Ubu still exists. (Doepel 2)

This particular point – that Ubu represents an archetypal figure of oppression and anarchy – without any comprehension of his own evil nature, provides the link between Jarry's Ubu and Pa Ubu of *Ubu and the Truth Commission*. Jane Taylor used material from Jarry's plays in writing *Ubu* and combined this with elements from various other sources, drawing very strongly on the South African setting and making the play a unique cultural experience. What makes the play extremely valuable in the context of a discussion of myth is the way in which the stereotypical qualities associated with an assassin, the apartheid government's underdog, are built into Ubu's character. In his confrontation with the Truth Commission, Ubu's personality reveals the ambiguity of a perpetrator who has no sense of the gravity of his deeds while at the same time he experiences a fair amount of anguish at having to reveal them. It is interesting to note in terms of this that Taylor made use of dialogue contained in interviews from Jacques Pauw's documentary on Eugene de Kock.

When Pa Ubu explains on-stage how ‘tubing’ was done on a victim, he uses the same expressions that Ronald Bezuidenhout used in his explanation to Pauw about this particular torture method. Pa Ubu says, “when he wet his pants, you knew he was

standing at the Pearly Gates” (Taylor *Ubu & TRC* 43). In Pauw’s video *Prime Evil*, Bezuidenhout says: “when he wet his pants, you knew he was entering the gates upstairs.” Another reference to Bezuidenhout’s interview appears in the animated images on the screen behind the stage. The animated sequence of a set of earphones blowing away a pig’s ears is curiously reminiscent of Bezuidenhout’s story of how the men at Vlakplaas tested a rigged Walkman on a pig before sending it to Dirk Coetzee (another former Vlakplaas commander). Pa Ubu’s description of how they burnt a body while having a *braai* next to it corresponds to Dirk Coetzee’s description to Pauw of the Vlakplaas men burning bodies next to the Komati River. Whether or not these similarities are coincidental is unimportant. Their importance lies in the elements contained in Pa Ubu’s personality and experiences that correspond to the character-sketch Pauw’s documentary presented of the average man operating at Vlakplaas. Being the first and at the time, the only documentary of its kind exposing South Africans to this section of society, it was greatly influential in creating an image in the public mind of a stereotypical perpetrator.

The men who told their stories to Pauw seem to have similar backgrounds. Bezuidenhout’s tragic tale of his unhappy childhood and his training as “spy, double agent, killer, mercenary, fugitive, security policeman” is printed in Pauw’s book *In the heart of the whore: The story of apartheid’s death squads* (264-269). Born to a poor white family and taking his only consolation for a disastrous life from enduring suffering “for [his] God, [his] Country and [his] people”, he represents many other police officers employed by the apartheid government who have now been forsaken by their commanders (Pauw *Heart* 265). The exact details of Pa Ubu’s background are not disclosed in the play, and are probably not that important, but the link between his character and the stereotypes that were created by the media of the men of Vlakplaas is evident.

I wish to distinguish between two types of myth embraced by Pa Ubu’s character: those myths concerning his *identity* that are revealed through his interaction with other characters, and the myths that underlie his *motivations*. The distinction I am making is somewhat artificial and ambiguous, because his identity and motivations are co-dependent. When I refer to myths underlying his motivations, I imply political motivations in particular. The reasons Pa Ubu gives for his actions are linked to a myth

that functions on a public level – that of patriotism and sacrifice for the country and the ‘greater good’ of fellow citizens. It is the element in his behaviour that complicates his notion of truth. The type of myths concerning his identity function on a more personal level, but are contained in every sphere of his life. These are the myths that link him with the stereotypical perpetrator. The other important difference between the two kinds of myth is that his identity, containing stereotypical qualities, is never revealed to him as being a construct. Ubu’s perception of himself as a man with particular ‘masculine’ qualities continues to delude him. However, his notion of truth is challenged by his confrontation with the Truth Commission and this causes him to face *some* realities in his understanding of the government’s position in the country. I will try to clarify these statements by referring to more specific examples in the text.

To begin with, Pa Ubu identifies himself through the manifestation of *masculinity* and *power* in his behaviour. The most apparent example in the play is the interaction between Pa and his three-headed dog Brutus. Brutus is one of two puppets that interact directly with the Ubus on stage. Other puppets that are part of the action have their own separate ‘narrative’ that runs parallel to the Ubus’ story. The dog-puppet is made of a suitcase with three heads attached that are manipulated by three different puppeteers. Each head represents a different aspect of the dog's character, these being the foot soldier, the general and the politician. The dogs accompany Pa Ubu on all his covert nightly activities. In their first interaction on stage their conversation (which is interrupted by a scat quartet they sing together) establishes Pa’s understanding of masculinity as patriarchal authority, closely related to violence and aggression. He teases the dogs and says:

Shut up, you pack of lies, or I’ll split you end to end and feed you to Ma’s kitty... How is a man to maintain his dignity if he cannot even control his dogs?
(Taylor *Ubu & TRC* 7).

The question Pa asks here is the first of many insinuations throughout the play regarding his conception of ‘manly dignity’ and authority. He gives orders to the dogs, as he explains in his verse in the scat quartet:

With razor-like teeth and steel-sprung jaw
I’ve found myself a weapon that evades the law.
He’ll attack when he’s told
And submit when I scold
For I’ve made a pet of the dogs-of-war (Taylor *Ubu & TRC* 7).

