SYMPATHY WITH THE DEVIL: ETHICS AND GENRE IN APARTHEID AND POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

by

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Abstract

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Sympathy with the Devil considers textual and visual cultures in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa to examine how practices of reading and "ways of seeing" contributed to the formation of ethical relation during a period largely characterized by the absence of ethics. It focuses on reading populations generally underexamined in studies of reader response and ethical criticism, arguing that this neglect reinforces hegemonic discourses of cultural production and consumption that overprivilege the responses of certain types of readers to certain types of textual objects. By focusing on readers in positions of subjection and exploitation who consume a wide variety of textual and visual genres, *Sympathy with the Devil* seeks to carve out a place in the study of audience and reader reception that recognizes the ethical importance of all acts of reading.

While a reader's subject position determines her ethical response, the form and content of what she reads also influences this. If reading instantiates ethical being, the *ethos* summoned forth varies according to the form or genre of the text itself. While most work on the relationship between literature and ethics considers the production of ethical being through the pages of so-called "high" literature, little has been done to examine how popular culture and other reading materials also do this. Thus I consider various genres of culture production, including passbooks, photocomics and testimony at the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission, as well as novels, short stories, and memoirs. The dissertation accordingly reevaluates the role of popular culture in the formation of ethical consciousness. Despite the preponderance of philosophical and theoretical scholarly work examining the nature of the ethical, this study concludes that subjectivities characterized by oppression rather than by privilege are more conducive to the conditions of possibility that give rise to ethical consciousness and ethical action.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation began as a loosely formulated interest in South African literary studies based almost entirely on my fortuitous encounter with a novel by J.M. Coetzee. To Ida, I am grateful for introducing me to his work. Since then, a number of teachers, colleagues and friends have contributed to the project's transformation into an entirely different project focusing not on the great South African literary titan of today, but rather on the less well known readers and writers of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. From the Graduate Center I would particularly like to thank Meena Alexander, Moustafa Bayoumi, Rachel Brownstein, Gerhard Joseph, and Robert Reid-Pharr for their generous contributions, helping me to refine my ideas during my early years in graduate school through thoughtful discussion and commentary. Travel grants from the CUNY Graduate Center enabled me to conduct archival work at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, as well as at Michigan State University, and a fellowship at the Center for Place, Culture and Politics during 2008-2009 helped lighten my teaching responsibilities so I could spend more time writing. My students, however, at Baruch College, Hunter College, Medgar Evers College and at the Gallatin School at New York University, were also instrumental in helping me understand how reading can and does produce encounters with difference leading to productive forms of social relation. For their attention and willingness to grapple with the often difficult texts I presented them with, I am sincerely grateful.

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Introduction

> "There are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination" (Coetzee *Elizabeth Costello* 80)
>
> "'Tis not contrary to reason for me to chuse my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an Indian or person wholly unknown to me" (Hume *Treatise* 180)

To judge by a recent op-ed in *The New York Times*, the importance of emotional or affective knowledge in the construction of an ethical world—a central focus of much recent work in the humanities—has now been recognized in mainstream intellectual debate (Brooks). For the author, the rationalism and empiricism long dominating discussions of human sociability have proved insufficient guides to understanding human behavior, and he calls for a return to the "social sentiments" of British Enlightenment to remedy this oversight.

Such public recognition of the entanglement of affective and rationalistic cognition in the production of interpersonal relation augurs a shift in the popular imagination. In this vein, *Sympathy with the Devil* seeks to examine how considerations of such psychosocial matrixes might reconfigure our understanding of relation within political systems as ethically deficient as South Africa's infamous apartheid regime. Though my argument may apply to other relationships of inequality linked by class, race, gender, sexuality, nationality or otherwise, the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 1994 provided the world with a model of state-mandated reconciliation that depended largely upon subjects attuned to common affective experience, able thus to engage in explicit acts of forgiveness. As I shall show, the sympathy and compassion enjoined by the TRC built upon previous apartheid-era acts of

imagining and sympathizing with otherness that emerged out of apartheid's structures of supremacy. Such attunement to the being of otherness—of whiteness, in this case—was often the result of attempts to understand the racist policies of apartheid and their everyday incarnations; attempts to understand what was largely incomprehensible, namely, the inhumanity of the apartheid *Weltanschauung*.

Sympathy with the Devil aims to intervene in two fields of study frequently discussed together: postcolonial studies and ethical studies. It aims firstly to present a challenge to previous thinking about the etiology of ethics by arguing that ethics originates in spaces and subjects of subjection rather than in the domain of the powerful and elite. Ethics is, of course, a multivalent term. I use it here primarily in two main senses—firstly, to indicate the Aristotelian *ethos*, which I understand as "the characteristic spirit, [or] prevalent tone of sentiment, of a people or community" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). This definition, it should be noted, is devoid of moral valency, and indeed a communal *ethos* may, under certain circumstances, be considered an immoral or unjust *ethos*. What is important for this thesis is the ways in which such an *ethos* emerges via encounters with textual and visual materials such as literature, film, and other forms of popular culture. Ethics, on the other hand, I use to refer more precisely to the philosophical and material modes of interrelation which are characterized by doing good in the world. While an *ethos* may not involve conscious effort or consideration, ethical relation actively seeks to restore or maintain human relations within a framework of responsibility and answerability. How this comes about in the South African context will be the subject of much of what is to follow.

My second conceptual intervention emphasizes the continued necessity of postcolonial studies—and in particular, postcolonial *literary* studies—to make a place for cultural studies within a terrain often dominated by considerations of the novel. While some important recent scholarship has been carried out that looks at non-literary forms of cultural production in African and African diasporic contexts, such works tend, by isolating generic difference in separate studies of that difference, to reproduce the hierarchical distinctions between literary and non-literary forms that have long dominated discussions of genre[1]. By looking at literary production alongside other forms of cultural production, I mean to enact a democratization of considerations of cultural "texts" in order to dethrone literature from its assumed place of cultural privilege and superiority.

The two spheres of interest forming the conceptual backbone of this study—ethics and genre—neatly overlap in considerations of reading practices. As a long line of theorists have intoned, reaching back to Aristotle's famous discussion of tragedy, practices of "reading" or experiencing literature are instrumental in the construction of ethical consciousness (Aristotle). A central question the dissertation attempts to grapple with is how theories linking reading practices with ethical being transform when the textual material under consideration is not a work of so-called "high literature," but rather a popular text, such as the photocomic, or the South African passbook.

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[1] Particularly strong recent scholarship concerned with non-literary forms of African cultural production include: *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the African Self*. ed. Karin Barber, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. *Love in Africa*. eds. Jennifer Cole and Lynn M. Thomas, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. *Picturing a Colonial Past: The African Photographs of Isaac Schapera*. eds. Jean Comaroff, John Comaroff, and Deborah James, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. *Readings in Popular African Fiction*. ed. Stephanie Newell, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002.

Scholars working in reader-response theory, philosophy, and social and cultural studies have long been interested in examining the influence practices of reading have on subjective experience and social and discursive formations[2]. *Sympathy with the Devil* builds upon such work to explore the effect that readings in textual and visual cultures had upon black readers in South Africa during and immediately after apartheid. A fundamental premise of the dissertation is that such reading populations have generally been unexamined in studies linking ethics to acts of reading, and that this neglect ultimately serves to reinforce prevalent hegemonic discourses of cultural production and consumption that overprivilege the response of certain types of readers to certain types of textual objects. By focusing on readers in positions of subjection and exploitation who consume a wide variety of textual and visual genres, *Sympathy with the Devil* seeks to carve out a place in the study of audience and reader reception that recognizes the importance of all acts of "reading."

[2] Hannah Arendt, "The Social Question," *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep : An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). Dorothy J. Hale, "Aesthetics and the New Ethics: Theorizing the Novel in the Twenty-First Century," *PMLA* 124 (2009). Thomas Keenan, *Fables of Responsibility : Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). Lynn Avery Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008). F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (New York: New York University Press, 1963). J. Hillis Miller, *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, De Man, Eliot, Trollope, James, and Benjamin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987). Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Mark Sanders, "Ethics and Interdisciplinarity in Philosophy and Literary Theory. Introduction," *Diacritics* 32.3-4 Spec. issue Ethics (2002). For an overview of the more recent interest in question of ethics in the humanities, see Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack, *Mapping the Ethical Turn : A Reader in Ethics, Culture, and Literary Theory* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001).

In *Black Skin, White Masks* Frantz Fanon makes an important observation about reading and colonial subjectivity. He notes that when colonized children read comics, "there is always identification with the victor," even when there are other characters whose positions might seem more similar to that of the reading child. Through readings in mass culture, "the little Negro, quite as easily as the little white boy, becomes an explorer, an adventurer, a missionary 'who faces the danger of being eaten by the wicked Negroes'" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 146). Though this passage's primary intent is to elucidate a step in the process of black children's psychic development, Fanon also implicitly explores the relationship between reading, race, and the ethics of identification[3]. Reading, as literary theorists have pointed out, generates ethical response by eliciting encounters with alterity in the form of relations between readers, narratives, characters, authors, narrators and the material texts themselves. But do reading practices interpellate differing ethical subjectivities in the disenfranchised than in the privileged?

The writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie recalls how formative reading practices led her to write stories populated by "white," "blue-eyed" characters who "played in the snow…ate apples," and "drank ginger beer." This despite the fact that she lived in Nigeria where they "didn't have snow," they "ate mangoes" and she "had no idea what ginger beer was" (Adichie). Both Fanon and Adichie show how geographic, cultural, and racial contexts often determine textual responses. As my dissertation argues, ethical responses differ accordingly.

[3] While this moment of identification might be explained as an instance of "false consciousness," such an interpretation fails to allow for the ethical potentials of cross-racial identification. Such a charge is also rarely leveled when white readers such as women, for instance, engage in acts of identification with figures of power.

Sympathy with the Devil is grounded in what Dorothy J. Hale refers to as the "New Ethics" (Hale). Its proponents refute earlier works by scholars such as Northrop Frye and F.R. Leavis whose yoking together of literature and ethics rests on the premise that reading instantiates discrete individual subjects[4]. For theorists of the "New Ethics," reading is ethical instead because it destabilizes this idea of the Enlightenment subject, binding reader and text together in inescapable, irresolvable encounters with alterity.

Yet such studies concentrate largely on Euro-American reading publics and texts. Few examine what kinds of imaginative ethical responses occur when readers are the very human beings who have been traditionally understood as the targets, or beneficiaries, of ethical feeling. While poststructural scholars challenge theories that reify Enlightenment notions of the individual subject, the hypothetical readers conjured up by the "New Ethicists" are still largely imagined as inhabiting legally constituted spaces of citizenship and privilege. By attending to underprivileged readers, my aim is less to reinforce these divisions that separate those who feel and act upon ethical feeling from those who have been understood as its recipients. Rather I aim to expand the purview of studies linking cultural consumption with the formation of ethical consciousness by insisting that all acts of "reading" possess the potential for an ethical response in all readers, regardless of their position. As the South African context suggests, however, the imaginative sympathy that is the prerequisite for ethical relation tends to arise more frequently in those who are subject to exploitative regimes, for a variety of reasons I explore below.

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[4] See in particular Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, Collected Works of Northrop Frye (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006). F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition; George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (New York,: G.W. Stewart, 1948).

Despite their differences, both the recent thinking of the "New Ethicists" and the earlier theorists of ethics and reading nonetheless agree that "what is ethically, aesthetically, and politically at stake…is the productive power of conceiving of the self as other…" (Khalip 24). It is my contention that South African blacks under apartheid specifically, and exploited peoples more generally, were forced on an everyday basis to identify in such a way with the dominant, and in the case of South Africa—white—other. This occurred both through direct interactions with power, and through acts of identification encouraged in reading and "ways of seeing." Where blacks often needed to conceive of "the self as other" in order to survive, whites could pick and choose if and when they wanted to attempt such cross-racial identifications. As J.M. Coetzee put it, in the context of Nazi Germany, "The horror is that the killers refused to think themselves into the place of their victims," refused, to engage the "faculty, *sympathy*, that allows us at times, to share the being of another" (*Elizabeth Costello* 79). Thus, if we wish to understand how reading initiates ethical and political engagement, we must turn to readers whose daily existence always already required acts of identification.

It is important to note the distinction I mean to draw between the sympathetic and the ethical: the two terms should not be equated. While the former may lead to the latter, not all acts of sympathetic understanding result necessarily in ethical action. Sympathy, I am arguing, operates via an act of imaginative attunement or resonance, opening up a channel to the ethical and presenting the potential for its arrival. Sympathy beckons towards ethics, but does not necessarily result in its instantiation. Indeed the sympathy inherent in everyday life under apartheid may have most habitually consisted of precisely the kind of sympathy that, being strategically inspired, led infrequently, if ever, to actual

interactions of ethical exchange. More often than not, the necessity provoking such acts of imaginative sympathetic attunement may have precluded the desire to direct that consciousness into ethical acts to disrupt apartheid's divisive structure. When I refer to the sympathetic, I mean precisely to indicate that mode of imagining the self as other that creates the potential for ethical relation but that by no means assures it.

While a reader's subject position determines her ethical response, the form and content of what she reads also influences this. If reading instantiates ethical being, the *ethos* interpellated by texts varies according to the form, content and genre of the text itself. Thus my dissertation considers various genres that were read by blacks and coloureds[5] during apartheid. While most work on the relationship between literature and ethics considers the production of ethical being through the pages of so-called "high" literature, little has been done to examine how popular culture and other reading materials also do this. Peter Hitchcock reminds us that "the policing of the borders of genre tells us something about the logic of power" and that "genre too is subject to decolonization" and it is in this vein that I examine several genres that have tended to escape consideration in studies of the relationship of reading to ethics (302). My intention is, in part, to destabilize the generic focus on the novel that has dominated postcolonial literary studies and I do this, as I outline below, by looking at the passbook and the photocomic, as well as testimony at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

This work seeks to remedy scholarly negligence in two areas of the study of the relationship between ethics and acts of cultural consumption: 1) to reevaluate the role of

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[5] I use the term "coloured" to refer to the identity some South Africans continue to appropriate, conscious all the while of its originary status as a divisive category of racial apartheid.

popular culture in the formation of ethical consciousness, and 2) to expose how ethical discourse has traditionally been articulated by privileged philosophers and politicians while being, in actuality, less a trait of the powerful than a defining part of the everyday experience of subjection.

Western philosophy has generally monopolized the discourse of the ethical largely, I argue, because it was the least ethical of cultures, particularly during the Enlightenment's sudden explosion in theories of sympathy[6]. The coincident rise of British and French imperialism with the expansion of French and British theories of responsibility, interrelation, and sympathy[7] attests to the anxiety underriding the colonial project that put (at least imaginatively) so many French and English in contact with unfamiliar peoples from all over the rest of the globe[8]. When David Hume uses the figure of an unnamed "Indian" to emphasize the global reach of sympathy, he reminds us how present the colonial project must have been, even for those philosophers intent on articulating objective and universalist truths about human nature. Hume insists that " 'tis not contrary to reason for me to chuse my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an

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[6] Important exceptions to this "Western" dominance include Indian and Tibetan Buddhist and Hindu ethical philosophies.

[7] Seminal texts in this tradition include David Hume, "An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals," *Hume's Ethical Writings*, ed. Alasdair MacIntyre (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2003). David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby Biggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004). Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Discourse on Inequality*, trans. Maurice Cranston (London: Penguin, 1984). Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Essay on the Origins of Languages Which Treats of Melody and Musical Imitation," *On the Origin of Language* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1966). Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, eds. D.D. Raphael and A.L Macfie (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

[8] Michael Meranze reminds us that Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiment* was published in 1759, smack in the middle of the struggle for colonial power between France and Britain, known as the Seven Years War. Michael Meranze, "Review: Sentimental Education," *History Workshop Journal* 53.Spring (2002).

Indian or person wholly unknown to me" (Hume *Treatise* 180), thus in one eighteenth-century sentence predicting the Levinasian turn that has proved so compelling to recent theorists. Western philosophy obsessively returns to theories of the ethical (from Aristotle to Spinoza, to Levinas, Derrida, Butler, and Nussbaum), because there is the constant need to reassert an ethical modus operandi in a world plagued by its absence. Sympathy, and thus the potential for ethics, I am arguing, is instead a near ontological characteristic of oppression.

Regardless of the variations in definitions of the ethical, its theorists tend to agree on the central role played by the imagination in the production of ethical relation, since any ethical experience is predication on some form of relation, and particularly on the need for an individual or group to attempt *to imagine* the situation of another person or group[9]. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau succinctly puts it: "He who imagines nothing is aware only of himself" ("Essay on the Origins of Language" 32). Thus to a certain degree, ethics is predicated on the fictional, or literary, since its emergence depends upon an imaginative act.

Such acts of imaginative speculation are a requisite of everyday existence for oppressed populations. Survival within a system that excludes, ignores or debases an

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[9] Hume suggests that the idea of a sentiment (thus its imagined existence) may at times "be so inliven'd as to become the very sentiment or passion"—"tis certain we may feel sickness and pain from the mere force of the imagination" Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 319. Rousseau tells us that pity," though innate, "would remain eternally quiescent unless it were activated by imagination" Rousseau, "Essay on the Origins of Languages Which Treats of Melody and Musical Imitation," 32. "By getting outside ourselves…and identifying with a being who suffers. We suffer only as much as we *believe* him to suffer. It is not in ourselves, but in him that we suffer." Rousseau, "Essay on the Origins of Languages Which Treats of Melody and Musical Imitation," 32. See also Nancy Yousef, "Sympathy and Skepticism: The Imagination of Other Minds from the Englightenment to Romanticism," Columbia University, 1995.

individual physically, psychically, or both, puts that individual in positions wherein it is imperative to imagine the needs and requirements of the dominant group; imperative to imagine the drives and impulses of the powerful. Consider the exchange of reading practices that occurred on an everyday basis during apartheid, in encounters between policemen and black and coloured South Africans at pass checkpoints. Passes were a form of internal passport restricting or permitting the movement of non-white South Africans through the national space. In order to monitor this movement, police regularly established roadblocks and demanded to see black peoples' passes, or randomly stopped passersby to check their "books." At such moments, if we accept theories that link reading with the emergence of ethical consciousness, we would expect the policeman reading the book to experience the being of otherness in his perusal of the passbook's text. Yet, the structural parameters that dictated how and to what end the book should be read in fact precluded any such ethical response on the part of the policeman. State-mandated instructions required these texts to be read pragmatically, only for the superficial "factual" information they conveyed about their bearers, restricting any interpretation within a polarized matrix of legality or illegality. In *Life & Times of Michael K*, for instance, a novel I consider at length in the final chapter, the protagonist stopped at a pass check surmises that "if I look very stupid…perhaps they will let me through." Instead, the "policeman with the dog made an impatient gesture" and pushed K into the line designated for "captivity" (Coetzee *Michael K* 40-1).

Those subject to the pass controls often had to actively engage in interpretive acts of reading the police, with the aim, at least in these moments, to understand the powerful person in order to best respond to his demands, to gain permission to move on. As many

apartheid-era novels of this period elucidate, such acts of imaginative speculation resulted in divergent portraits of the police that undermine purely simplistic understandings of police as mere "devils" or incarnations of evil. In contrast, the police in such situations had no incentive to imagine what it was like to be the person stopped. Thus imagining others, for the powerful, is primarily a faculty employed *by choice* rather than a necessary or requisite response to the presence of another human being. In contrast, the colonized or oppressed subject is engaged in a more nuanced set of interpretive readings of a text that, in this case, is human. As Ashis Nandy has pointed out in his discussion of Hegel's master-slave dialectic, "one must choose the slave… because he *represents a higher-order cognition* which perforce includes the master as a human, whereas the master's cognition has to exclude the slave except as a 'thing'" (xvi my emphasis).

Dominant cultural norms demand acknowledgment by all social groups, even if many of those in the society inherently oppose the normative values both ontologically and through lived practices. Part of the experience of being under the control of a dominant culture that undervalues or denies difference, involves not only perceptive awareness of the dominant mode, but its constant imagining. These imaginative acts of difference are often requisite for survival, but also, more subtly, provide a mode of participation allowing individuals to live relatively unnoticed within a societal structure that relies on one's own subordination for its continued hegemony. I refer to this particular mode of the sympathetic—that sympathy which emerges in subjects who tend to be considered the objects of sympathy rather than the active bearers of sympathetic feeling—as "sympathy from below." This phrase is useful in order to differentiate

between the mode of sympathy traditionally articulated by theorists of the sympathetic—as sympathy bestowed by a powerful agent upon a passive, suffering individual[10]—from the sympathy which I argue is a fundamental characteristic of oppressed subjectivity. I explore this concept most thoroughly in Chapter Three.

Ethics, or at least, the potential for ethics, originates in a place of subjection almost automatically, and thus without the necessity for its articulation, is lived as practice, rather than obsessively theorized in absentia. Resituating ethics' etiology in this space of subjection also challenges descriptions of the ethical that have tended to rely on unidirectional models assuming one suffering body and one non-suffering body. An example of this reductive approach can be found in Luc Boltanski's otherwise useful book, *Distant Suffering*, where he argues that "to arouse pity, suffering and wretched bodies must be conveyed in such a way as to affect the sensibility of those more fortunate" (11). Boltanski relies characteristically on a categorization of fortunate and unfortunate, effectively reinforcing strict divisions between victims and perpetrators, a divide which this dissertation understands as often pragmatic, yet unrepresentative, of the instability of the two categories themselves. Such theories of ethics have implicitly denied suffering people's own ability to recognize the humanity of others, thus reinforcing imbalances in power by reducing descriptions of suffering others to monochromatic portraits of pure, passive suffering. While critics of postcolonial studies accuse the field of too starkly dividing the world into innocents and guilty, colonized and

[10] Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media, and Politics*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

colonizers[11], much recent work has sought to recognize the complicated terrain of colonialism and postcoloniality in order, in part, to recognize the agency of the colonized themselves, both in terms of their complicities with colonial governments as in their resistance to colonialism[12]. In fact, recognition of this complexity, I would argue, has been a part of postcolonial studies since its emergence as a field of study. In 1983 (a considerably early moment in what we now know as postcolonial studies), Ashis Nandy wrote what may have initially been thought of as a provocation, that in colonialism "the victors are ultimately shown to be camouflaged victims, at an advance stage of psychosocial decay" (xvi)[13].

Chapter One, "Ways of Passing: Revisiting South Africa's Pass Laws" attempts to outline modes of relation fostered at sites of interracial encounter. It does this specifically by looking at how the reference books black and coloured South Africans were required to carry before and during apartheid instantiated their bearers' cross-racial, ethical experience. These books told different life stories than novels, and thus determined alternative forms of political and ethical self-awareness. I argue that acts of reading these passbooks at the pass blocks ironically revealed that the ethics arising from such encounters were not housed in the minds and consciousness of the reading policeman, but

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[11] Martin Weiner, "The Political Unconscious of Postcolonial History." Unpublished talk. March 4, 2011. The Graduate Center, History Department.

[12] See for example, Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (New York: Touchstone, 1996). Robert Reid-Pharr, *Once You Go Black: Choice, Desire, and the Black American Intellectual*, (New York: New York University Press, 2007). Mark Sanders, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid*, Philosophy and Postcoloniality (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

[13] There is much earlier evidence of such thinking in eighteenth and nineteenth century slave narratives as in Frederick Douglass' famous autobiography.

instead in the imaginative acts required by those subject to policing. The chapter considers one woman's (Susan Makhubu's) passbook alongside apartheid-era "protest novels" that often return to descriptions of the roadblocks. The narrators of these works frequently attempt to imagine the policeman's interiority, recounting how police, on the other hand, usually refused to concede that those they had stopped possessed any psychic or emotional subtlety. This reminds us that forms of reading, whether the text be a human or a book, may always provide the possibility for sympathetic relation yet sociopolitical circumstances also determine whether the responses are ethical or instead negate ethics. The chapter foregrounds passbooks alongside coeval "protest novels" because they formed an integral part of blacks' textual experience under apartheid, so much so that, as Lionel Rogosin recounted, "they refer to [them] as 'the Bible'" (28).

Chapter Two, "Not Western: Race, Reading, and the South African Photocomic," examines a subgenre of popular culture, widely popular in South Africa during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Photocomics consist of stories told through sequences of photographic stills with dialog and narration inserted in captions above the images or in speech bubbles. Focusing on the Western photocomic, popular among both blacks and whites during apartheid, the chapter explores its function as an outlet for indirect expressions of contemporary racial anxieties. With its tropes of the expanding frontier and the indigenous "noble-savage," the Western resonated strongly within apartheid South Africa, discursively producing and disturbing, through narrative displacement, cultural, national, and racial subjectivities. Cultivating the kinds of cross-racial identification identified by Fanon and Adichie, these photocomics brought black and white readers in

visual and textual contact with alterity, establishing ethical potential through literary and consumptive practices.

Chapter Three, "Sympathy from Below in Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's *A Human Being Died That Night,*" argues that writing produced after the formal end of apartheid makes explicit those relations of sympathetic and cross-racial engagement that existed during apartheid, but remained obscured in much "protest lit." With the emergence of South African writing that emphasizes this discourse of the sympathetic, we are not simply observing a reversal of power whereby the newly enfranchised black elites appropriate the language of benevolence. Instead such recent work articulates apartheid-era practices of identification with the other—"from below"—yet does so within the now dominant discourse of black self-governance. It is in this post-apartheid moment that we observe overt examples of how sympathetic relation becomes ethical action. Though "sympathy from below" is born out of unequal power relations, the imaginative identification that is its hallmark continues to dominate after the destruction of the apartheid system, suggesting that sympathy can coexist with power. In the redistribution of power ushered in by the change in governments, sympathetic identification found forms for its realization in ethical acts of ethical.

As the dissertation's chronological organization aims to demonstrate, it is only in the public articulation of these instances of psychoaffective sympathetic relation, that we can clearly see the concomitant arrival of ethics. While there is ample evidence of these acts of imaginative sympathy by blacks for whites during apartheid, it is most clearly in the post-apartheid moment that the transformation of a "sympathy from below" into the

emergence of an "ethics from below" occurs, as in the case of Sindiwe Magona and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's recognition of interracial mutual responsibility.

The final chapter "Sympathy and the Aftermath of Forgiveness at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission" considers testimony as a genre engaged in the elaboration of ethical subjectivities. Despite its self-conscious elaboration of a reparative moral agenda, at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings the onus remained on the shoulders of black constituents to sympathize with the guilty whites, and when possible, to forgive them. While blacks finally were given a forum for their own stories, the TRC unwittingly managed to re-inscribe moral hierarchies, putting blacks once again in the position of having to identify with (and forgive) white guilt. A return to J.M. Coetzee's 1983 novel *Life & Times of Michael K* allows for an exploration of the possibility of alternative models of response to apartheid's injustices, particularly in the practice and (non)articulation of silence. This chapter crystallizes my understanding of the sympathetic as an ambiguous mode, simultaneously capable of producing new ethical practices while re-inscribing moral and material inequalities.

A few words about the title. Throughout most of the dissertation, I have chosen to use the word sympathy in lieu of today's more popular "empathy," precisely to mark the Enlightenment-era intellectual genealogy of the idea I describe. Alternate terms such as compassion and pity were also frequently used by the eighteenth-century theorists of sentiment who form my most central cadre of interlocutors for thinking about intersubjective, ethical relation. To some degree the choice of sympathy is one made out of necessity, as distinctions between these words over the last few hundred years reveal a

semantic instability that makes clear demarcation of the boundaries between them an almost impossible undertaking[14].

The devil of the title is of course no one. To sympathize with such a representative of incorporeal evil is, as Derrida has shown in his discussion of forgiveness at the TRC, to transform him/it into someone altogether human. During what was arguably the other most famous set of legal proceedings carried out to “repair” or “restore” justice to a world deprived of it by gross violations of human rights, namely the Nuremberg trials and in the later trial of Adolf Eichmann, the discourse of demons, devils, Faustian pacts, and of good and evil, was regularly called upon to account for the rise of fascism and to explain the Allies’ choices of punishment at Nuremberg. Hannah Arendt reported that in the opinion of the judge, Dr. Kastner, a Jew who collaborated with Eichmann, “…had ‘sold his soul to the devil.’” “Now that the devil himself was in the dock” continues Arendt, “he turned out to be an ‘idealist’ and though it may be hard to believe, it is quite possible that the one who sold his soul had also been an ‘idealist’” (*Eichmann in Jerusalem* 42). Such language was also employed at the TRC. In his critique of the reconciliation process, Mahmood Mamdani draws attention to the minority dissenting report of Commissioner Wynand, who highlighted “a […] tendency in the Commission to view its subject matter through the lenses of a morality play, whose ‘dogmatic and absolutist’ text was drawn from ‘religious thought’ for ‘the juxtaposition of forces of light and forces of darkness, good and evil is inherent to religious thought’”

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[14] Following Hannah Arendt, Boltanski distinguishes compassion from pity by arguing that the former is extrapolitical while pity insists that suffering can be addressed via the political. This distinction is necessary for Boltanski’s differentiation between governmental policies and individual approaches to “distant suffering,” but this conceptual difference is hard to locate in historiographically.

(Qtd. in "Amnesty or Impunity?" 55). Essential to the task of bedeviling the purity of such notions themselves, we must attend to the overlapping economies of morality that occur in systems of oppression. But it behooves us also to consider how sympathetic consciousnesses that challenge simplistic systems of categorization arise, and how such potentiality might be channeled towards more productive modes of ethical and political relation.

Chapter One: Ways of Passing: Revisiting Apartheid South Africa's Pass Laws

> "Blerry law is everywhere" (La Guma *In the Fog of the Season's End* 70).

This chapter looks at literary depictions of subject formation within the particular context of apartheid South Africa's pass laws. Works written by colonized subjects are often concerned with depicting personal, intimate experiences of selfhood—"A colonized person," wrote Frantz Fanon to Jean-Paul Sartre, "must constantly be aware of his image"—and so it is to such forms of writing that I turn to ground my analysis of South African subject formation during apartheid. This does not mean I seek to fix a particular African subjectivity, nor a black South African one, since, as Achille Mbembe has written, "the time we live in is fundamentally fractured, [and so] the very project of an essentialist or sacrificial recovery of the self is, by definition, doomed" ("African Modes" 30). Indeed, while nuanced debates about the decentered subject mark the last few decades of scholarship in the humanities, I am interested less in identifying actual, material, subjectivities, than in the way that power works to produce particular modes of subjectivity which can be experienced, interchangeably, as authentic or as performed[15]. It

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[15] The notion of a unified, discrete subject has of course taken a healthy bashing in recent years. In a cautionary remark, warning against a complete dismissal of poststructuralist concerns about the subject, Mark Sanders suggests that "It is not that humanism is being superseded today by poststructuralism—unless one is an intellectual historian—but rather that by not allowing its categories to be examined, to be open to its others, its self-professed defenders render it ethically and politically dangerous" Mark Sanders, "Reading Lessons," *diacritics* 29.3 (1999): 9, Sanders, "Reading Lessons," 9. Despite poststructuralist critiques of the unified subject, I accept, following Jessica Benjamin, that human experience still involves "some notion of the subject as a self, a historical being that preserves its history in the unconscious… the person's singularity… not a Cartesian ego, not even all ego, but still a being separately embodied, and in that sense an

is important to remember that "only the disparate, and often intersecting, practices through which Africans *stylize* their conduct and life can account for the thickness of which the African present is made" (Mbembe "African Modes" 273).

According to Mbembe, slavery, colonization, and apartheid are the three crucial axes through which recent African identities emerged. It is the last of this triad I examine, to identify modes of being forged by the legally sanctioned dictates of the pass system, regulations building on pre-apartheid systems of classification and identification requiring that subjects carry identity papers and be ready at all times for police inspection. This method of state surveillance, I argue, produced new racial subjectivities both disciplined by, and escaping, the limits of state control. These emerging subjectivities crystallized most noticeably in encounters between white police and black and "coloured" targets at the pass check. These are obsessively described in apartheid-era novels.

Between 1916 and 1981, 17¼ million black South Africans were arrested for pass law infringements (Giliomee and Schlemmer 1)[16]. This domination over space and time effected by the apartheid state's pass system conditioned various political, racial, and gendered subjectivities, yet state-led orchestrations failed to mould all forms of subjectivity into the rigid forms promulgated by apartheid doxa. I argue that the pass laws' near-complete intrusion in aspects of spatial and temporal life severely limited the development and scope of resistant or sympathetic subjectivities, and that black literary production during this period (an arena often described as a hotbed of political activism)

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individual psyche" Jessica Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995) 13.