The dogs' fierce aggression is necessary for the assassinations they commit under Pa's command. But this aggression is present even in the relationship between Pa Ubu and the dogs, as is seen in the quote above where Pa says he will "split [the dogs] end to end". Although they share intimate jokes, there is an underlying violence to their bond. Their behaviour when they are together on stage is suggestive of a kind of animalistic and predatory tension. The dogs "rub affectionately against Pa" while they pant with excitement (Taylor *Ubu & TRC* 7). At times Pa Ubu takes on the manners of a dog, going on hands and knees and gasping with his tongue hanging out. While they sing, the dogs' heads are placed strategically around Pa as he stands on top of the table. One head appears between Pa's legs in a suggestive phallic image. (A photograph of this particular scene appears in the printed text on page 6.) The entire image is emphasized by Pa, wearing only underpants, a vest and boots, who takes on a provocative pose with his pelvis thrust forward.

More than just companions in crime, Pa and his dogs evoke an atmosphere of male camaraderie that relies on sexual innuendo and aggression. One is reminded of scenes in Pauw's documentary of the Vlakplaas squad having '*Spanbou*' or 'teambuilding' sessions and particular rituals taking place there (usually associated with heavy drinking). The connection between male bonding and violence is a field of research on its own. Don Foster points out in his article on perpetrators that the TRC report failed, as many other reports on mass violence, to address the aspect of gender (Foster 227). The reality is that the greater majority of perpetrators of violence are male. The high number of squads that existed throughout South Africa during apartheid (operating on both sides of the Struggle) reinforces the idea that violence is linked in some way to a certain conception of masculinity.

Pa Ubu's bond with the dogs places him in a traditional patriarchal position of power, one that he tries in vain to carry through to his home situation and his relationship with Ma. When Pa and the dogs come together, a separate space is created on the stage, removed from the Ubu household. This space is both literally and figuratively one of subversion, where Pa Ubu enters a pact of secrecy with his dogs. The dogs confirm his belief in the mythical power of his manhood and in its extension, which is the acting out of violent and murderous schemes against the mythical 'total onslaught' that threatens

his country. Without his loyal followers, he becomes a frail, paranoid being, hiding under furniture from the truth-seeking ghosts of his memories.

His interaction with his dogs activates both sets of myths. Pa Ubu acts according to a code of behaviour that he draws from his sense of masculine power. This 'power' contains elements traditionally associated with patriarchal authority, but these elements remain superficial. Although he seems to be exercising power over the dogs, the supposed authority he carries is completely undermined and mocked in Act 1 scene 5 when Pa himself receives orders from above. Or rather below, because he communicates with his general by the imaginary radio transmitter in his underpants. The irony of Pa's 'power' in society is that he is only powerful insofar as he instructs the dogs. He relishes the position of 'authority' he holds over the dogs and over his victims while he is himself nothing but a tool that the government uses to uphold apartheid.

Consider Pa's conversation with Niles the crocodile-handbag describing his reaction to first hearing that amnesty requires full disclosure:

PA UBU: It is a poor tailor who has to make his own suits. Besides, our Reign of Terror was no Reign of Error. We knew what we did, and still we did it.

NILES: All you did was your job. And really, what harm did you do? A little killing here and there never hurt anyone.

PA UBU: But If I keep mum, how will they find out? I still have friends in high places (Taylor *Ubu & TRC* 19).

Pa's words reveal that he is still operating under the impression that the government and those "in high places" will come to his rescue if he is convicted. Even more falsely, he believes that the crimes he committed were simply part of his job and will not be defined as murder. His motivations for the killings he committed are embedded in the myth that the government's power – that is manifested in violence – is real. He believes that by being loyal to the state he himself will hold this mythical power. (Ironically he admits to being corrupt and stealing money from the state whilst still being a "loyal servant" (Taylor *Ubu & TRC* 5), which adds a question mark to his conception of 'loyalty'. This point also questions the ethics behind the granting of amnesty to criminals.)

Pa Ubu realises that his trust in the support of his authorities is in vain, as he finds himself “cast aside without thanks” after his service is no longer required (Taylor *Ubu & TRC* 5). On the other hand, Pa’s own cowardice has a similar effect on the bond between him and his dogs. Pa has no reservations about stuffing the dog’s belly with incriminating evidence as soon as he needs to clear his own name. Pa Ubu seems to resemble Dirk Coetzee rather than Eugene de Kock at his point. In many of the former Vlakplaas members’ eyes Coetzee is a coward (according to the Pauw documentary). He was a commander who sent out his henchmen to do dirty jobs rather than going to the frontline himself, who then betrayed them by disclosing all their secrets and receiving amnesty for it. Unlike the fierce De Kock who led his men into danger, Pa Ubu uses his dogs for his operations. When they all apply for amnesty, the dogs are sentenced to prison while Pa is set free. He claims that the things he has been accused of were committed by “those above [him]; those below [him]; those beside [him]” (Taylor *Ubu & TRC* 67) and that he knew nothing of what had been going on. Taylor gets in a stab at the leaders of the apartheid government who claimed not to have known what their security forces were up to. Pa Ubu no longer represents just the perpetrator who was ‘innocently’ following orders, but the leaders of the National Party as well. Pa Ubu uses the very claim F.W. de Klerk made in front of the Commission, that he stands ‘without shame or arrogance’ (Taylor *Ubu & TRC* 67) – in his speech to the Amnesty Committee.