[16] Pass laws were officially dismantled in 1986.

emerges within the totalizing discourse and logic of apartheid jurisdiction while simultaneously denouncing it. In contradistinction to the penchant for sympathetic identification set up in reading materials such as the photocomic, described in Chapter Two, encounters at the pass block and elsewhere generally foreclosed this possibility by firmly entrenching the division of power between the policeman and his subject. Moments in the apartheid-era literature expose, nonetheless, certain ruptures in the totality of relations imposed via the pass system.

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The architects of the 1952 pass laws which revamped the design and administration of previous pass book laws, expressly aimed to have the new 'booklet… contain the "personal history and movements" of every African worker…' (Mickenberg 85). With their attention to an individual's work history, residence history, tax history, birth date and location, race, tribal ethnicity and marital status, passbooks narrate life stories quite distinct from those described in biographies, autobiographies, poems, and novels. Though presumably not the intention of the apartheid state, by naming identification documents *books*—passbooks, reference books, *Bewysboek* ('the book of proof') in Afrikaans—we are invited to investigate them *as books*, or as evidence of parts of life stories not told in novels[17]. This chapter explores how it is that passbooks thus narrated lives.

This chapter also situates itself within postcolonial studies' traditional interest

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[17] Here I understand the literary through the wider Foucauldian lens described by Terry Eagleton—"'literature' as a name which people give…to certain kinds of writing within a whole field of…'discursive practices'" Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) 205.

in relation[18] through a close examination of the encounter at the pass check as described in novels, short stories, and journalism produced during apartheid. Novelistic depictions of apartheid's pass system provide insights into the everyday experience of living and moving under a surveillance system regulated through the written form of the passbook.

I draw on several works: Peter Abrahams' pre-apartheid novel *Mine Boy* (1946); Bloke Modisane's 1963 fictionalized memoir *Blame Me on History*, banned in 1966; Can Themba's collection of short-stories and essays *The Will To Die* (1972), banned pre-emptively in 1963 by a complete ban on his writings; and Alex La Guma's *In the Fog of the Season's End* (1973). Though it would have been possible to have drawn on examples describing the encounter at the pass check from a wide variety of novels written by black South Africans during apartheid, I limit myself to these case studies, partly because they each offer extensive descriptions of that encounter. In addition, except for Abraham's novel, the works all appeared after the standardization of the apartheid state's pass law program, and as such, each responds to already firmly established practices of surveillance. The three decades between the publication of Abrahams' novel and La Guma's, and the negligible differences between their descriptions of the encounter at the pass check, remind us that the apartheid pass system was a normalized part of daily life for Black South Africans that must have, at times, felt permanent.

Nevertheless, these literary works were the *anti*-passes insofar as they managed to

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[18] Notable examples of this trend include: Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove, 1967). Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anti-Colonial Thought, Fin-De-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). Albert Memmi, *The Clonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon, 1991). Ann Stoler, ed., *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997).

transmit written ideas not entirely circumscribed by legal mandate. Censored, banned, and publicly maligned, they nonetheless made it into print, defying boundaries of township, Bantustan, and nation. They were pass*ports* into other places, portals into a future imagined if not perceived; the novel defied the limits imposed by its other—the passbook—refusing its tethering to place, and testifying to a South Africa unlike that revealed in the passbook's pages. As Jacques Rancière established in *The Nights of Labour*, these men who wrote managed to do so despite the fact that the occupation "writer" was not a category stamped or written into the passes they carried (Rancière). They understood that writing in English did not have to be the monopoly of the apartheid state.

Though this chapter is split between an examination of the passbooks as biographies, and a consideration of the artistic responses they engendered, these two approaches expose how the strict distinctions made between legal and literary written discourse works to consolidate the political power dividing them. Keeping these discursive modes separate ensures that tactics to counteract that power remain largely confined within narrow disciplinary boundaries, thwarting cross-disciplinary solidarities. Indirectly, this chapter highlights the political motivations behind discursive and disciplinary isolationism, refusing, as much as possible, to honor strict distinctions between the literary and the legal. Instead, by reading passes as novels and novels as passes, I explore the fruitful results that emerge when the interdependence of the literary and the legal is rendered transparent[19].

What is the difference between the stories that novels tell and the stories that

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[19] This tension between literary and legal language is also relevant in Chapter Four.

passbooks tell? What role, I ask, did subjects play in the revision of their own lives through the manipulation and forgery of passes? How do changes in the books change the life stories being told, and how does our retroactive gaze hamper our ability to understand the way they functioned in the lives of their bearers? Who were the 'authors' of the pass books?

Subjecting pass books to a literary reading permits a parallel reversal, of course: to read literature (construed in the narrow sense of novels, poetry, and drama) as a form of pass itself, denying or permitting access to varying spatial and material privileges.[20] Just as state forms of identity documentation (censuses, birth and death certificates, fingerprint records, and today's biometric measurement systems) might be read as processes of knowledge-production and power consolidation involved in the creation of transparent, or 'legible' populations (Scott), so too must we understand the novel as a textual practice inside the domain of political power, reproducing it, or in certain publishing climates of censorship,[21] being kept outside of it. In the same way that the novel is used to access certain forms of power (as the pass is), it can consolidate that power, or alternately disrupt the system that confers it. Black and "coloured" apartheid novelists participated in "writing the world," or as Gaytri Chakravorty Spivak nicely puts it, in explicit acts of "geo-graphy," alongside the textual surveillance practices of

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[20] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[21] Censorship laws and pass laws worked in tandem to rigidify the National Party's spatio-economic control. Indeed they parallel one another in significant ways in their attempts to edit places and people, books and articles, allowing certain bodies to be seen under certain conditions, excised, or 'whited out', in others. For a particularly astute discussion of censorship (which Freud defines as 'the judgment to admit or refuse entry'), see J.M. Coetzee, *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 201. See also Peter D. McDonald, *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and Its Cultural Consequences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

statecraft (*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* 30).[22] By reading passes and literary works in tandem with one another, I hope to transform rigidified notions of the literary and the legal, resituating them within wider contexts of discursive interconnection.

<u>Passes in Historical Context</u>

Modernization, colonization, and apartheid were marked by centralized governments' increased presence in subjects' daily lives. Requiring subjects to carry passes at all times helped states consolidate state control over widely heterogeneous populations. As Simon Cole observes "the desire to identify and thereby control [the natives of Europe's colonies; recent migrants; people of color; poor, mobile 'vagrants'; 'degenerates'; and prostitutes] is what fueled the demand for identification technologies 'more than mere criminal investigation" (3)[23]. James Scott explains how this will to classification aimed to reduce difference, sometimes in the attempt to annihilate it altogether. In apartheid South Africa, of course, state policy seemed intent on *rigidifying* categories of difference rather than forcing conformity to one supreme model. Yet this privileging of difference in the form of racial categories in particular, was still a variant

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[22] It is perhaps more accurate to use Breyten Breytenbach's phrase "re-writing the world" to describe the attempts to undo hegemonic discourses that can be found in many black apartheid novels. "Re-writing" is certainly what happened at the moment of transition, particularly in the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. "Re-writing the world" may be the intention of every novelist, but perhaps no more so than for that of the post-colonial writer. Leon de Kock notes this tendency in postcolonial studies to see "Return, reply, writing back, revision, reformulation—these iterative processes of *counter*-assessment […] as being at the heart of the *post* in postcoloniality…" Leon de Kock, "Sitting for the Civilization Test: The Making(s) of a Civil Imaginary in Colonial South Africa," *Poetics Today* 22.2 (2001): 392.

[23] For a discussion of this solely within the colonial context, see Arjun Appadurai, "Number in the Colonial Imagination," *Orientalism and the Post-Colonial Predicament*, ed. C.A. Breckenridge and P. van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

of global state-orchestrated trends to reduce difference, since the state determined what constituted ethnic and racial difference[24] and which differences it could ignore. While the complete erasure of heterogeneity was never fully accomplished, the methods of classification and monitoring devised, though largely reductive, nonetheless had great influence over individuals' everyday experience of living and identity.

The pass system in South Africa was used throughout its history to alternately keep people out, *and* to guarantee them entrance into previously proscribed areas. How the pass system was used to ensure access to a continual, cheap labor supply has been well documented by historians of apartheid.[25] At certain moments during apartheid rule the pass laws functioned to restrict movement, and at other times to facilitate it; variations in the laws reflected the relative political power of certain industries over others at different political junctures, with their specific labor requirements.[26]

Unfortunately, the history of human confinement extends back as far as we have documentary evidence. Freedom of movement is the exception, rather than the rule.

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[24] Afrikaner anthropologists were particularly instrumental in producing knowledge systems to support these categories of difference, and were also notably involved in the construction of the apartheid state. See Robert Gordon, "Apartheid's Anthropologists: The Genealogy of Afrikaner Anthropology," *American Ethnologist* 15.3 (1988).

[25] See Hermann Giliomee and Lawrence Schlemmer, eds., *Up against the Fences: Poverty, Passes and Privilege in South Africa* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985). D. Hindson, *Pass Controls and the Urban African Proletariat in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987). Shula Marks, "Southern and Central Africa, 1886–1910," *The Cambridge History of Africa, from 1870 to 1905*, eds. Roland Oliver and G.N. Sanderson, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject : Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[26] Pass laws fell into disuse, for example, during the nineteenth century, until diamonds and gold were discovered. They were also briefly revoked during World War Two to increase the productivity of various industrial sectors supporting the Allies. See Julia C. Wells, *We Now Demand! The History of Women's Resistance to Pass Laws in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1993) 8.

Using a system of passes to control movement was hardly confined to South Africa alone—under slavery in the U.S., slaves were required to carry passes written for them by their owners whenever they left the confines of the plantations to which they were tethered. But the apartheid state's version of the pass system has a particularly strong historical resonance, explicable, in part, because of its unlikely duration within a period of mass decolonization on the African continent. In addition, its particularly bureaucratized nature, while prone to administrative setbacks, was "the first universal biometric order… unprecedented in the twentieth century" (Mickenberg 105) .

Nor were the pass laws specific to *apartheid* South Africa. A prototype of the "internal passports" system was set up as early as the eighteenth century in the Cape Colony to control the movement of slave laborers on Dutch farms. This practice continued and spread inland under Afrikaner control, particularly after the Great Trek (1830s), and also under the British Union government established at the turn of the century as the Anglo-Boer War ended (Marks "Southern and Central Africa, 1886–1910"). Under apartheid, of course, this incentive— keeping strict tabs on the movement of the labor force—was insidiously covered up by sham legal doctrine which justified capitalist-motivated spatial domination through discourses of theologically and "evolutionarily"-mandated racial segregation.

Arguably the most important moment in the history of passes in South Africa occurred in 1952 with the passage of the misleadingly titled "Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents Act." The shift in policy ushered in by this act was dictated both by the desire to reduce bureaucratic costs (though in fact, it failed to do so), and by an omnipotent "panoptic fantasy" of the apartheid government (Mickenberg 85).

Orchestrated by the "architect of Apartheid," then Minister of Native Affairs, Hendrik Verwoerd, this law standardized the pass system, establishing the bureaucratic machinery to register every adult "African." In 1953 this registration process began: subjects' fingerprints were taken, and their names, place of residence, and place of work, tax status, and "rights" to live, work, and/or reside in certain areas, were assigned by a whole range of state-appointed functionaries. Keith Breckenridge notes that the two major differences that this new law ushered in, were 1) the abolition of the space to write on the "personal file"—neither "Africans" nor their employers could document any mutually-agreed upon contract of labor anymore; and 2) the use of fingerprints to set up a centralized surveillance system. Prior to the implementation of this plan, many black South Africans were required to carry twenty-eight different documents (Mickenberg 87)!

This new system also assigned a reference book number to each person which as the Bewysburo director, Ramsay, put it, monitored black subjects "'from registration to death'" (Mickenberg 87, 97). Yet the state failed to institute a completely foolproof surveillance system. Although steps were taken to make passbooks resistant to tampering, it became clear that, to some extent, this was unavoidable. In addition, the state's failure to cope with the administrative demands fingerprinting all subjects required, meant that the passbook number and photograph became the only way to reliably monitor identity. Partly in response to these failures, by 1962, argues Breckenridge, the Department of Native Affairs "called for more vigorous police intervention and for a 'sharpening' of influx control. It was the state's reliance on these intense coercive measures that made the Dompas (dumb pass) the key instrument of a

brutally-enforced white supremacy after 1962 – a mechanism of capricious policing, mass arrest and imprisonment" (Mickenberg 101).

Inevitably, because of the wide reach of the system, especially after 1952, references to the pass system appeared everywhere: in songs, poems, cartoons, essays, memoirs—wherever the apartheid state intruded. Not to mention in the resistance movement[27].

A Passing Life: The Case of Tununu Susan Makhubu

Your documents, all neatly put together,
Are transferred from the living to the dead,
Here is the document of birth
Saying that you were born, and where and when,
But giving no hint of joy or sorrow,
Or if the sun shone, or if the rain was falling,
Or what bird flew singing over the roof… (Paton)

[27] Though *all* South Africans were legally required to carry the passbook with them at all times, it was largely South African blacks, "coloureds," and Indians, who wanted to burn them. The common experience of the oppressive pass laws created ground for commonality (in complaint) and thus for subjectivities of resistance, culminating in pass protests. This form of resistance began as early as 1908 in Newtown, Johannesburg, with the organized passive resistance efforts led, in part, by Mohandas Gandhi. The Sharpeville shootings in 1960 which resulted in the massacre of at least 69 people by apartheid police, were a response to an organized protest against the passbooks. For a look at women's resistance to the pass laws see Wells, *We Now Demand! The History of Women's Resistance to Pass Laws in South Africa*. For a fictional portrait of black women's seminal role in protests against the pass laws, see Lauretta Ngcobo, *And They Didn't Die* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1999).

Figure 1. By permission of Historical Papers, University of Witwatersrand Library

Passes tell a story too, albeit it one dominated by the "blerry law" which stuck its nose, pen, and rifle into the daily activities of their bearers. While the passbook is not a novel, it is nonetheless imbued with novelistic qualities, and in what follows I consider one woman's passbook as the representation of a life story. As with all readings, this process commingles deduction with subjective assumptions. As with all life stories, the book tells us of one individual's progression through time, only in this case we literally have a *Bildungsroman* on palimpsestic, tattered pages.

For the moment, we can identify at least three ways to read this passbook. Firstly, most importantly, the book was Tununu Susan Makhubu's, and it was she who donated it to the University of Witwatersrand Library after the ANC electoral victory in 1994. The function that it served for her, the symbolic and literal values invested in it, for her, can only be guessed at. Whether she was ever tempted to destroy it, we cannot know. Each page of the book is stamped with the word CANCELLED in bright pink ink. When was this done? When Makhubu's pass was replaced with another one? In 1986, when the pass system was abolished? During the period of transition from apartheid to ANC rule? And why is her face half scratched out?[28] We cannot know. This, we must accept, gives the book the properties of a mystery, but a mystery without resolution, suggestive if open-ended. Thus this first way of reading the pass, through Makhubu's eyes, testifies really to the absence of a way to read, drawing attention more to our own historical subject-position than to any certain knowledge of her own.

A second way to read this book is through the eyes of the apartheid policeman,

[28] The passbook substitutes as a printing-age system of marking that was previously made directly onto the bodies of the enslaved and exploited. Tzvetan Todorov reminds us of the markings Indians wore on their faces—branded names of their owners—which were meant, as writing is in the passbooks, to legally dictate existence.

the “ideal reader” of the book, for whom the book was intentionally designed. Again, there must be limits to our ability to project ourselves backward into his shoes, yet the laws which the policeman was charged with upholding at the pass check allow us a certain amount of assurance about the kinds of assumptions we might make when reading Makhubu’s pass in this way.

The details scrupulously filled in throughout the years to document Makhubu’s movements—her places of employment, her periods of unemployment, her places of residence and forced removal, her trips to doctors for medical inspections and x-rays—all of these were signed off on by a wide variety of apartheid bureaucrats. It must have worked like this: administrators stamped her pass and then filled in the blank spaces by hand. (Were police juggling inkpads, stamps, and pencils on their street patrols along with their billyclubs and guns, or was Makhubu required to present herself at the many offices of the apartheid state for this pleasure?)

From Makhubu’s pass we see she was given various permits by the “Native Commissioner,” “P.O’s” (police officers), “The Non-European Affairs Department,” the “Registering Office,” the “Influx Control office, Bantu Resettlement Board,” “The Municipal Labour Officer,” “The Labour Office,” and “The Bantu Registration Examination Centre.” These individuals and government departments all formed part of apartheid’s broad bureaucratic network and remind us, etymologically speaking, of how often the state changed departments’ euphemistic names to purge them of quickly-acquired negative associations.

So what can we learn from Makhubu’s book? Her pass was issued on February 28, 1959, seven years after the passage of the Abolition of the Passes Act. Presumably,

especially in the urban and peri-urban areas in which she resided, the protocol for checking and validating passbooks was firmly established by the time she received this pass. The final stamp in the book is given 25 years later[29] on November 4, 1984[30], when she is again granted permission by a Municipal Labour Officer to stay in Johannesburg "in terms of Section 10(i) (b) of Act No. 25 of 1945." There is not a stamp for every year of her life in this book, but each time Makhubu leaves a job, there are a sequence of stamps, noting her status as a "workseeker," and then subsequently her permission to reside in a series of places, in and around Johannesburg, after she finds work. Her employers sign her book when she is discharged.[31]

In addition to learning that Makhubu worked at "The Little Imp Manufacturing Co." for six years, and at Phil Arbeter Ltd. in Johannesburg as a "Machinist" for another 11, and another 4 for Hugo Franco as, mysteriously, "lab," we also learn from the pass that she was originally born in Alexandra Township. "Alex" is one of Johannesburg's oldest townships, established in 1912 where, initially, blacks could own land. It is, historically, also one of the most politicized. Relocation efforts implemented by the apartheid government in response to political protests in Alexandra managed at first to

[29] The length Makhubu possessed the pass recalls artist Sue Williamson's 1990 artwork composed of framed images of passbooks, "For Thirty Years Next to His Heart."
[30] The pass laws were repealed in 1986.
[31] Tellingly, the book has no place to note a person's voluntary departure from a job. While it is likely that many blacks were loath to leave steady employment, particularly in times of constant economic hardship, the absence of such an option on the official record forces us to read more than the apartheid policemen did. In such a world, blacks can only be "discharged"; perceived as docile subjects who follow orders, they are thus divested of any agency in determining their own lives. Or so, at least, hoped the passbooks' designers.

halve its population, though today it is vastly overcrowded.[32]

A stamp in Makhubu's passbook reveals that on the 22 of February, 1962, the order was given by one P.O. Iketlo that she be "resettled" and moved from Alexandra Township two months later on April 19th. Her actual removal, however, did not take place until April 24th, an apparent glitch in the administrative order that we cannot explain. It does suggest a number of things however about Makhubu's experience, which again are only conjecture, but lead to the third way of reading this pass—imaginatively.

Did Makhubu prepare to leave Alexandra on the 19th? Did she doubt the order when the police did not arrive, or had they started rounding up others already? Did she welcome the removal from the place she was born? Did she look forward to living in "Zone 2 Diepkloof" as an officer has written into her pass, or was she angry about being moved? Did she welcome the four-roomed "matchbox" house that was presumably assigned her, or abhor it? Or was her response to all these changes mere consensual resignation? Was she politically active in either of these places (Diepkloof, her new home, was also the site of mass protests and underground organizing)? These are clearly questions only the literary can try to answer.

How can we begin to answer them? What follows is an attempt to do so indirectly through an examination of fictional passages directly engaging the pass system. It is in imaginative fiction that we find Makhubu's life fleshed out, but I should make one thing clear. Makhubu's silence is doubled in certain ways by my over-reliance on fiction

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[32] Although "designed for a population of about 70,000…current population estimates vary widely and have been put at figures ranging from 180,000 to 750,000." http://web.mit.edu/urbanupgrading/upgrading/case-examples/overview-africa/alexandra-township.html.

written by black South African men.[33] This is, in part, because it was almost entirely men who dominated the privileged world of fiction writing in South Africa (only two published novels were authored by black South African women in the 1960s, and these from abroad)[34]. Despite the ways these works help us to fill in the missing information about Makhubu's life, so they repeat the erasure by failing to portray women's experiences of an encounter that they too, after 1952, had every day.[35]

Representations of Apartheid's Pass System

> "Jong, kom, kom, kom, pas, man, pas." (La Guma *In the Fog of the Season's End* 67)
>
> "When African people turn sixteen they are born again or, even worse, they are accepted into the mysteries of the Devil's mass, confirmed into the blood rites of a servitude as cruel as Caligula, as merciless as Nero. Its bonds are the entangled chains of infinite rubber stamps, and the scratchy pens in the offices of the Native Commissioners are like branding irons which leave scars for life." (La Guma *In the Fog of the Season's End* 80)

The criticism often levelled against literature written during apartheid—most notably by Njabulo Ndebele and Lewis Nkosi—is that "protest literature" is overly

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[33] Women's pass books unsurprisingly tell different stories from men's. On the opening pages of Makhubu's book we read that her father "Jim" gives consent to Makhubu to work outside the home. It is likely that Makhubu lived with her father at "87 15th Ave, Alexandra T.ship," if not also in Diepkloof. As Julia Wells points out, women often had two jobs during apartheid—outside the home to ensure survival inside the home, where they were also responsible for the domestic work. Did Makhubu come home from her jobs to a house that needed cleaning and meals that needed cooking?

[34] These were novels by Bessie Head and Noni Jabavu. See Dorothy Driver, "*Drum* Magazine (1951-9) & the Spatial Configurations of Gender," *Readings in African Popular Fiction*, ed. Stefanie Newell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

[35] Women were not universally required to hold passbooks until 1952, with the passage of the Natives Abolition of Passes and Coordination of Documents Act, though precursors existed in the form of special permits.

concerned with superficial moralistic portraits of apartheid's injustices, insufficiently attentive to the details of everyday life, and that this attention to *affective* moralities fails to address the larger systemic causes of inequality. "Writers of the fifties and sixties" Ndebele writes, "codified the predominant themes, characters, and situations which were welded into a recognizable grammar of what came to be called 'protest lit.'" (Ndebele *South African Literature and Culture*). This repetition of tropes and themes works, however, to my advantage, since "protest lit" novels obsessively return to descriptions of the pass encounter, revealing how central passbooks were in the production of South African experience.

Though mostly fictional, these works subscribe to the realist tradition, and demand to be read as accurate depictions of actual pass control encounters[36]. Indeed, an engagement with the real world was often a direct intention of the authors of the fictional works under consideration, who saw writing as a confrontation with history, instrumentally geared towards effecting change. As Kelwyn Sole remarks in his discussion of South African Black Consciousness writers of the 1970s and 80s, "[its adherents] rarely perceived what they did as limited to the printed page or performance podium. Literature was regarded as a transformative practice, stirring its practitioners and readership to fresh insights and values… a form of activity which could, through various textual and performance strategies, spread knowledge and truth to its putative black audience" (2)[37].

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[36] For a discussion of realism in African novels, see the special issue of NOVEL edited by Susan Andrade, "Introduction," *NOVEL* 41.2/3 (2008).

[37] I follow Ndebele here in seeing a continuity between the literary productions of the 1950s and 60s, and those influenced by the Black Consciousness movement of the later period. Though certain obvious shifts in philosophical orientation can be noted—most

Though the novels of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s are riddled with representations of the relationship between the state police and their black and 'coloured' targets, and though in many pages we can notice starkly binaristic divides between these two groups, it turns out that, examined together, as a group of descriptions relating the same scenario over and over again, several modes of intersubjectivity emerge. Some of these, as Ndebele bemoans, directly reinforce Manichean oppositions, while some directly or subtly problematize these binaries. Taken together, the descriptions of relation and subject formation extend beyond the rigid boundaries intended by the architects of apartheid laws, and also beyond those usually attributed to these novels. They thus deserve a closer look.

Accepting the pass encounter as a generative one, producing and reproducing subjectivities, places, politics, and powers—we inevitably ask *what* subjectivities and *what* politics emerged in these encounters between South African policemen and the disenfranchised majority population? How do written modes of cultural representation, like the novel, comment upon other modes of writing, particularly when the novels under consideration "protest" forms of social control that rely on techniques of textual documentation to do so? What opportunities does the form of the pass present for rendering bodies *illegible* and thus divesting the state of control over their movements? And the novel?

In what follows I identify three distinct modes of subjectivity at the pass check—

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noticeable in the overt declaration by Black Consciousness writers that they were writing explicitly for black audiences—the two generations of writers are strongly united by the fact that their writing was, almost uniformly, a form of political engagement with the world. As such, the thematic connections position them side by side in a relation of connection rather than rupture.

subjectivities 1) of domination, 2) of "semiotic perception," and 3) of sympathy. As I insisted at the outset, these are not meant to provide a complete catalogue of forms of black subjectivity under apartheid—I have merely separated them out to clarify the functioning of the different modes. Not only do I assume that there are other ways of thinking about subjectivity, I also assume that the modes I identify were dialectically related—that is to say that individuals would alternate between modes from one moment to the next.

1. Ways of Passing in South African Writing: Domination

> "Time and distance were the anticipation of pain." (Ndebele *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* 82)
>
> "The *police* includes everything." (Foucault "Politics and Reason" 79)

The first—subjectivities of domination—suggests a totalizing, Foucauldian form of control in which time, space, and the body are all rigidly disciplined through the intersubjective encounter. Alex La Guma's 1973 novel *In the Fog of the Season's End*, bleakly parodies the absurd totalizing control of the pass laws. In the following scene, a white policeman speaks to a black man. "You are a good kaffir," he says:

> You understand, of course, that you are not allowed to travel from here to take up residence in another place without first having permission to leave here and arrive there? And to remain there, take up residence, to work, to go to work and to return from work, to walk out at certain times, and so on and so forth also requires permission (La Guma *In the Fog of the Season's End* 81-2).

In this scene, the man spoken to acquiesces; however, encounters at roadblocks were not regulated only through speech. The body also internalised the discipline required in such

instances, exhibiting its docility in everyday responses. The main character in Peter Abrahams' 1946 novel, *Mine Boy*, doesn't even need to be spoken to in order to know what is expected of him when he is stopped outside a bakery: "He stopped and looked at [the cakes]. [Xuma] felt a tap on his shoulder and turned. It was a policeman. *Without a word* he fished his pass from his pocket and gave it to the policeman. The policeman *looked at it, looked him up and down*, and returned the pass to him" (Abrahams 62 emphasis mine). In this way, both bodies in the encounter are transformed into vehicles for apartheid ideology—in Foucauldian terms, apartheid as a "disciplinary apparatus" exercised even "infinitesimal power over the active body," over all movements, gestures, and behaviours (Foucault *Discipline & Punish* 137).[38] Indeed "as an array of disciplinary practices, the passport regime linked rewards and punishments to degrees of public conformity to standardized ideological discourses" (Garcelon 88).

So complete was the reach of apartheid doctrine in forming these subjects, that even internal organs could be disciplined. Indeed, La Guma's narrator, describing the fear induced by the threat of the pass control, informs us that "palpitations of the heart had become a national disease" (La Guma *In the Fog of the Season's End* 65). Even the most internal and private human organ—the heart—is caught within the discourse of nation. The biopolitics of sexual relations and reproduction were also closely controlled, since

[38] It is interesting to note that the encounter on a city street has often been the trope used by writers and philosophers to exemplify the emergence of subjectivity, selfhood, and citizenship. This scene recalls Louis Althusser's description of interpellation as a mechanism instantiating subjectivity in everyday encounters on city streets: '*Interpellation,* or hailing…which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing "Hey you there!'… [and] in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*'. Louis Althusser, "Excerpts from "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1968)," trans. B. Brewster, *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004).

passes were required for couples to leave their areas of labor or residence to visit one another[39]. By reducing humans on both sides of the pass encounter to automatons—in the figure of the disciplined policeman as much as in the figure of the black man called on to present his pass—the utility of the docile body was enhanced and its potential for revolution and dissent eclipsed.

As we see in the quote above from La Guma's novel, it is at the offices of Native Affairs that this violence gets in-scripted. The ritualistic inculcation at "the Devil's mass" where young black men were required to go when they turned sixteen to be assigned a pass book, "confirmed [them] into the blood rites of a servitude as cruel as Caligula," where the vampiristic state began the life-long marking of its subjects through the weaponry of writing—"the scratchy pens in the offices of the Native Commissioners are like branding irons which leave scars for life" (La Guma *In the Fog of the Season's End* 80). State writing and violence are inseparable under such conditions of structural domination, and represent, as Roman Jakobson famously wrote of literature, an "organised violence committed on ordinary speech" (Qtd. in Eagleton 2).

As Foucault shows so well, the disciplining and construction of obedient subjectivities, maximised for utility, not only involved regulating the physical body in space, but also required a control of the temporal. The hours of the day were of course regulated by curfews, but as Mr. Laxon Gutsa, "a relatively prosperous builder" in nearby Southern Rhodesia explains, even the time one was legally allowed out of the home was constantly co-opted by the colonial state: "Each time you would move in the street, when

[39] As Mahmood Mamdani has explained, the pass system also strengthened divisions between the rural and urban by mostly only allowing men access to urban areas, thus keeping many women in their traditional or "customary" roles as mothers and wives in the "homelands."

you meet a policeman he would ask you for [the pass]; 10 times a day. 10 policemen a day, you would have to produce it" (Barnes 61). Can Themba's short story "Ten-to-Ten" exemplifies the relationship between apartheid law and its daily regulation of the temporal. It tells the story of a black policeman nicknamed "Ten-to-Ten" by the people of the neighbourhood he patrols, because he begins his shift just before curfew. In the opening passage of the tale, which follows, Themba makes clear how controls over time were just as likely to create panic as controls over space:

> The curfew proper for all Africans in Marabastad, Pretoria, was 10 p.m. By that hour every African, man, woman and child, had to be indoors, preferably in bed; if the police caught you abroad without a 'special permit' you were hauled off to the battleship-grey little police station …and clapped in jail. The following morning you found yourself trembling before a magistrate in one of those out-rooms that served as a court, and after a scathing lecture, you were fined ten-bob. So it behove [sic] everyone, every black mother's son, to heed that bell and be off the streets at ten.
>
> But it was strange how the first warning bell at ten-to-ten exercised a power of panic among us, really out of all proportion. I suppose, watchless at night, when that bell went off and you were still streets away from your house, you did not know whether it was the first warning – ten-to-ten – giving you that much grace to hurry you on, or the fatal ten o'clock bell itself.
>
> However, there were ever women in their yards, peering over corrugated-iron fences and bedstead gates, calling in sing-song voices 'Ten-to-ten! Ten-to-ten!' as if the sound of the bell at the police station down there in First Avenue

> was itself echoed, street after street, urging the belated on, homewards, bedwards, safe from the Law (Themba "Ten-to-Ten" 47).

The bell tolls neither for a death, nor a marriage, nor for people to congregate, but rather as a reminder of the depth with which apartheid rule penetrated and segregated private lives. Turning neighbourhoods into prisons, homes into cells, and humans into the prisoners as well as the guards, this scene demonstrates how seamlessly spatial domination was internalised under apartheid regulation of the temporal. Ideology sings out in the bell and then in the women's voices—"Ten-to-ten! Ten-to-Ten!" By a subtle act of substitution, the women become the very messengers and instruments of apartheid discipline, while the guard's individual identity—his name—marks him as nothing but the physical embodiment of state oppression.

Other manipulations of temporal scales can be found in novels of this period. Passes, for instance, tended to be issued for brief stretches of time, so trips to the Office of Native Affairs were common interruptions in the normal course of a day. "Thank goodness," the narrator of RRR Dhlomo's early novel *An African Tragedy* (believed to have been written in 1928) observes "there was no necessity for him to go to the Pass Office and spend half a day there waiting for his pass to be endorsed" (21). In an article written for *Drum* magazine, Can Themba recounts what actually happened at these pass offices, pointing out how class distinctions between black subjects are quickly flattened under the gaze of the apartheid state. After being X-rayed,

> …you pass into an inner room where you are curtly told to drop your trousers, all of you in a row.
>
> You may be a dignified businessman, a top-class lawyer, a jeweller, a

> wood merchant, or anybody. You will find yourself naked. Well, you wanted a permit to work in Johannesburg didn't you? The official world is not finicky about your embarrassed modesty (Themba "Nude Pass Parade " 78).