The implication of Pa’s speech is that the politicians who have ordered assassinations during the apartheid period are now using assassins as scapegoats for the guilt that they (the politicians) should confess. But Pa Ubu is an assassin himself, making his speech quite ambiguous. For Pa Ubu the government is the front behind which he operates. He claims to be looking after “the affairs of state” (and that it is “classified”) (Taylor *Ubu & TRC* 3) when Ma enquires about his whereabouts at night. His relationship with Ma is another clear indication of Pa’s concept of manhood. He keeps her completely in the dark about his double life, which reinforces his position as patriarch. In a scene where the couple dances together, Pa tells the audience:

I must, above all things, hide my stories from Ma. Who knows how she might react? ... After all, to betray our men is to damn ourself. We can bravely face their exposure, but are a little more circumspect about our own. Therefore a soldier must bite his tongue (Taylor *Ubu & TRC* 21).

He claims to ‘protect’ Ma against the truth, but in fact this is yet another situation where Pa chooses to remain silent for his own benefit. As he says, he is “circumspect” about his own exposure. He reveals in this speech that his ‘manhood’ does not include genuine loyalty to his fellow soldiers. Even his patriarchal authority is an illusion. His threat to Ma – “If you keep me hungry, you make me angry. You don’t want to see me angry, Mother” – is countered by her with “I don’t want to see you at all, you ugly rhinoceros” (Taylor *Ubu & TRC* 27).

Pa Ubu’s illusions of grandeur in combination with his false sense of power and dignity are the cornerstones of his sense of his own masculinity. Recognition of the falseness of what drives Ubu is enhanced by placing his story parallel to the ‘narrative’ of testimonies by the witness-puppets that appear sporadically throughout the play. The truth according to the witness-puppets appears in stark contrast to the truth Pa Ubu propagates. The play’s engagement in the TRC debate essentially begins at the point where the witness-puppets enter the action. Pa Ubu’s false reality is placed alongside the actuality of the Truth Commission hearings and specifically the tragic testimonies of witnesses, presented by wooden puppets with human manipulators. The parallel narratives add a different level to the play. It is now not simply an exploration of Ubu, but of the social context that he enters when he appears at the Truth Commission. The effect on Ubu of hearing witnesses speak so openly about atrocities that he had an immediate part in establishes yet another level in his character. He becomes distraught and anxious when confronted with the truth. His tormented dreaming in Act 4 scene 2 and the appearance of the daunting Pa Ubu Shadow figure shortly thereafter reveal that Pa Ubu is indeed human. He is not a psychopath who kills relentlessly, but is haunted by memories of murdered victims and this is the most problematic and disturbing side of his personality.

Dudley Pietersen, in his examination of *Ubu and the Truth Commission* in terms of the theory of the apocalypse, reads Ubu’s character as an allusion to “the latent capacity for violence and evil inherent in the human psyche and the catastrophic consequences should these forces be allowed to dominate human behaviour” (Pietersen 60). The duality in Ubu’s character, Pietersen argues, is the ‘new’ shape of the apocalypse itself. Pa Ubu takes refuge (as does Ma Ubu) in the thought that, because he receives amnesty, he does not need to take responsibility for his actions, or for reconciliation in general.

He manages to keep his sense of masculinity intact by believing in his position as patriarch 'at the head of the family' and in loyalty to his country, as he explains in his speech to the Commission (Act 5 scene 4). But for the audience, the mythical stereotype of the perpetrator has been undermined by the duality in Ubu's character.

The implication is that amnesty is a false representation of the TRC's quest for the promotion of reconciliation. Violent perpetrators are freed of responsibility for their actions, but also from taking responsibility for reconciliation in society.

The Perpetrator and Power in *Country of My Skull*

The obvious link between *Ubu and the Truth Commission* and *Country of My Skull* is that Krog devotes a great part of her book to depicting and exploring the mind of the perpetrator, as the narrator is confronted with some of them at the Amnesty hearings. Interviews with Joe Mamasela, Jack Cronje and Dirk Coetzee, among others, provide insights into the motivations of apartheid's killers. But more chilling than the accounts given by killers is the refusal of many political leaders to become part of the uncovering of truth. In Krog's depiction of P.W. Botha he inadvertently places himself on the same level as that of a merciless killer by virtually saying 'I am guilty of ordering these atrocities, but I will not give anyone the satisfaction of hearing me admit to my guilt'. Buthelezi, as representative of the Inkatha Freedom Party, refuses to be involved in the 'witch hunt' of the Truth Commission (Krog 102) and De Klerk avoids any confrontation with the past in his submission on behalf of the National Party (Krog 126). These political figures inadvertently confirm that the fictional nature of memory is for some the deciding force in the uncovering of the past. The truth-telling process occurs outside a court of justice and relies only on what witnesses choose to reveal. If an amnesty applicant offers a certain narrative it is one based on his/her memory, which, as I have established, can be influenced greatly by the myths the applicant clings to.