The omnipresent gaze of the state works, via humiliation, to produce as docile a subject as possible. One man Themba interviewed for the article, John Raditsebe, a watchmaker, explains: "'This pass […] is so precious that one shuts one's eyes and goes through with the miserable experience" (79). As the eyes of the state remain vigilant and surveying, the eyes of its subject close, almost to the point of blindness.

Even lifespan was subject to the pass laws as Elias, a fictional member of the anti-apartheid resistance movement in La Guma's *In the Fog of the Season's End* contemplates, because his pass incorrectly reflects his age:

> So they made me older than I really am, Elias thought, and smiled to himself. They have command of everything now, even the length of time one is entitled to lived [sic] in this world. If they do not do it with the gun or the hangman's rope, they can easily write it out on a piece of paper, ending days, years, life, like a magician he had once seen at a concert, making playing-cards disappear (128).

As in the earlier scene at the office of Native Affairs, writing is directly accused of enacting violence, with the added detail here that exposes how inexplicably this violence is done—the white writing works "like a magician," appearing almost god-like, choosing, at whim which "playing-cards" to keep and which to erase. Black life, for the white officials in charge, is reduced to an amusing game of chance, for, as Giorgio Agamben shows, the state has the exceptional power to take and give life outside of the strictures of ordinary law (Agamben *Homo Sacer*).

The pass laws thus exerted control over time, space, and also over social relations. Following Foucault, the new relation of power exemplified during apartheid meant "uninterrupted," and "constant coercion …exercised according to a codification that partitions as closely as possible time, space, movement" (*Discipline & Punish* 137). Thus the apartheid government aimed to establish an inescapable, totalizing reign of spatio-temporal-biological-social surveillance and control, though it did not wholly succeed.

2. Ways of Passing in South African Writing: Re-reading Signs

A second mode of subjectivity in evidence in these novels is what I call, following Chela Sandoval's work on Roland Barthes, a subjectivity of "semiotic perception." Although subjectivities of domination were interpellated through the body and through language, as Sandoval points out, "social life under subjugation requires the development of [a] process of semiotic perception and deconstruction; it provides moments when… colonised or subordinated subjects perceive dominant ideology, and understand the distortion that power is capable of imposing on any form" (Sandoval 104-5). "Semiotic perception" presents the condition for the possibility of alternate, resilient subjectivities, cognizant of power's discursive manipulations, and thus, capable of reworking systems of signification to their unanticipated advantage.

Within South Africa for example, the word "pass" came, counter-intuitively, to stand for *not* being able to pass, for a hindrance, an obstacle to the act of freely passing through space. A small piece of paper carried in the pocket or purse came to apportion space in the same way that the segregationist signs at public facilities did. As the words on a beach sign separating the oceanfront into racialized territories could be read as

inscriptions of far more than the mere practical instructions they were meant to convey, so too was the pass read semiotically, as more than a name, an age, and a race, but as the material and symbolic manifestation of an entire system of repressive, white supremacist ideology.

In Abrahams' *Mine Boy* Johannes is in charge of a group of men on the mines. As "boss boy" he is a boss of sorts, but nonetheless answerable to all whites. Using the possessive grammar of ownership employed by whites to convey their status over blacks—"my boy," for example—he distorts the relation of power by referring to his own boss as "my white man." We see this semiotic manipulation when Johannes speaks to an unidentified white man at the mine about the newly hired "Boss boy," Xuma, the character we have already encountered being asked for his pass outside a bakery:

> "Yes?" [asks the white man.]
>
> "There is a new one," Johannes said.
>
> "Your gang?"
>
> "No. For the Red One. Boss boy."
>
> "The Red One has not come."
>
> "My white man said so."
>
> "You mean your boss."
>
> "My white man."
>
> The man at the window stared at Johannes. Johannes returned the stare. The man at the window cursed and turned his eyes to Xuma.
>
> "What is your name?"
>
> "Xuma."

"Where's your pass?" (Abrahams 38).

By insisting on using the phrase "my white man" instead of the ordained "my boss," Johannes draws attention to the race of this man, thus emphasizing racial difference and calling attention to whiteness as otherness, rather than as *sui generis* norm. Yet we see here the limits of semiotic manipulation as a mode of resistance. The demand for the pass, which terminates the discussion, is a weapon of domination that Johannes is unable to return (as he can the stare), since he cannot demand to see the white man's pass. Linguistic deviance is perhaps one of the most essential tools of a subjectivity of semiotic perception. Yet its power to effect change is rare; it enables a subject to "talk back" to power, but not necessarily to change material inequalities. Once more, the powerful pass has the last word.

For Sandoval, Barthes' science of semiology—sign reading[40]—is one of the key "methodologies" used by the oppressed to determine power relations. Citizen-subjects engage semiotics by continually gauging and redrawing their responses to signs, in order to survive *and*, for Sandoval, "to pursue a greater good." The ethical implications of this methodology differentiate it slightly from Homi Bhabha's notion of "sly civility" which describes the colonized subject's intentional subversion of colonial rhetoric and discipline—a mode of behaviour and expression that bypasses the unwitting colonizer's detection (Bhabha *The Location of Culture*). Reading signs well—or practicing

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[40] "As Hegel had already pointed out, the methodology that allows one to read forms of domination as 'artifacts' is a familiar behavior among powerless subjects, who early on learn to analyze every object under conditions of domination, especially when set in exchanges with the master/colonizer (what is his style of dressing? her mode of speaking? why does he gesture? when do they smile?) in order to determine how, where, and when to construct an identity that will facilitate continued existence of self and/or community'" i.e. "sign reading." Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2000) 86.

semiotics—in order to survive, is entirely familiar to Bloke Modisane, author of the apartheid memoir *Blame Me on History*, encapsulates this attitude when he writes: "The shadow of apartheid spreads long over my life…I have to be sane, calculating and ruthless in order to survive…" (56).

Leon de Kock criticises postcolonial studies for dividing responses to colonial power between those defined through oppositionality, and those characterised by mischievous, intentional rhetorical and material manipulation[41]. So it is important to note

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[41] One way to achieve this, was through the notorious practice of passing. Passing as something other than what one is, or passing one's thoughts off as other than they are, is of course nothing new in the long long history of subjection. Often it was an essential skill for getting by or getting ahead. Modisane recalls his experience learning history in school:

> It was impossible to understand history, it showed a truth I could not accept, so I learned my history of South Africa like a parrot, I reproduced the adjectives describing African chiefs, and for external examinations I added a few of my own adjectives to flatter the white examiners.
>
> "Which adjectives did you use?" I asked classmates, after writing the examinations. "I described Dingane as malicious, venomous, ferociously inhuman, beastly, godless; I should get a good mark." Bloke Modisane, *Blame Me on History* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986) 41.

As the character Brian Redfield recounts in *Passing*, Nella Larsen's famous 1929 novel, passing as white confers power on the passing subject, since she has a firmer grip on the nuances of a situation than the one who is unwittingly having the wool pulled over his eyes. "It seems to me" Redfield tells his wife Irene, "that you, my dear, had all the advantage. You knew what his opinion of you was [racist, in this case], while he— Well 'twas ever thus. *We know, always have. They don't. Not quite.* It has, you will admit, its humorous side, and sometimes, its conveniences" Nella Larsen, Charles R. Larson and Marita Golden, *The Complete Fiction of Nella Larsen*, Anchor Books ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 2001) 215.

Yet appropriating the "master's tools" is a form of acting, or interpellating whiteness, a simultaneous self-identification with, and alienation from, the white man. Modisane provides another example of this when he recalls his behavior during his daughter, Fiki's, birth:

> I was pacing outside the room, like the Hollywood cliché of the nervous husband, but I was not in a film and Fiki was not being delivered in antiseptic Hollywood hospital wards, she was in a rooming-house in Sophiatown, in a yard littered by the dog, by the droppings of pigeons and fowls, spiced with skokiaan fumes and the smells of the outdoor

Sandoval's emphasis on a mode of semiotic perception that carries the possibility of an ethically conscious relation. This form of interaction relies less on manipulation than on necessity (survival), yet it also promises an imminent intersubjective relation characterized by productive, positive exchange. I explore this possibility briefly towards the close of this section, and more fully in the following chapters.

Sandoval tends, however, to overstate the revolutionary possibilities of semiotic perception. Where she reads resistance, it is often possible to find stagnation and entrenched subjection with no wiggle room for the production of alternate modes of interaction between oppressed and oppressors. As Cindi Katz notes, "When it comes down to it, feeling good, even when it is called something as fancy as "reconstituting one's subjectivity in the face of power," through all manner of discursive practices and independent readings is simply not enough to transform the social relations of oppression and exploitation that are the cornerstone of so many people's daily lives (Katz 242). Nowhere is this foreclosure of resistance more apparent than in the strictly defined encounter at the pass check.

Trickster-like manipulation should not be simplistically read as resistance, since it can hardly be that this behaviour fundamentally changes anything about the system

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> lavatory…There was little reason for anxiety about complications… yet *I could not resist miming the histrionics of the anxious white husband*, as parodied—I hope—in Hollywood films; I was pacing in front of the door, *affectedly* nervous, chain smoking, stopping, listening, continuing the marathon, all to the amusement and delight of young brother Pancho and Suzan" Modisane, *Blame Me on History* 71. my emphasis.

Acting—or "signifying'" as Henry Louis Gates' famously explained—is a constant feature of an oppressed subjectivity, thus it comes as no small irony that Modisane worked as an actor in the United States where he finally ended up as an exile.

itself.[42] Nor, however, is this masking entirely negligible. This "methodology" of responding to the language of power through a reversing of the already doubled double-talk of apartheid policies assumes a relation of antagonism, which is at least a move away from the passive docility of the subjectivity of pure domination. Indeed, following Fanon's recognition of the "values, morals, and ideologies of dominant Euro-American cultures…. as 'artifacts'" we may say that semiology permits new possibilities for subject formation, since forms of oppression are understood to be products, not *ipso facto* ontological conditions of existence (Sandoval 86). Sandoval explains: "Such emancipation requires citizen-subjects to 'incarnate a new type' of subjectivity. Fanon describes this process as occurring through a 'slow,' 'painful,' re-'composition of my self in an ongoing process of mutation'" (Qtd. in Sandoval 129). As these subjectivities, new and old, are born from the ideological structures and counteractions determining them, so do they effect intersubjective relations in turn. While it is hard to identify *when* subjectivities emerge that escape mere ideological dictates—for Fanon, this process is "slow" and "painful"; indeed it is an "*ongoing* process"—they can ultimately redefine the intersubjective relation in addition to the subjective position, and thus open the possibility to the introduction of ethics into all encounters.

So how was the pass manipulated semiotically by its bearers? One obvious way is through the forgery and doctoring of passes. Changing names, races, ages, and permissions clearly expresses a form of flexibility in the face of the rigid pass laws, albeit

[42] Cindy Katz's progressive model of the three Rs—resilience, reworking, and resistance—is a useful model for identifying the nuances of responses to power that fall outside the realm of mere capitulation.

one the state had not counted on[43]. In some cases the absence of passes among certain groups, could also, ironically, mean a flexibility of identity. Before 1952 this was often the case for women, and in colonial Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), "'the native female name has no stability and because of the lack of documents for native females, may be changed from time to time at will'" permitting a mobility for women entirely unknown to men (qtd. in Barnes 72). Documents were flexible methods of identity regulation, though offering the pretense of permanence. Timothy Longman points out that during the Rwandan genocide the instability of documents, and their susceptibility to forgery, sometimes paradoxically reinforced rather than undid essentialist racial categories:

> During the genocide, the realization that official documents could be forged created an uncertainty about individual identities. This suggests that in Rwanda today *ethnic identity is understood as an essential characteristic of individuals, not an official designation*. Thus, ironically, while official documents were not a reliable determinant of individual identity, their usage by colonial and postcolonial governments nevertheless helped to transform the manner in which Rwandans regard identity. *In part because of the issuance of identity cards, most Rwandans today, unlike in precolonial times, believe that ethnicity is a fixed trait of individuals*" (347 my emphasis).

By placing the onus of *in*authenticity on official identity cards in Rwanda, the ethnic ironically came to be understood as an essential biological trait, verifiable through the body if not on paper; in the South African case this occurred as well with racial

[43] In one of Athol Fugard's plays, a character assumes the passbook—an identity—of a dead man. Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead; and, the Island* (New York: Viking Press, 1976).

categories.[44] This can be seen today in the endurance of the "coloured" identity in contemporary South Africa.[45] Identity is therefore, in certain ways, a product of the state, and even, via the pass system, a commodity, exchangeable or exhaustible, depending on the material and ideological needs of the governing powers. La Guma elucidates this commodity-identity link best when he describes how "[The pass officers] could give you a name and an age, all nicely ready-made, like a hat or a coat out of a shopwindow" (La Guma *In the Fog of the Season's End* 123).

Jane Caplan and John Torpey deter us from understanding such state-mandated identity documentation practices merely through a negative lens of fascist control. For them, this approach fails to "capture the ways in which human ingenuity and recalcitrance have taken up the state's tools and turned them against themselves. This is

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[44] Garcelon notes how this also happened in Russian conceptions of *national* identity. "[Paradoxically], the internal passport replicated particular national identities at the expense of the internationalist ideology of 'new Soviet man,' rather than gradually dissolving them into a generic Soviet identity as Soviet leaders had hoped" "…the disciplinary project …engineering an ideologically prescribed identity foundered on its own contradictory practice of abetting the reproduction of the very 'national' identities it aimed to displace Marc Garcelon, "Colonizing the Subject: The Genealogy and Legacy of the Soviet Internal Passport," *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World*, eds. Jane Caplan and John Torpey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 99-100.

[45] Although the term was initially used by the racist imperial and apartheid governments, institutionalized as a legal identity under National Party rule, and although this fact is well known within the "coloured" communities in South Africa, the term is still used by many who continue to identify themselves by this term, refusing to situate themselves under the umbrella term "black" that has, at least since the emergence of the Black Consciousness movement, served as a catch-all term for those minorities oppressed by the white apartheid government. "Coloureds" or *Bruin Afrikaners* are not solely responsible for this denomination, as the practice of differentiating between "coloureds," "blacks," and "whites" also continues within the more rigidly defined communities of "black" and "white" South Africans. See Grant Farred, "Better the Devil You Know?," *Souls* 2000. Zoë Wicomb, "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa," *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*, eds. Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

not just a matter of forgeries and frauds, but of the creation of new identities and names, a parallel world of revised or resistant identities and relationships" (6). Yet their reluctance to totalise state practices overcompensates by assigning an ontologically positive association to the foundation of "new identities and relationships." Caplan and Torpey thus ignore the more ambiguous "identities and relationships" (such as "passing" subjects who viciously defend apartheid dogma) which such regulative legislations and material and linguistic practices may also engender. It is not remiss for Caplan and Torpey to want to open up a place within the practices of state surveillance systems for citizen-subjects to subvert juridico-political attempts at total spatial domination, however, when new identities which are moral and material improvements on previous ones emerge out of such a system, it is important that these are understood as anomalies within a system which refuses to recognize them.

3. Ways of Passing in South African Writing: Sympathy

So far I have identified two forms of response to the interpellations of the apartheid state, both of which have received considerable attention in studies of colonial and marginal subjectivity. The third form of subjectivity I examine involves a sympathetic approach to the oppressor—a "sympathy from below." In this I concur with de Kock and Mbembe when they problematize reading colonial and postcolonial subject formation solely through the lens of "false consciousness," oppositionality, or "sly civility" ("African Modes"). In general, scholars of the postcolonial have tended to shy away from an exploration of subjectivities which do not straightforwardly privilege the moral superiority of colonized and subjected groups—subjectivities of consent and

collaboration, for instance.[46]

The excerpt from Abrahams' novel, *Mine Boy*, referred to earlier, illuminates the problem I am getting at. Here it is again, with an additional line:

> He stopped and looked at [the cakes]. He felt a tap on his shoulder and turned. It was a policeman. Without a word he fished his pass from his pocket and gave it to the policeman. The policeman looked at it, looked him up and down, and returned the pass to him. *Xumas [sic] could see he was a kind one* (Abrahams 62).

Previously, this passage provided a good example of how interpellated subjectivities are produced at the bodily level, without necessary recourse to speech. But with the addition of the next line, we are forced to wonder how it is that Xuma knows this policeman is "kind." Abrahams provides no further clues in the rest of the section. They are not necessary, anyway, since it is clear to the reader that Xuma must have quickly gone through a process of assessment and interpretation, a process very much a part of daily subjectivity. By *reading the signs* of the policeman's body, he comes to the conclusion that this particular officer would be agreeable and easy to deal with.

But what is perhaps of greater interest here, is the conclusion that Xuma draws. That a policeman—any policeman—working for the apartheid state can be deemed "kind" hints at a whole realm of ambiguity in which the agents of oppression are understood by the victims as complex human beings rather than as mere embodiments of aggression. That Xuma can find a "kind" policeman, and that Xuma does not express

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[46] For more on the historicist tendency to define African subjectivity via systems of opposites, see Achille Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing," *Public Culture* 14.1 (2002), Njabulo Ndebele, *South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

further shock at so doing, suggests that this was not a surprise to him, that in fact, there were other "kind" policemen working for the apartheid state, and that intersubjective relations between policemen and the subjects they attempted to regulate were not all characterised by stark opposition and violence. A passage such as this one from Abrahams' novel challenges Ndebele's accusation that such "protest lit" simplified apartheid oppression by relying on Manichean oppositions between good/bad and black/white, since, just for this moment in the text at least, we see that a virtue normally associated with goodness—kindness—is attributed to a policeman—the figure most often caricatured as the personification of evil. That these moments are infrequently depicted in "struggle" literature may attest less to the infrequency of such sympathetic cross-racial or intra-racial encounters, and more to the politically motivated intentions the novelists had. Here, I draw closer to Ndebele's charge that these novels fail to depict the nuances of everyday life, caught up as they often are, in their need to effect political change through portraits of rigidly divided racial groups. Nonetheless, such moments *do* emerge, however fleetingly, and hint at a range of intimacies and identifications rarely discussed in black apartheid literature.

This example of sympathy from below is another method that oppressed groups use to transmogrify extant structures of inequality.[47] I will discuss this at far greater length in Chapter Three.

Here I argue that, counterintuitively, sympathy for those who oppress and dominate is an additional mode of survival for subjected groups, and provides *at times* a way for imagining and theorizing alternative forms of relation. One way of explaining

[47] Sandoval's "methodologies" of the oppressed, although intervening in ideological subject formation, do not include the sympathetic.

this form of intersubjective relation is, of course, through paternalism, however, in the apartheid state an individual's relation to an unknown policeman was not the same at all as the kind of relation as that between, say, a slave and her master—the classic paradigm for describing paternalism (Genovese). A man or woman stopped by an entirely unknown policeman can scarcely have felt the kind of complicated love that has been well documented in explorations of relations between slaves and their owners[48].

How such sympathy is cultivated in early childhood reading practices was the subject of the next chapter. And how this sympathy "for the devil" is taken up in the literature of the post-apartheid years is the focus of Chapter Three. It is clear, however, when returning to the pass laws, that there was rarely room within the intersubjective encounter at the pass check for such ambiguous relations. Despite the marked openness suggested by the passage in Abrahams' novel—an openness to a relation characterised by more than just strict opposition, possessing the potential for alternative conceptions of relation—subjectivities interpellated by the pass laws tended to be restricted to the first two forms I discussed, due to the control effected by the passbook surveillance system. Within such rigid confines, individual identity and relation were tightly circumscribed, and seldom found ways to escape predictability.

Coda: Contemporary Surveillance, Biometrics, and the New Pass Laws

Write down!
I am an Arab
And my identity card number is fifty thousand.
I have eight children
And the ninth will come after a summer

[48] For a fictional portrait of this affective dilemma, see Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (Boston: Beacon, 1988).

Will you be angry?
(Darwish)

Unfortunately, the pass laws cannot be relegated to history, understood as ways of state control best left in the past. Document policing is still employed in state practices to control racialized bodies, and thus the formation of subjectivities produced through such a system as apartheid remains crucial for understanding intersubjective and ethical relations today. Perhaps more disturbing than the use of biometric surveillance techniques to monitor national and international populations is the way that such processes have been normalized. What was once only South Africa's Benthamite dreamscape of state control, perceived by most nations as the exception of apartheid, looks normal today to subject-citizens, migrants, and refugees worldwide. Breckenridge explains how, ironically, contemporary democratic South Africa may be the first nation-state to produce an electronically-based population surveillance system to monitor employment, criminal, medical, tax, credit and travel histories, all through one simple card. One particularly sinister implication of South Africa's Home Affairs National Identification System (HANIS) is its involvement with profit-driven companies and banks who, with the express approval of the ANC government, are encouraged to use the identification cards to extract profit. The great irony is, of course, that while "New South Africa" may be the first democratic country to implement such a process, its whole system of identification rests squarely on the archival resources and administrative networks left behind by the apartheid state. A further legacy of apartheid, and one which, it could be argued, characterises most modern states, is that the fantasy to "grasp the identity, and history, of its elusive citizens" continues to define the South African government's agendas, despite

the injustices promulgated in the name of such a fantasy, and despite the system's structurally inefficient, and blatantly incompetent failures (Foucault "Politics and Reason" 271).

Today, the parallels being made with increasing frequency between Israel's treatment of Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere, and South Africa's programmatic apartheid regime, means that we cannot stop looking at how state-driven ideology works through the tight policing of geographic and textual borders.[49] We should be looking for ways to cross those borders, both at the ideological and material level of state practices, and at the intersubjective and interactive level of the intimate. As I have outlined in this chapter, state-mandated oppression can severely interfere with human beings' capacity for sympathetic identification, especially when violence or the threat of violence reduces entire groups of people to mere "bare life" by defining their existence as only that which is not-yet-dead (Agamben *Homo Sacer*). However, as the forgery and tampering of passbooks reminds us, apartheid failed to tamp out all creativity, and this is further evidenced in the anti-apartheid literary output of the period. The persistence of such alternative modes of expression attests to the endurance of imaginative modes of relation, and indeed, as I have argued above, one such mode—the sympathetic—was fostered, ironically, through interactions with the apartheid state that occurred at passblocks and elsewhere. By forcing blacks and whites into encounters with one another—even in this most unbalanced of situations—blacks were compelled, against their will perhaps, to imagine whiteness as an identity or subjectivity that could not be simply codified through

[49] See Klein, Naomi, "Enough. It's Time for a Boycott," *The Guardian*, 2009; Lloyd, David, "Teachers against Occupation: Open Letter to President Obama," February 1, 2009, <http://www.teachersagainstoccupation.org/home/?p=13>.

recourse to polarizing bromides about pure evil. While such acts of sympathetic imagining rarely resulted in ethical acts of interpersonal relation, these were not entirely absent during apartheid, as Abrahams' *Mine Boy*, and his subsequent 1948 novel about interracial apartheid romance shows (Abrahams *The Path of Thunder*). Other forms of sympathetic cross-racial identification were also cultivated via readings in popular culture, as I explore in the following chapter. Together, these should serve as examples of how common it was for blacks to have to think about white subjectivity, and not always, as is the case with the passbooks, as a way to negotiate questions of life and death. Reading, we shall see, for the sole purpose of entertainment, also encouraged sympathetic identification that fostered interracial identification in many different reading populations.

Chapter Two: Not Western: Race, Reading, and the South African Photocomic

In 1976, residents of Soweto burned down a newsstand because it was selling the propagandist comic, *Mighty Man*, whose eponymous hero was a black caped crusader modeled on the Marvel superheroes from U.S. comics[50]. In it, Mighty Man "leaps across rooftops in a single bound, dodges bullets with lightning speed and smashes one pot-smoking gang of bad guys after another" (Willenson, Younghusband and Manning 48). . Bill Mantlo, a commentator in *Comics Journal*, explains how the comic attempts to persuade its black readers to conform with apartheid's ideology: "*Mighty Man*," he writes, "preaches against the owning of firearms—to blacks. He propounds a message of nonviolence—to blacks. He sermonizes subservience to the white man and the police—to blacks" (75). The comic even extols apartheid police: "Bless that fearless crimefighter called *Mighty Man!* And bless all those *gallant police officers* who protect us from the evil forces that would *destroy* us all!" (Qtd. in Willenson, Younghusband and Manning 48). The comic understandably outraged its targeted black readers since its message propounded subservience to whites and policemen, yet their incendiary act did more than just destroy the comics. Taking the situation into their own hands, the fire set by black readers directly linked reading with the development and expression of political agency.

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[50] J. van Zyl Albert, the owner of the company producing *Mighty Man*, also ran *To the Point*, a right wing news magazine. Yet despite these links, allegations that the comic was a propagandistic tool of white supremacists were adamantly denied. Jeff P. McGoff, the American owner of the printing company in the townships insisted that they were merely meant to "help educate the black man in the ways of Western society, social concerns and free enterprise." Nonetheless, Richard Manville, the U.S. consultant who had initially hoped that a success in South Africa would provide justification for a market in the U.S. as well, stopped publishing the comic in direct response to the burnings Bill Mantlo, "Bill Mantlo's Column on South African Comics," *Comics Journal*. 43 (1978): 77.

Though overshadowed by the deathly events of the Soweto uprising, this act of dissension nonetheless highlights how textual production and consumption are not always solely operating at superstructural levels divorced from everyday material relations. This chapter looks at another popular genre that many blacks read during apartheid—the photocomic—to consider particularly the role that reading played in the formation of black ethical consciousness.

After a discussion of the form itself, I turn to readers' response to and memories of photocomics to focus on one case study of Western, or "cowboy" photocomics through which I elaborate my ideas about the relationship between race and ethics in South African reading practices. Ultimately, I argue that despite the apparent visual apartheid of South African photocomics, reading practices destabilized their supremacist fantasies. Thus we may see in the photocomic a case in which the ambiguity of the literary extends into generic realms often overlooked in literary criticism. This chapter makes a case for the expansion of theories of literature and ethics to an inclusion of mass produced and popular genres along with genres of "high literature," in order to recognize the importance of all acts of reading in the creation of the ethical.

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The photocomic[51] was a popular form of mass entertainment in the mid-twentieth century, consumed widely in Europe, Latin America, and Africa.[52] Yet despite its

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[51] Photocomics' genealogy is not entire clear – a generic instability reflected in the different names used to describe them. These include photonovels, photo-novellas, photo-novelettes, photostories, photoromans, photo soapies, picture comics, photo-comix, and "bookies."
[52] In 1978 the photocomic is "omnipresent among the masses in Latin America, Northern Africa, France, and Italy," write Cornelia Butler Flora and Jan L. Flora, "The Fotonovela as a Tool for Class and Cultural Domination," *Latin American Perspectives* 5.1 (1978):

international reach, this now almost-defunct genre has received scant critical notice within literary and cultural studies—an omission that has been attributed to the photocomic's status as the "most degraded form of mass 'literature'" (Krauss 300).[53] Singular exceptions exist, such as Jan Baetens and Ana Gonzalez's *Le Roman-Photo,* yet the analyses in their collection are largely Eurocentric, and rarely engage with the considerable theoretical contributions of postcolonial studies. When photocomics are studied in colonial and postcolonial contexts, critics attend only to their recent reincarnation as pedagogic tools,[54] and do not consider them as aesthetic forms interpellating their own specific reading practices.

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135. Giet provides some figures describing French consumption of *Nous Deux*, a popular romantic photocomic that debuted in 1947. In that year they printed 150,000 copies; 1950, 700,000 copies; 1957, 1.5 million copies; 1964, 1 million copies; 1971, 850,000 copies; 1977, 1 million. Sylvette Giet, "Le Roman-Photo Sentimental Traditionnel Lu En France," *Le Roman-Photo*, eds. Jan Baetens and Ana Gonzalez (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996) 13. All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.

[53] In their otherwise useful survey of the black press in South Africa prior to 1979, Les and Donna Switzer characteristically exclude "[t]he large number of photo-novella or photo-story magazines in comic-book format for blacks that have appeared in the past 25 years or so. Although these publications have undoubtedly filled a need," they continue, "*their value as potential source material for researchers remains questionable* and, in any event, it would take another book to describe the publications in this field." Donna Switzer and Les Switzer, *The Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho: A Descriptive Bibliographic Guide to African, Coloured, and Indian Newspapers, Newsletters and Magazines 1836-1976*, ed. James C. Armstrong (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1979) ix. Emphasis mine. Unlike the comic, "the photographic novel of the 1980s never has been taken seriously in all its aspects," writes Jan Baetens, "The Intermediate Domain, or the Photographic Novel and the Problem of Value," *Critical Inquiry* 15.2 (1989): 284-5. In Chile, *fotonovelas* were banned by Pinochet's government in the mid-1970s for being "morally degenerate": Flora and Flora, "The Fotonovela as a Tool for Class and Cultural Domination," 136.

[54] See recent work incorporating Paolo Freire's theories of teaching, especially Laura Nimmon, *Photonovels through Critical Pedagogy: A Consciousness Raising Health Literacy Project with Esl Speaking Immigrant Women* (Saarbrücken, Germany: Verlag Dr. Müller, 2009).

This chapter locates the photocomic in the historical context of apartheid South Africa and reconsiders questions of genre and popular culture using the theoretical framework of colonial and postcolonial studies. While certain "universal" characteristics of the photocomic may explain its global success, the South African examples took particular forms, shaped as they were by the political, cultural, and racial stipulations of a censorship board with quite different aims from those of similar regulatory bodies elsewhere.[55] Of course censorship extended far beyond institutional and administrative boundaries; under apartheid, white supremacist ideology inevitably shaped cultural production through consent as well as coercion.

Mirroring trends in popular genre fiction, photocomics follow narrative conventions of romances, mysteries, Westerns, and crime thrillers, popularized in pulp fiction and film. Familiar characters and plot conventions from these were modulated (usually by anonymous authors) to fit the photocomic form, which consisted of sequences of photos overlaid with text (figure 2).

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[55] The censorship board looked at publications as a matter of course if they were foreign imports. South African publications were examined only if they caused controversy. Nonetheless a "climate of self-censorship was encouraged by government statements of intent and a long-drawn-out process of investigation into 'undesirable publications' and the press." Christopher Merrett, *A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1995) 35. See also McDonald, *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and Its Cultural Consequences*. Coetzee, *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship*.

FLASH October 1965

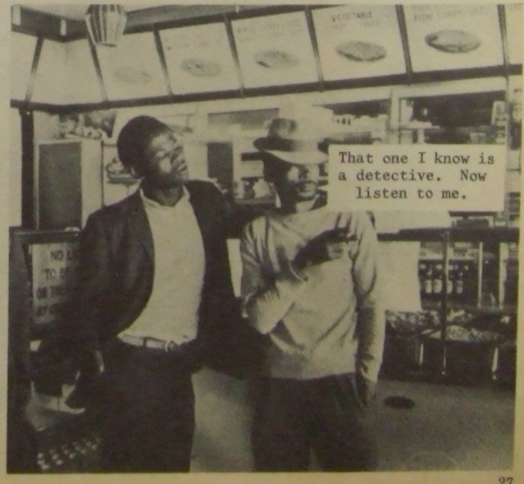
DETECTIVE STORY

THE KEY TO MURDER

Follow the exciting career of the fearless twin detectives Bravo and Morgan in their fight against crime. Read about their thrilling adventures against Duba-Duba the elusive leader of a notorious gang operating in the underworld.

A MURDER HAS BEEN COMMITTED AND THE TWIN DETECTIVES BRAVO AND MORGAN MEET AT A RESTAURANT AS ARRANGED.

UNKNOWN TO THE DETECTIVES THE FEARED GANG LEADER DUBA-DUBA AND ONE OF HIS MEN ARE THERE TOO.



27

Figure 2: *A page from "The Key to Murder" story in* Flash *(1965). Special Collections, Michigan State University Libraries.*

Much like comic books, they were often serialized, and many of the popular titles in South Africa, such as *Great, Kid Colt*, *Tessa*, *Dr. Conrad Brand* and *Grensvegter* ran for upwards of twenty years.[56] An especially popular photocomic, *See: Romantic Adventures in Photos*, ran for over thirty years between 1963 and 1995.