The political figures above are closer to Ubu than it might seem at a first glance. If Ubu is indeed representative of a collection of perpetrators, including both those who ordered and those who obeyed orders, the same mythical system of power and masculinity that structured Ubu's behaviour could be applied to the political leaders of

the apartheid government. I argued that a dual system of myths underscribes Ubu's behaviour, namely myths underlying his perception of masculinity and power, and myths underlying his motivations. Several different types of narratives are used in Krog's depictions of perpetrators, for example, interviews, subjective descriptions by the narrator and transcriptions from the hearings. The narrator's personal responses to the perpetrators from her interviews with them provide an opportunity for a probing analysis of the principles underlying their behaviour.

The narrator decides to confront the group of Afrikaans-speaking security policemen who were responsible (with Joe Mamasela) for the murders of Richard and Irene Mutase at the time of their amnesty hearings. Her first impression of these men horrifies her, because their cultural background is so familiar to her, yet they are the murderers of innocent individuals. The following extract describes her personal feelings toward them, as representatives of her own culture:

Aversion. I want to distance myself.
They are nothing to me.
I am not of them (Krog 90).

As a result of her need to establish that her cultural identity is distinct from theirs, she interviews each of them individually. During these interviews the narrator becomes aware of a subtle hierarchy existing between her as a younger Afrikaans-speaking woman and the perpetrators, being middle-aged to elderly men. Her interview with Jack Cronje is particularly disturbing because of the way he reminds her of the kind of God-fearing Afrikaner *oom* that she grew up with. What occurs during this interview is the awkward positioning of a stereotype that usually evokes a sense of security and homeliness, in a seat of terror. The amnesty hearings presented hundreds of cases like that of Cronje when a feared perpetrator would find himself in direct conversation with victims, but this particular moment is different.

The narrator is simultaneously horrified at her apparent link with these men and curious to discover what it is that destroys the link. And through this personal conflict of the narrator's, the myth of the mighty Afrikaner patriarch is exposed. Cronje is unperturbed in his defence:

When I drove back in the mornings after an operation, and people passed me on their way to work, I thought: I did it for you and for you...you could sleep safe and sound, because I was doing my job. This country would not have held a week if it weren't

for the security forces... For myself I didn't do it, also not for my pocket. I did it for my country (Krog 92).

The same defence echoed in a multitude of halls – be it in front of the Commission or in courtrooms. Violent killings are validated through an overwhelming belief in nationhood and racial purity as a sound basis for patriotism. What is most problematic is the narrator's response in this instance. A colleague mentions to her after the interviews: “You know, your whole body language and tone of voice change when you are with these men... [T]here is a definite intimacy” (Krog 92). Simply by having a conversation with them, by sharing language and by recognizing the stereotypical quirks, the narrator falls back into the familiar pattern of behaviour ‘expected’ of an Afrikaner woman addressing an elder. She inadvertently upholds the mythical power of the Afrikaner male even while she can recognise the clichéd and empty nature of their speech. One has the sense that the same kind of mythical authority that Ubu frantically and pathetically tries to manifest on stage in *Ubu and the Truth Commission* is here reinforced by the narrator.

At the same moment Krog emphasizes that myths exist because they are effective in keeping a structure intact. The structure in question here is the power of the patriarchal Afrikaner, manifested by the belief that the ‘noble’ motivations behind his (in this case Cronje's) murderous deeds justify them. While the narrator does not reinforce the justification, she unwillingly upholds Cronje's authority by allowing him to intimidate her.

The picture of the perpetrator in *Country of My Skull* is not limited to the Afrikaner patriarch, though. An aspect that complicates my notion of myth so far– as an element underlying white perpetrators' motivations – is the perplexing existence of death squads on both sides of the apartheid divide. ‘The A-Team’ was infamous for their activities in the township of Tumahole at Parys (Krog 45). This group's ritualistic activities were as gruesome and haunting as was the terror at Vlakplaas – in Krog's words, “Men bonding in groups. Drinking, choosing a victim, arming themselves and then getting together to make the Big Kill” (Krog 46). But what makes the A-Team even more terrifying is that their attacks were made on the innocent people of their own community. Black men were fighting among themselves and betraying their kin by working with the SADF and

Inkatha. The A-Team used to have the same kind of bonding rituals that for Vlakplaas men meant beer and *braaivleis* next to the burning corpses of victims, but for the A-Team these were of an African tribal nature instead. The Amabutho, another fearsome group of KwaZulu-Natal, made war potions and partook in special cleansing rituals, using body parts of their victims after their attacks (Krog 46).

These groups no doubt bought into an ancient myth that links brutal violence with an essentialist brutal and primitive form of masculinity. The Amabutho created their own euphemisms to describe their acts, such as 'to remove obstacles' or 'to purify the fields' (Krog 46). These men differed from Ubu only in their lack of cowardice. By believing sincerely and fiercely in a common morality that justifies killing, they were able to commit murder without having to deal with guilt. But the A-Team and the Amabutho were black men who acted in defiance of their own community's morality and they do not uphold the stereotype of the Afrikaner male. The myth of masculinity exemplified by Ubu's character returns in a guise that removes it from patriotic pride and detaches it from racial identity.

The stereotypical image of the perpetrator with his need for ritualistic male bonding is undermined completely by Krog's description of Jeffrey Benzien at his amnesty hearings:

He sits alone, for three days, in the same grey suit and tie. At a press conference afterwards, the victims remark how strange it was to see him so alone (Krog 74).