Though studies of photocomics have largely overlooked the African continent, we can assume from their long publication history as well as the abundant references to them in published and on-line memoirs, that theirs was an extensive and multi-racial readership[57]. Precisely quantifying the numbers of readers is difficult as photocomics circulated mainly in a secondary economy of informal distribution through trading, swapping and lending. Nonetheless Antonio Altarriba notes that in Spain,

> Following analysts' estimates from that time, and keeping in mind that photo-novels were swapped, left in public places, hair salons and so on, and that there was also an important lending market, this kind of publication had more than five

[56] Dates for the popular titles are based on the records of the National Library of South Africa. *Tessa* ran from 1975-85 and then merged with *Kid Colt* to form *Tessa and Kid Colt*; *Grensvegter*, 1972-1995; *Swart Luiperd*, 1976-1995; *Die wit tier,* 1977-1995; *Young* Love (reincarnated as *Love Story* including *Charmaine*), 1974-1995; *Ruiter in Swart* & *Kid die Swerwer* (the Afrikaans *Kid Colt*), 1985-into the'90s; *Secrets plus Louise* (a merger of *Secrets* and *Louise*), 1984-1993; *See: romantic adventures in photos*, 1963-1995; *Verdwaalde Harte ("Ons Dominee Reeks") [en] Saal 10 Ongevalle*, 1984-1995, *Eerste Liefde [en] Dr. Conrad Brand*, 1985-1995. Photocomics also ran in *Drum*, the popular magazine for black South Africans, with local editions in Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria. D. Dodson, "The Four Modes of *Drum*: Popular Fiction and Social Control in South Africa," *African Studies Review* 17.2 (1974).
[57] For representative examples, see Lin Sampson, "One Last Picture Show," *Now You've Gone 'N Killed Me: True Stories of Crime, Passion, and Ballroom Dancing* (Cape Town: Oshun, 2005) 83-8. Loren Kruger, "'Shoo--This Book Makes Me to Think!' Education, Entertainment, and 'Life-Skills' Comics in South Africa," *Poetics Today* 22.2 (2001): 484. *In Praise of the Humble "P*** Boekie" and Pinup Girls*, Available: http://www.allatsea.co.za/army/pboek.htm, 25 March 2011.

million readers every fifteen days, more than a third of the country's female population (Altarriba 43).

Such analyses are hard to locate in the South African context. Indeed with such undervalued[58], disposable forms of mass entertainment, it is impossible to establish a trustworthy account of how many people read the photocomics in South Africa, though we may assume their success in the marketplace only hints at the level of readership they actually acquired.

Plentiful references to the "bookies" can be found on the internet where readers of the photocomics reminisce at length about these childhood staples. In a 2009 radio report, one former reader asks:

> Who does not remember the row of "bookies" hanging from a string at your corner café shop or sneaking a copy and reading it surreptitiously under the bed — because "there were people kissing in it, for heaven's sake!" If you were ever caught with these "haraam (forbidden) bookies" as a youngster, no way would you be spared a hiding, because naturally you would have been "ougat" (precocious) ("Photo Stories Make a Return").

The language in the final sentence, with its inclusion of Arabic and Afrikaans terms, suggests the reader's coloured identity. Depictions of coloured subjects are largely absent in the South African photocomics, whose racially neat division between photocomics for

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[58] One reader's choice of words exemplifies the general way photocomics were viewed: "These trashy produced pieces of *literature* fascinated us because you did not need an imagination, and if you did not understand the text you could always look at the pictures." *In Praise of the Humble "P*** Boekie" and Pinup Girls*. Emphasis original. Despite his initial dismissal of the form, the author, a former member of the South African Defence Force, nostalgically describes the role photocomics played in reinforcing troop morale.

whites and photocomics for blacks also eradicates this racial identity. Indeed, the absent coloured reader haunts this discussion of the photocomics, in her exclusion from the stories, and consequently in my discussion. It is essential to remember, as this reader reminds us, that coloureds were as likely to be reading photocomics as the strategically intended racially-divided audiences.

Origins and Aesthetics of the Photocomic

The photocomic is generally thought to have emerged in postwar Italy,[59] but its origin is difficult to pinpoint. Sylvette Giet argues that the photocomic emerged via the "fumetti" (Italian cartoons) or "romans dessinés" (cartoon novels), which were already mixed genres, combining literature, theatre, and film (5). Benoît Peeters situates the photocomic within a larger history of sequential photography and cinema stretching all the way back to the early works of Edward Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Maray (16). Roland Barthes enigmatically locates the genre's birth "in the lower depths of high culture" (66). Other critics suggest that the primary precursor to the photocomic was the comic, with its obvious combination of images and text. Indeed the term photocomic is itself unstable since it attempts to splice two very separate genres—the photograph and the comic—into one unified cultural product[60].

[59] B. Peeters, "Le Roman-Photo: Un Impossible Renouveau?," in Baetens and Gonzalez (eds), pp. 15-23; Flora and Flora, "The Fotonovela."

[60] Taking this confusion of signification a step further, Altarriba distinguishes between the photoroman and the photoromance, while Flora and Flora insist that the photoroman is "a love story" and distinguish it from the *fotoaventura*. Antonio Altarriba, "Le Roman-Photo En Espagne," *Le Roman-Photo*, eds. Jan Baetens and Ana Gonzalez (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996) 52. Flora and Flora, "The Fotonovela as a Tool for Class and Cultural Domination," 135.

Peeters locates the dearth of critical responses to the photocomic precisely in this generic instability: "Its deadlock stems from the fact that it has never existed as a genre in of itself, but simply as a sub-product, derived from another medium… In this sense, the photoroman would have no history. It would be immediately associated with borrowing, adaptation, copying" (17). Scholars have compared the photocomic to the telenovela, to soap operas, to cinema, to photo-essays, to the "Nouveau roman," even to the dream[61]—indeed few know how to discuss the genre without resorting to a comparison. Perhaps the predominance of comparative analyses has contributed most to the photocomic's belittlement. Critical focus on its generic instability may well contribute to its denigration and obsolescence, rather than rehabilitating it as a worthy object of study.

Yet its generic inscrutability is hard to avoid, and the processes of photocomic production further contribute to this[62]. South African photocomic producers followed European examples by both revamping Italian ones for South African consumption—by translating and reprinting them—and by producing their own series of photocomics.

Dianne, a white actress in several popular serial photocomics published by Republican Press—the firm largely responsible for producing and distributing the popular titles of the period—describes the relatively simple process of shooting a photocomic:

> On the whole, it only took a morning to shoot the entire book. We used to get there by 08h30 and were finished between 12h00 and 14h00 depending on your

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[61] Roger G. van de Velde, "Le Roman-Photo Intérieur Et Son Reportage," *Le Roman-Photo*, eds. Jan Baetens and Ana Gonzalez (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996).

[62] "The low cost of a romantic photoroman, the material banality of its presentation, its extra-library distribution and also its protocols of collective reading, are all contributing factors that seem to condemn the traditional photoroman to being nothing but a degraded object, less for reading than for consuming," writes Baetens Jan Baetens, "Le Roman-Photo *in Situ*," *Le Roman-Photo*, eds. Jan Baetens and Ana Gonzalez (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996) 36.

> part in the book. Dennis Griffiths was the co-ordinator and he would phone and tell us (for example) to bring 3 day outfits, 1 evening outfit and a bikini. Obviously in the "period" books like "Ruiter in Swart" or "Kid Colt" we would wear the outfits from that era in which case we had to take off our watches and were not allowed to wear nail polish.
>
> We used to shoot all the scenes in location: all the scenes in the doctor's office, then all the scenes in the restaurant etc. A note was made of what outfit was worn so that there was continuity and we used to have to change clothes countless times during the shooting of a book. All of us were quite adept at changing in the back of the Combi! Even then, it was a good laugh to go through the books when they were published and see all the mistakes that were made...! (Dianne)[63].

In addition to being cheap to make—a car functioned adequately as a changing room—photocomics were sold alongside other cheap magazines, and were thus associated with other denigrated genres such as pornography.[64] In 1963, under the Publications and Entertainment Act in South Africa, "[t]he import of all publications costing less than 50¢ was prohibited, in a move claimed by the authorities to be targeted against pornography" (Merrett 60). This subsumption of the cheaply produced and cheaply acquired photocomic under the umbrella of the pornographic (the average price in 1971 was

[63] "Actors" in the photocomics enjoyed some celebrity, although the work was not particularly lucrative. Sampson recalls: "Right up until the 1980s, pay was around R14 a day"—about $6 at the time. Sampson, "One Last Picture Show," 87.

[64] The photocomic was also successfully adopted as a vehicle for pornographic content. Altarriba, "Le Roman-Photo En Espagne," 52.

around 20¢) could only have augmented its position as a devalued, “trashy” genre. Yet the prohibition of photocomic imports must also have strengthened the domestic industry.

Previously, the production process involved was highly transnational. Take a Latin American example:

> The stills for *Corín Tellado* were shot in Spain. It was published in Miami, and sold throughout Spanish-speaking North and South America. The central distributor in the Americas was headquartered in Miami. In mid-1975, the company decided to shift filming away from Spain and instead produce the stories in Mexico where they were cheaper and sold better. The negatives were sent to American magazine distributors in Miami, where they were printed. North and Central America and the Andean countries were the areas of distribution (Flora and Flora 136-7).

This patchwork production process adds to the photocomic’s status as the banished Frankensteinian monster of popular culture. Implicated within an increasingly common global mode of post-Fordist capitalist production, bits are cobbled together from around the world, conglomerating to produce a semblance of formal unity despite its actual hybridity. In addition to this *bricolage* of a production process, “the romantic photoroman’s cheapness (in both price and presentation), that it was not sold in reputable bookstores, and also the protocols by which it was read collectively, all apparently contributed to the traditional photoroman’s reduction to nothing more than a degraded object, less read than consumed” (Baetens "Le Roman-Photo *in Situ*" 36).

The production process certainly mirrors the genre’s contradictory aesthetic properties. Photocomics’ reliance on photographs seems to emphasize realism and

mimesis, differentiating their thematic concerns from comics obsessed with outer space, the supernatural, and the superhuman. Altarriba suggests that in the "photoroman" "[e]verything is done to make readers believe that life is a photoroman" (Altarriba 48). But it is precisely this semblance of realism that best facilitates the articulation of ideological fantasy while seeming to portray reality as it is. In their very function as carriers of positivist images—the photo that "never lies"—photocomics mask a complex subterranean reality of fantasy and social control[65].

On the surface, the racial segregation of the South African photocomics—those for whites only featured white actors, and those targeted at blacks only starred blacks—reflects the fantasy of apartheid's "apart-ness." However these photocomics, unwittingly or not, employ polyvocal, extra-literary discourses even when they attempt, particularly in their reliance on hyper-stylized genres, to reify narrative monolingualism. Indeed, these works persistently remind us how difficult it was for apartheid to erase the mixture that was not only a part of everyday life in South Africa but even a part of Afrikaner heritage—and whiteness—itself.[66]

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[65] Of the image in late capitalism Jameson writes, "all come before us with the immediacy of cultural representations of which one can be fairly certain that they are by a long shot not historical reality itself. If we want to go on believing in categories like social class, then we are going to have to dig from them in the insubstantial bottomless realm of cultural and collective fantasy" Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text* 1 (1979): 139.

[66] Afrikaner identity and language were formed largely through contact, not isolation. For Breyten Breytenbach, Afrikaans emerged from "the collision and coupling of culture – from domination and humiliation, ignorance and poetry, from the bible and the mosque and the bar and the shack and the veld, from death and adaptation." Qtd. in Rita Barnard, "*Bitterkomix*: Notes from the Post-Apartheid Underground," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 103.4 (2004): 752., note 27. The discourse of purity was not limited to racist whites; in a photo by Peter Magubane, a black male student wears a sign on his back in the 1976 Soweto riots, which reads "THE BLACK NATION IS NOT A PLACE FOR

What follows, therefore, is an attempt to contextualize the photocomic's commodity status within the larger social dictates of apartheid culture. Thereafter I turn to the content of photocomics, and in particular to the highly popular subgenre of the Western. Other popular forms (depicting the border wars of *Grensvegter* or *Kaptein Duiwel*; the black detectives in *Flash* and *Drum*; romances in *True Love* and *Sister Louise*; the jungle stories in *Takoeza* and *Great*, and the sexualized escapades of provocative *Tessa*) deserve individual attention—indeed the photocomic genre as a whole requires a much longer treatment. While the Western has its own racial and historical contexts, I hope that this foray into its specifics will also shed light on the other photocomics, and in particular on the relation between popular culture and the articulation of power during apartheid. This is intended as an initial examination into a much-neglected area of popular culture, and therefore suggests far more than it can accomplish.

Reading Photocomics in South Africa

To be interested in reading practices in the global south often means to look beyond the strict confines of the literary, to understand how it is that other forms of textual production are used in the inscription and devolution of ideology, hegemony, subjectivity, and sociality (Newell). As work in cultural studies shows, attention to popular culture reveals alternative insights about the structural formations of the society in question to those garnered from works of "high culture" such as novels and painting. A few artists interested in crossing the boundaries between popular and "high" art have

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IMPURITIES AFRIKAANS STINKS." Peter Magubane, *Magubane's South Africa*, (New York: Knopf, 1978) 91.

incorporated the photocomic in their work, yet these expropriations did not have the popularity of the photocomics under consideration here[67]. For scholars interested in the intersection between reading and the development of ideologically-suffused subjectivities in colonial and postcolonial places, the photocomic provides rich material.

Lin Sampson recalls that in South Africa photocomics "were commonly known as books, so someone saying he or she loved books might well have been referring to a literary knowledge consisting of every edition of *Sister Louise*" (83)[68]. For many readers these photocomics were *the* books people read. Nonetheless, the photocomic is maligned, I suspect, because of its popularity — to invoke Benjamin's famous essay on art and mechanical reproduction, the photocomic has neither author nor "aura" (217-52). This has led some critics to mistakenly assume that it merely reflects hegemonic capitalist ideology and is thus unworthy of any examination that might assign it more substance.[69] Even if it is true that in contrast to "protest literature" the form promises no overt political agency or engagement, it is, at least in terms of its consumption, one of the most "democratic" of genres (Baetens "Le Roman-Photo *in Situ*" 36-8) Studying it may reveal

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[67] Artists who have engaged with the medium in their work include John Berger, James Coleman, Marie-Françoise Plissart (with commentary by Jacques Derrida) and Alain Robbe-Grillet. Baetens sees a place for the photocomic in the domain of the contemporary artist, drawing attention, perhaps overly-optimistically, to a modern art concerned with anti-corporate expression, grounded in mediums that are readily available to everyone, and to a rejection of the notion of the sublime, skilled artist and critic. Baetens, "Le Roman-Photo *in Situ*," 36.

[68] *Sister Louise* was a photocomic about a nurse.

[69] Flora and Flora, 'The Fotonovela', oversimplify matters by dogmatically insisting the fotonovela is nothing but a tool of capitalist ideology. There is no room in such accounts for more nuanced discussions of reading practices, such as famously described in Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

more than studying novels can about the role culture played in the production of everyday life for most people living under apartheid.

Photocomics certainly travelled more freely than humans across the racial divides cemented and policed by the apartheid state. The covert tales they tell about race in their plots, aesthetics, and in the networks of consumption they precipitated, forged interracial relations (at least at the imaginative level), even while their segregated format seemed to foreclose this. Indeed, direct engagements with South African race relations were absent from most forms of popular fiction. One reader explains:

> If you were a person of colour, like most other reading material of the time, the photo stories had very little to represent you. There was hardly ever any person of colour included in these stories. If one had to be depicted, than [sic] a white person was painted black and basta! ("Photo Stories Make a Return")

This minstrelsy, as I explore below, although superficially a way to maintain racial separation, actually collapsed the differences between black and white as the actors' bodies became symbolic sites of racial ambiguity.

Another reader, T. Job Mzamo, learned English and perfected his Afrikaans by reading the photocomics: "I started reading and writing from an early age," he explains,

> before I even started attending school. I was fascinated with letters and numbers. In the 60s we used to read comics like *True Africa* where we read about Samson the Lionheart, Chunky Charlie and Battler Ben; that's when I started learning English. My Afrikaans was also perfected through reading comics such as *Takoeza*, *Die Ruiter in Swart*, *Kyk* and others (Thaisi).[70]

[70] The "comics" referred to here are actually photocomics.

People thus frequently read photocomics not directly targeting them: readership repeatedly crossed racial lines, despite the state's intention to have readers "imagine communities" of fellow readers as segregated as the photocomics themselves. This was also facilitated by the format of the stories since, unlike other "books," photocomics do not require a high degree of literacy. Socio-economic circumstances also contributed to photocomics' success among African and coloured children. One reader recalls:

> It was the late 1970's and in my home town of the Strand, the only way you could gain access to a library for so-called Coloured people was if you trekked all the way to the City Centre and used a relative in Cape Town's address to gain membership. Within this void, photo stories like *Ruiter in Swart, Arend, Takoeza, Condor, Chunky Charlie, Sister Louise, Saal 10, Tessa* and weekly inserts in magazines like *Look, See* and *Keur* became popular weekly reading material ("Photo Stories Make a Return").