Benzien has no share in the male camaraderie of the death squads. He was a killer who worked by himself and he manifests this quality in his hearings. Unlike Pa Ubu who finds anyone 'below, beside or above' him to blame, Benzien takes responsibility for single-handedly torturing his victims. But he adds a different level to his violence, in that he developed personal relationships with his victims. It seems that the impact of this kind of relationship is psychologically even more devastating than the anonymous murders of the Vlakplaas gang. He acts solely on his own instinct and draws his power not from the bond he has with other torturers but precisely from his isolation. Unlike the groups of killers, he has the advantage of meeting his victims one on one, thus establishing an ambivalent and unsettling closeness between them. Benzien knows each of his victims personally, down to their mannerisms. This is evident in the hearings

when Benzien faces his victims, although the relationship between torturer and tortured is different because of the presence of the Commissioners and the audience. It seems as though the power imbalance remains unchanged:

Within the first few minutes he manages to manipulate most of his victims back into the roles of their previous relationship – where he has the power and they the fragility. He uses several techniques to achieve this during the amnesty hearings... Benzien remembers his victims' code names, the exact words they spoke, their unique mannerisms (Krog 74).

In his hearing concerning Ashley Forbes, Benzien renews the 'intimacy' between them by recalling details about their relationship during the torture of Forbes. This strategy ensures that Forbes remains in a victimized position. In the case of Gary Kruser on the other hand, Benzien claims not to remember him at all, which is probably the greatest insult he could give Kruser, given the fact that for other victims he remembers so many details.

In Benzien, the face of evil transcends the myth of the Afrikaner patriarch. According to Benzien's psychologist, Ria Kotzé, he often truly does not remember events in his past, because of their traumatic nature (Krog 78). Kotzé speaks of memory loss as the "reconstruction of memory" and avers that it can happen voluntarily, involuntarily, or because of unnaturally high levels of stress when a person is testifying in public. Most significantly, Kotzé says:

In my job, there are, in a sense, no lies – all of it ties in, reacts to, plays upon the truth (Krog 78).

While Benzien's narrative subverts myths of masculinity and power, it obscures the notion of memory. Unlike Ubu, Benzien is not unwilling to take responsibility for his actions, but he simply does not recall many of them. In order for him to bear with the shame of having degraded and humiliated other human beings (whom he often got to know quite well), he subconsciously buries the most disturbing details in the recesses of his mind. To the psychologist this means that "there are no lies" and that every statement contains a version of the truth. For the TRC, however, Benzien's testimony intensifies the problematic nature of the construction of history. Brink's idea that the imagination greatly influences memory is quite appropriate to Benzien's narrative.⁷ Benzien (consciously or unconsciously) alters his memory of events so that facts

become fiction. For the audience as for Benzien, apparently, the distinction between actual history (fact) and his memories of it (fiction) becomes vague.

The ‘reconstruction’ of memory is for Benzien a way of enduring the two conflicting worlds in his past – that of a ‘respectable’ husband and father and that of a feared perpetrator. His evasion of the truth is thus a concern about putting himself and his family to shame. In a section of *Country of My Skull* that explores the origins of shame, the narrator and a colleague ponders the possible motivation behind Winnie Madikizela-Mandela’s deliberate evasion of the truth in her amnesty hearings. The colleague explains that it has to do with the difference between guilt and shame:

The essence of shame is the honour of a group, the essence of guilt is the responsibility of the individual towards a specific morality. (...) People feel *guilty* when they violate the rights of others. They feel *shame* when they fail themselves, when they fail their group. Guilt is linked to violation; shame is linked to failure. Shame requires an audience. Guilt does not (Krog 262).

This argument holds that Madikizela-Mandela’s concern is not a morality pertaining the conduct towards others, but a concern for the honour of what she represents. There is an assumption that a concern about honour is limited to the minds of male perpetrators, but from Madikizela-Mandela’s case it is clear that myths of honour is not gender-specific. Her case also contributes to clarifying the motivations of other perpetrators. The point is that they believe in their innocence insofar as they have acted according to their own set of morals. This moral framework is not linked to the framework of human compassion, but rather to a morality that is based on honouring their political ideals. When Jack Cronje says that the “country would not have held a week if it weren’t for the security forces”, he sincerely believes that he acted righteously because he obeyed the rules of honour for his group, namely the security police. Their honour subscribes to the myth that sustained oppression of black South Africans will ensure peace. Ironically the same system of honour and shame functioned for black terrorist groups like Amabutho or The A-Team.

⁷ See Chapter 1.

Chapter 3

CULTURAL TENSIONS: Perpetrator and Victim face-to-face

The quote from André Brink's discussion on memory and the imagination that I referred to in Chapter 1 introduces the idea of individuals defining themselves through the "constant editing and re-editing of memory" (Brink *Stories of History* 30). From Krog's text alone it is clear that this 'invention of self' is not limited to the witnesses testifying at the Commission. Everyone involved in the truth-telling process is drawn into an attempt to clarify the past. In fact all members of society are involved in the rewriting of a national history whether they choose to be or not. Not only the witnesses, the Commissioners and the immediate audience share in the impact of the hearings, but also the media reporting on it and the broader audience of the public exposed to the media reports. The narrator of *Country of My Skull* follows the development of the process professionally, whilst she is struggling with a personal 're-editing' of memory. She needs to acknowledge what the past means to her and embrace who she is in the present, even when it entails being a white Afrikaans-speaking South African woman.

Consequently, the narrator rediscovers her identity as the past unfolds. Her personal crisis starts with her horror at her apparent identification with perpetrators like Jack Cronje and Dirk Coetzee, simply because she shares an Afrikaner culture with them. After her interviews with a group of five policemen who were all Vlakplaas operatives, she expresses the ambivalence she feels towards them:

They are as familiar as my brothers, cousins and school friends. Between us all distance is erased. Was there perhaps never a distance except the one I have built up with great effort within myself over the years? (...) I am powerless to ignore what vibrates in me – I abhor and care for these five men (Krog 97).

She finds herself facing P.W. Botha during a press conference and trying to find a 'link' with him, something that connects them as fellow Afrikaners. But, as in the case of Cronje that I discussed in Chapter 2, she seeks this connection only to be able to detach herself from it. Her reaction confirms her detachment: "No. I can still find common ground with those who are battling to deal with a dramatically changing order, with our part in the past – but with this swaggering fool [Botha] there is nothing" (Krog 271).

The narrator was never a victim of human rights abuse herself, but in her exposure to perpetrators at the hearings she makes a moral identification with the victims. She needs to re-evaluate her Afrikaner culture and discard the system of power that prescribes a connection between her and the Afrikaner perpetrators. Because this power, as I have argued earlier, is founded in myths of masculinity and racial purity.

Eventually she reaches the moment during Madikizela-Mandela's hearing when she can honestly identify with the "black heart" of the Commission. She says,

The deepest heart of my heart. Heart that can only come from this soil – brave – with its teeth firmly in the jugular of the only truth that matters. (...) I belong to that blinding black heart. (...) [F]or one brief, shimmering moment this country, this country is also mine (Krog 259).

The ability of the narrator to take possession of an African identity while not entirely discarding her own Afrikaner identity is the outcome of her internal conflict with the discrepancies in the perpetrator-narrative. The narrator illustrates a kind of forging of her cultural identity that seems to be not unlike Ndebele's theory of victims' reinvention through narrative (Ndebele 27), although for her it occurs on completely different terms.

Pa Ubu, on the other hand is unable to achieve a reinvention of identity because of his persisting expectations of power and protection that he links with masculine honour. In Pietersen's reading of Ubu as exemplary figure of the devastating human potential for evil and self-delusion, he mentions the "lack of accountability" and the "attitude of detachment" that are exposed in Pa Ubu's character (Pietersen 64). By detaching himself from his actions in both his public and private lives, Pa manages to keep the myth of power effective for himself. It is of no consequence to him whether society is changing around him, for as long as his system of myths remains relatively intact, he has no need to adapt to a new political environment. He can sail off obliviously into a sunset and start 'fresh' with Ma and Niles, knowing that he plays no role in reconciliation. His very last words, "A bright future", sum up his philosophy.

As I noted in Chapter 1, the presence of the vulture in this scene and its sardonic commentary on the situation indicate that Taylor and Kentridge do not intend to endorse Ubu's view. Rather, the play exposes this particular attitude for its subversion of the TRC's promotion of reconciliation. Ma Ubu's attitude is not much different from Pa's.

When her character enters the stage, the audience is not entirely sure what to make of a black actor playing Pa Ubu's wife. But very soon she is recognisable simply as an ignorant white woman who "dreams of love and money", as the caption on the screen points out in Act 1 scene 6. The fact that her character is played by a black actor probes the audience to rethink the role-playing of the characters, but further than that no insinuation is made regarding Ma's personality. She is clearly very ignorant about the political situation of the country, and is only concerned about her own financial well-being. When she discovers the truth about Pa's other life, she is relieved that he has been "important" and was "protecting" her against the "Swart Gevaar" (Taylor *Ubu & TRC* 45).

The Ubus refrain from any direct confrontation with witnesses or engagement with their testimonies. In the production, the puppets' narrative is very deliberately separate from the action in the Ubu household. The opening scene, showing a puppet painstakingly engaged in the process of soup-making, establishes that neither the Ubus nor the puppet are aware of one another. The stage is presented as an interchangeable space where settings overlap. When Pa Ubu enters in Act 1 scene 2, he completely disrupts the quiet atmosphere where the puppet had been busy. Later, a puppet representing a spaza-shop owner is placed at the Ubus' kitchen table right before they commence with their dinner. The implication of the scene is that the puppet and the Ubus exist in two separate spaces, because they are unaware of each other. However, the Ubus unknowingly have an impact on this puppet's life as they gradually remove all his items from his shop during their dinner conversation (Act 2 scene 5).

Similarly, when re-enactments of TRC hearings interrupt the action of the play the Ubus do not notice the existence of the witness-puppets. Although again, they exist in different spaces, the Ubus' oblivion of the puppets reinforces the audience's grasp of their ignorance of the effects of Pa Ubu's crimes on the lives of the victims. In Act 3 scene 2, the truth about Pa's nightly activities is revealed to Ma Ubu when she finds the documents he hid in Niles' belly. Pa Ubu appears on the stage twice during the revelation to 'testify' about his deeds. During this particular scene Pa is relaxed, even matter-of-fact as he relates how he participated in the brutal torturing and killing of victims. At this point there remains no doubt about his unwillingness to confront victims as human beings and in so doing recognising his need to reconcile with them.

In the witnesses' speeches are signs that they were involved in a struggle that included their entire community. "Queenstown became a battleground," are the words with which the very first witness of the play begins his testimony (Act 2 scene 1). He emphasizes solidarity with others by referring to other deaths and not only that of his son: "There were so many bodies, they couldn't cope," and "*We* waited in front of the mortuary - a thick stream of blood was running in front from under the door" (my italics). The second witness also notes that others were with her when she witnessed her son being burnt: "Someone came and told me, they are burning your son" (Act 2 scene 4). Later a witness says: "They said they had found the *bodies of our children*, they must take me to see them" (Act 2 scene 7, emphasis added).

The witnesses reveal in their speeches that they have supportive communities who share in the pain that they suffer for the killings of their children. In contrast to the Ubus' relationship, the witnesses are drawn together in defiance of the onslaught on their communities and the disregard of their humanity. In figurative expressions reminiscent of the Xhosa expressions from which his testimony is directly translated, a witness tells "A Scholar's Tale", as the screen caption describes it (Act 4 scene 2). The witness describes his "everlasting pain" over the death of his son by comparing his son's life to that of a dog or an ant. One would even treat an ant with respect, he explains, but human children did not even receive the basic right to live. The African philosophy of *ubuntu*, or humanity, often referred to by Desmond Tutu during his years as chairperson of the TRC, underlies these testimonies.⁸ Instead of seeking justice and revenge, the witnesses portrayed in the play seek only to understand how it is possible for humans to act so inhumanely.

The point here is not that the witnesses are able to act in this manner because of their culture, or that all Afrikaners will be inhuman because they do not understand *ubuntu* – this would be an irrational and racist generalisation. Rather, the emphasis on the cultural difference between Ubu and the witness-puppets delineates Ubu's character. His total dismissal of the witnesses' stories confirms that there will never be a true meeting

⁸ Richard Wilson defines *ubuntu* as "an expression of community, representing a romanticised vision of 'the rural African community' based upon reciprocity, respect for human dignity, community cohesion and solidarity" (Wilson 9).

between Pa Ubu and his victims, preventing him from re-evaluating his cultural identity and 'recreating' himself in the face of a new dispensation.

A section in *Country of My Skull* that describes the conversation between the narrator and an Eastern Cape academic, Professor Kondlo, about the testimony of Nomonde Calata illustrates a confrontation between perpetrator and victim that is also a cultural confrontation (Krog 37-44). Nomonde Calata is the wife of the late Fort Calata, who was brutally tortured and murdered in 1985. Krog interrupts the transcription of Calata's testimony with Kondlo's interpretation of Calata's words and the events she describes.

From a perspective of deep knowledge of Xhosa culture, Kondlo identifies Mrs Calata as the Female Storyteller – in Xhosa culture the “Socializer of Children”. According to him, the stories told by Xhosa women are very different to those told by men. Women's stories contain magic, myth and fantasy and are not confined to the same boundaries that apply for male storytellers (Krog 38). However, when Mrs Calata appears in front of the Commission she is no longer a traditional storyteller. The acts of forced removals, of limitations on her every-day life, introduced a new set of responses not previously contained in her storytelling: resistance, vulnerability, shame, anger and hate. The events she describes constitute a violation of her private space. These factors replace the traditional functions of storytelling with a necessity to articulate trauma.

Mrs Calata's narrative explains how Venter, a white male police officer, visited her in the early hours of the morning, disrespecting her living space by sitting on her bed (Krog 39). Venter and some other officers arrived at the Calata home on horseback, shining torches into the sleeping household. Kondlo, in his analysis of Mrs Calata's story, points out that the men insisted on speaking Afrikaans and threatened Mrs Calata when she was most vulnerable. Venter's attitude switches on an entire system of oppression. He does not consider it necessary for him to justify his behaviour, because he acts according to a morality that is attached to the preservation of his race and culture and which does not include respect for members of other races.

Cultural conflict becomes more prominent in the narrative when Mrs Calata recalls that an officer called her husband 'Meraai' and his friend Matthew Goniwe, 'Mattewis' (Krog 40). The irony of this situation is that an essentially Afrikaans value system is

denoted by reference to the television series *Mattewis en Meraai*, which was based on the main characters of the novellas by the Afrikaans writer Mikro. The police officer named the two men (who were labelled dangerous political activists) after two highly respected and honourable characters in Afrikaans literature. The fictional characters Mattewis and Meraai embody the myth of the *Armblanke* (the ‘poor white’), who is poverty-stricken, but always blamelessly moral. Venter has chosen his insult carefully. He used a reference that Calata and Goniwe most probably did not understand. In addition, he implied that Goniwe and Calata had the relationship of husband and wife.

Being a police officer upholding the purity and stability of the Afrikaner race, Venter himself plays the role of Mattewis, the ‘respectable citizen’. In the conflict between Venter and Calata, Venter’s references and attitude activate a power structure with its roots in the myth of the superiority of the Afrikaner culture. Nomonde Calata’s ability to recreate these scenes of cultural conflict is part of her attempt to reinstate her individual identity that had been violated by the intrusion of the police, in front of the Commission.

The same process takes place for an elderly shepherd in the testimony that Krog labels, "The Shepherd's Tale" (Krog 210-216). I have commented in Chapter 1 on the style Krog uses in the transcription of this testimony, to recall the idiosyncratic language Lekotse used. His words are carefully chosen so that they express exactly how his memory of the events had a dramatic impact on his life. He repeatedly states, “My family was affected since that day” – in fact, these are the words with which his testimony starts (Krog 210). When he describes the specific incident that ‘affected’ him, he stresses the particular day:

Now listen very carefully,
because I'm telling you the story now.
On that day
It was night,
a person arrived and he knocked. (Krog 211)

The event Lekotse narrates is a simple confrontation with policemen. Yet his meticulous descriptions illustrate that for him it marks the moment when he crossed the line between having faith in human compassion and being irreversibly disillusioned. In the extract he constructs the opposition of day and night. Later in his speech he adds other

oppositions: “Three policemen were black and the rest were white,” and he explains that he is illiterate, while his children are educated. He repeats several times that he would rather that the police killed him than let him live with the memory of the experience. These oppositions – day and night, black and white, life and death, educated and illiterate – distinguish his identity as a poor, uneducated black shepherd in contrast to the perpetrators who are powerful white police officers. Furthermore the oppositions function on an abstract level to express the permanent reversal that the interrogation caused in his life.

The confrontation between perpetrator and victim is more symbolic than physical. Even though Lekotse is physically assaulted, the real assault on his humanity occurs in the intrusion by the police into the privacy of his home without respect for customs. The case of Lekotse is in this way very similar to the confrontation between Nomonde Calata and the police. A space of security and intimacy has been penetrated for no apparent reason. Unfortunately, the perpetrator is absent from the hearing in both cases. The truth-telling contains a confrontation with the memory of the perpetrators only and not with the perpetrators themselves. From extensive evidence it is clear that reconciliation does not constitute one-sided action, but requires all involved parties to engage in conversation. One clear expression of this point is Ginn Fourie’s article, in which she distinctly states that perpetrators need to “[accept] responsibility for the hideous crimes which they had committed” as well as apologise, before forgiveness can take place (Fourie 236).

The urgency of the precise cultural nature of the interrogations in the narratives of Nomonde Calata and Lekotse conveys that they were still perplexed by cultural conflict during their hearings. They have not been able to redefine their personal cultural identity after it has been violated by the policemen. While the failure to reconcile cultural conflict presents psychological difficulties for the witnesses, it does also have bearing on their narratives as constructions of history. Villa-Vicencio says:

Memory gives expression to the inability of language to articulate what needs to be said. It is incomplete...There is a struggle between telling what happened and explaining it away (Villa-Vicencio 23).

The narratives of Lekotse and Calata indeed illustrate that the nature of memory is a conflict between remembering events as they happened and qualifying them in the

remembrance. Then history, constructed from the fictional accounts of individual memory, has the same unstable nature that prevents it from ever being complete.

CONCLUSION

The ambiguities present in all the undertakings concerning the preservation of memory, more than anything else, dictate the direction literature addressing Truth and Reconciliation will take. Memory, like history, is subject to construction and continuous redefinition. Hence, Truth and Reconciliation literature challenges the audience constantly to re-evaluate both public and private narratives in the truth-telling process in terms of their engagement with versions of the truth. This literature is a reminder that there is no formula for interpreting the past uncovered by the TRC, as there is no 'authoritative voice' on the past. The audience is encouraged to draw the final conclusions from subjective narratives, and in so doing construct their personal versions of history.

Because *Ubu and the Truth Commission* deals with the manipulation of the truth, it engages directly in a qualification of the concept of history that the TRC embraced. The prominence the play gives to Ubu's narrative provides an angle on the TRC's mandate that essentially questions it, while not entirely dismissing it. *Ubu and the Truth Commission* seems rather to be placing emphasis on the improbability that the TRC will necessarily encourage reconciliation by endorsing private narratives. Ubu's narrative illustrates that amnesty removes his need for confronting the truth of the atrocities he has committed and reconciling with his victims, which might have occurred through the acknowledgment of the falsehood of myths justifying those atrocities.

While the narrator's engagement with cultural identity and collective guilt in *Country of My Skull* finally constitutes a form of reconciliation, the book does not indicate an optimism regarding reconciliation at the level of perpetrator and victim as a result of the TRC hearings. Neither the uncovering of the truth nor the victim's opportunity for redefining identity at the hearings seems (in Krog's view) to result necessarily in reconciliation.

The texts do clarify the point, however, that the questions raised by the TRC hearings can be intensified in literature. The complication of pressing social issues in literature would be the first step towards the interpretation of such issues. The endings of both texts leave many questions unanswered. Literature, in this context, serves as an

indication of society's ongoing need for the redefinition of terms. By confronting disturbing issues head-on and by asking uncomfortable and challenging questions, literature can fulfill the difficult but important task of defining the terms on which the past may be addressed and dealt with in order to understand the construction of history. Literature that provide alternative perspectives on the past can expose many comforting delusions that are otherwise ignored. South African writers are continuously faced with the challenge of finding new ways to be part of a socio-political debate which evolves and takes on new shapes even while it deals with the past. Consequently it is the task of academics and literary critics to effectively respond to the involvement of literature in the socio-political debate.

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