The photocomics mentioned featured all-white casts. Yet due to sheer availability, blacks may have read these more frequently than the ones made for them. There also were *more* made for white audiences. One white woman recalls: "We weren't allowed to read them but our maid had them and we would spend our lives in her room pouring [sic] over them" (Sampson 87). Yet white people were also exposed to photocomics made for black readers. One online-forum reader, "Junta," waxes nostalgic about the photocomics and magazines for black readers:

> Chunky Charlie was my girlhood hero. Our gardener, then at the ripe old age of 72 when we first met, read three magazines; *Drum*, *True Africa* and *Bona*. They were always dog-eared copies, so they obviously did the rounds. Chunky Charlie

> was read to me every Friday afternoon at tea by our erstwhile gardener, inappropriately named “Boy” Mthembu, whilst we sat on the garage floor on two empty 25L oil drums. It was a ritual that lasted 3 or so very short years. The other story I loved dearly was Satana, also serialised in the mag ("Mweb Forums: Samson, Chunky Charlie and Battler Ben").

She continues:

> When we moved up to Jhb I missed those fortnightly mags, but have to admit developing a secret fetish for *Ruiter in Swart*... I collected them and hid them in the chicken coop from my English language pedant father…Ah... poesboekies... They were a cultural assassination, but strangely comforting back then. But…vastly inferior in all ways to the guile and chudspa [sic] of CC ("Mweb Forums: Samson, Chunky Charlie and Battler Ben")[71].

In South Africa, then, despite the vision of racial purity promulgated by apartheid photocomics, reading practices defied segregation policies and led ironically to the formation of black and white subjectivities more open, at least via imaginative identification, to racial otherness and heterogeneity than normally assumed. Yet, as most of my research suggests, blacks were far more likely to read the photocomics made for whites. “Junta’s” example of a white reader identifying with black characters is an important anomaly in my case studies.

It is thus to blacks’ experiences as readers that I turn for instruction about receptivity to alterity. As Bhabha suggests, “it is from those who have suffered the

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[71] “Poes” is “taboo slang” for “female genitals,” translatable as “twat” or cunt” in *Afrikaans-Engels Woordeboek* (Cape Town: Pharos, 2005). “CC” presumably refers to Chunky Charlie.

sentence of history—subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement—that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking" (*The Location of Culture* 246). As I argue here, building on the works of scholars such as Hale and Sanders[72], reading practices that encourage an ethical confrontation with alterity are essential for the production of subjectivities open to the uncomfortable and the unknown, resistant to colonial tendencies that violently and symbolically erase otherness. When Breyten Breytenbach asks, "Is imagination not the first expression of identification and therefore of generosity?", he is enjoining us to think of the imagination provoked by reading as well as writing ("Mandela's Smile" 46).

Westerns and Serialized Time

Given the heterogeneity of the "Western" photocomic subgenre, efforts to contextualize its formal and thematic qualities must inevitably draw from a range of theoretical sources encompassing genre and reader-response theories, as well as scholarship in art history and studies in popular culture. Is theoretical material on documentary and sequential photography relevant, building on works such as Berger's photodocumentary books, or Derrida's foray into telling stories with photography?[73] Or are recent theories of the comic and graphic novel more applicable?[74] And what about postcolonial cultural and historical studies? Inevitably the photocomic's etymological,

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[72] Dorothy J. Hale, "Aesthetics and the New Ethics: Theorizing the Novel in the Twenty-First Century," *PMLA*, 124, 3 (May 2009) 896-905; Mark Sanders, "Ethics and Interdisciplinarity in Philosophy and Literary Theory," *Diacritics*, 32, 3/4 (Autumn-Winter 2002) 3-16.
[73] John Berger, *Another Way of Telling* (New York, Vintage, 1995); Jacques Derrida and Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Right of Inspection* (New York, Monacelli, 1998).
[74] Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York, HarperPerennial, 1993).

etiological, and generic instability tests the limits of any strictly disciplinary theoretical model. Thus in what follows, while relying primarily on theories of the novel and genre theory derived from Bakhtin, I am well aware that other theoretical approaches may well provide equally important alternative ways of looking at the photocomic.

One of the subgenre's alternate names of course is the *photonovel*. And Bakhtin's concept of "novelization" nicely links theories of genre with those of the novel. Novelization is a process whereby genres usually thought of as different from the novel come to bear its characteristics, particularly its polyglot heterogeneity and its resistance to hegemonic discourse.[75] What I propose in the following discussion, is that the South African "Western" photocomics, seeming to simplistically reproduce the racist discourses and ideologies of apartheid, were simultaneously involved in processes of novelization which undermined the supremacy of those ideas. While reading practices defied segregationist dictates, the contents and the form of the photocomics also contributed to this weakening of statist ideas about race by subtly producing and transmitting more heterogeneous discourses.

Kid Colt, *Skrikruiter*, and *Ruiter in Swart* were popular Western-style South African photocomics in the 1970s. Kid Colt was initially a successful American comic-book character featured in an eponymous set of comics between 1948 and 1979; the South African photocomic was a spin-off of these. It follows the adventures of Kid Colt, a lone cowboy-like figure who spends his time "defending the law" in Mexico and the Wild West through the power of his gun. His enemies include Native Americans, "no-

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[75] Of course, as Jameson points out, no genre is inherently "pure" and "texts always come into being at the intersection of several genres and emerge from the tensions in the latter's multiple force fields." In this regard the photocomic is quintessentially generic. Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," 322.

good" outlaw whites (in contrast to himself, the "good" outlaw), Mexican bandits, and the occasional female trickster. *Skrikruiter* and *Ruiter in Swart*, Afrikaans equivalents, follow the main characters—the fearsome rider and the rider in black, respectively—through similar tales of gun-wielding adventure (*Kid Colt* was also published in Afrikaans as *Kid die Swerwer*—Kid the Drifter). All three follow standardized formats and have highly predictable narrative arcs.

In the opening pages, the hero kills or catches a "baddie," thus establishing his physical preeminence. After performing this feat the main story gets going with the hero's apprehension of a misdeed he then sets out to rectify. Whether or not a woman is the person wronged, at least one female character is always introduced as the hero's (temporary) love interest. She falls for the hero, he saves her from danger — by killing a series of other men — and then, after a brief romantic interlude, the hero leaves on another journey of solitary, violent, "law-keeping." And thus ends a typical issue.

These photocomics emulating the popular American Western also acutely resemble the epic, a nostalgic form that locates value in a past presumed superior to the present. "The world of the epic," Bakhtin writes, "is the national heroic past: it is a world of 'beginnings' and 'peak times' in the national history, a world of fathers and of founders of families, a world of 'firsts' and 'bests,'" and "[o]ne can only accept the epic world with reverence" (13, 17). Narratives of the American West have almost always possessed this epic quality, recalling a golden pre-industrialized era peopled by strong, brave men, "noble savages," and an expanding frontier promising great wealth. As Amy Kaplan explains, this United-States-in-formation, with its iconic, beckoning horizon,

resurfaces in other non-Western genres, such as the Romance novel of the late 1890s[76]. Much work has been done to explain how anxieties about industrialization, modernization, and anomie, manifested themselves in nostalgic forms like the Western[77]. André Bazin confirms this link between the epic and the Western when he writes that "[t]he migration to the West is our Odyssey" (148). Borges similarly claims that "while literary men seem to have neglected their epic duties, the epic has been saved for us, strangely enough, by the Westerns" (123).

Yet despite the epic's position as "a genre cut off from the present, a textual museum of antiquated speech, and a simulacrum of official values," *epic-ness* is not only a mode of the past, since it also inhabits the present, weaving itself consistently in and out of contemporary discourse (Clark and Holquist 288). Michael Holquist explains: "The epic is… not a genre confined to a moment in the distant past. It is historical precisely in the sense that it represents an always-still-available possibility. *It is the genre typical of societies in which diversity and change either go unrecognized or are actively suppressed*" (77 emphasis added). In this way the epic narrative of the Westerns recounts the utopian visions of a ruling class with aspirations for a future always and forever enclosed within the parameters of white supremacy. As the genre of censure and fascistic

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[76] Amy Kaplan, "Romancing the Empire," *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005). For those of us bound to this terrestrial realm, it is imagination, rather than space, that may prove to be the final frontier. For a look at the optimistic possibilities of the imagined *arrière-pays*, see Vincent Crapanzano, *Imaginative Horizons: An Essay in Literary-Philosophical Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
[77] This is now a commonplace assertion in most studies of the myth of the American West. See Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890.* (New York: Atheneum, 1985). Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). Shari Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001). Kaplan, "Romancing the Empire."

control, it should come as no surprise that the epic Western should see its efflorescence in 1970s South Africa, a particularly draconian period in apartheid history.

Despite the inconsistencies, inaccuracies, and anachronisms[78] in the ostensibly "historical" photocomics, the storylines' circularity suggests a world in which relations and behaviors are predictable, "natural," and thus permanent. Yet the Western photocomic contains contradictory depictions of time. On the one hand, time and space collapse, as in an image meant to depict the American West, which is actually a photograph of a house in the Cape Dutch architectural style (figure 3).

[78] The background settings occasionally betray the impossibility of a North American setting with plant species, or architectural styles, particular to South Africa.

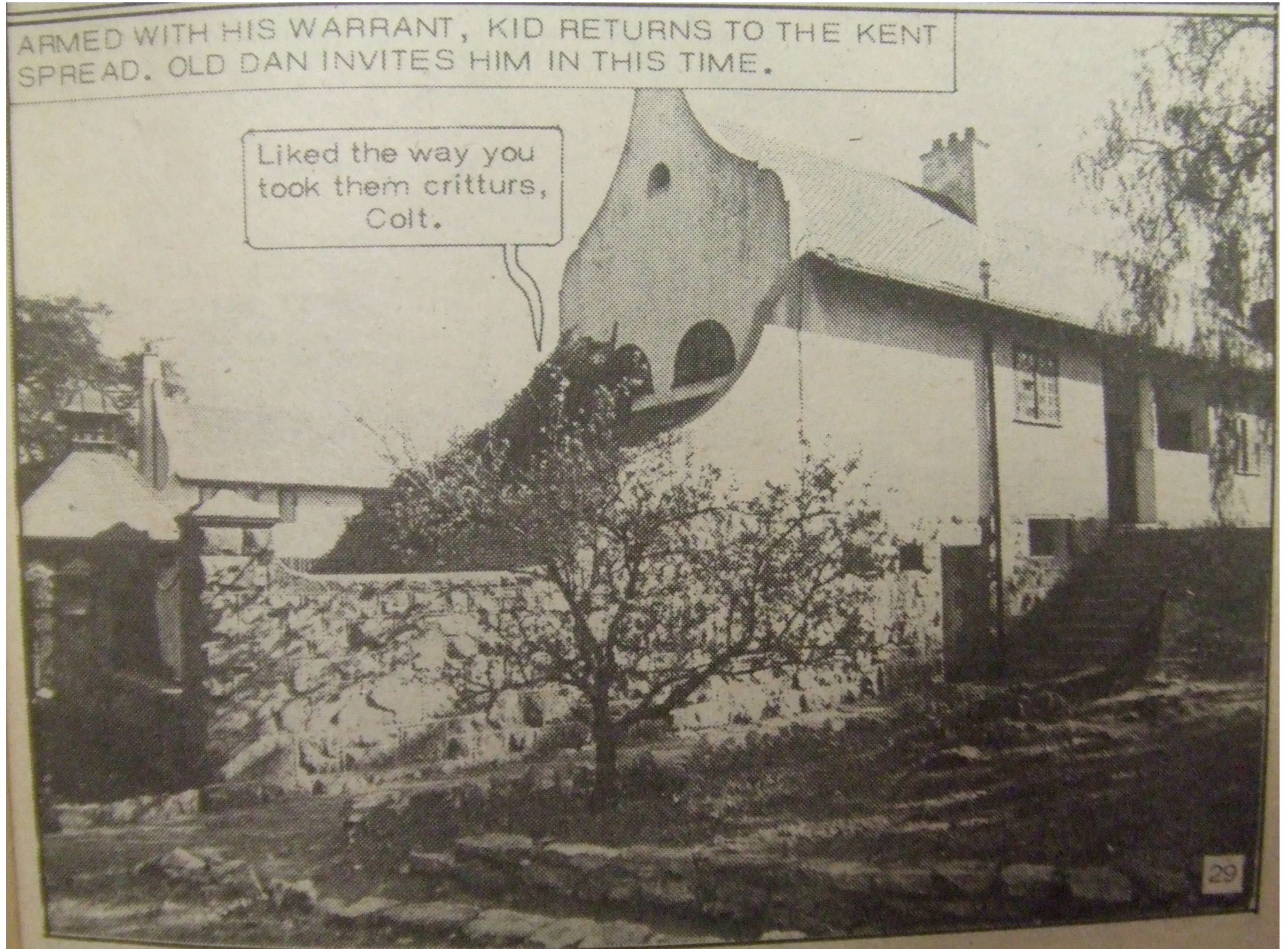

Figure 3. From Kid Colt. *The house is in the Cape Dutch architectural style, not that of the American West. Special Collections, Michigan State University Libraries.*

How receptive to this nuance readers may have been cannot be ascertained, but clearly *Kid Colt*'s creators were not particularly concerned with historical accuracy. That a South African setting might adequately serve as an overlay for an American one suggests that the two countries were seen as cognates or mirror images of one another. This substitution occurs both at the level of the nation and at the level of depictions of national subjects.

But another function of time in the photocomic might, following Scott McCloud in *Understanding Comics*, be described as "tangle[d] up" (97). The relationships between a series of frames, and the "gutters" between images, the shapes of the frames, not to mention the appearance or absence of text, can create a variety of experiences of time for the reader. McCloud's observations for comics are applicable to the photocomics that borrow essential formal elements from comics. Of particular importance is the way that readers "perceive time *spatially*," since for McCloud, "in the world of comics, *time and space* are *one and the same…* As readers, we're left with only a vague sense that as our eyes are moving through space, they're also moving through time" (100 emphasis original). In this sense, reading spatially, readers experience process, yet they can see peripherally the future and past (in other frames) even as they experience the present frame. This perception of time suggests the possibility of change, in addition to that of history, although since each photocomic ends with an invitation to read the next one in the series, I argue that the overriding tenor of time in these photocomics is static rather than revolutionary.

This cyclical representation of time conveys the ideological message that the time of white, patriarchal hegemony is permanent, closed off from the possibility of change,

inevitable and perduring. As Bazin insists, “[t]he western does not age” (148). Clark and Holquist confirm this in their interpretation of epic time and space, where “the represented world stands on an utterly different and inaccessible time and value plane, separated by epic distance. It is impossible to change, to rethink, or to reevaluate anything in epic time, for it is finished, conclusive, and immutable,” just as are the plotlines of the photocomics (287). While time repeats itself—the hero never ages, never has children, and the world in which he lives never changes—place also remains fixed, so much so that certain background images recur in *Kid Colt* issue after issue. This is a world in which the paradoxical law-keeper/outlaw is a figure for the apartheid state and its representatives—a permanent fixture, mobile only from frame to frame of the photocomic, which, serialized, produces a vicious circle of violent “heroic” acts.

Shula Marks notes that the collective historical memory for most South African whites during apartheid was selectively “the history of South Africa [as] the history of the triumphant progress of their pioneering ancestors who overcame both nature and black savagery in the interests of ‘Christian civilization’” ("Towards a People's History of South Africa?" 298-9). The Western photocomics celebrated precisely such a vision of the “wild” Voortrekker frontier in their stories of racial, sexual, and territorial conquest. One reader with the online moniker “Boerseun,” confirms the persistence, even today, of such a vision—linking the photocomics to the articulation of white supremacy. In response to another poster’s comment in a forum about photocomics—“who could resist ‘Tessa’ or ‘Louise’… those were the days,” writes “Proffie”—“Boerseun” bluntly adds, “Ja, bring back all the good, WHITE, heroes” ("Answerit" emphasis original). The nostalgia for a long gone historical moment thus even extends to the photocomic itself,

and to the form of “nation narration” that is now obsolete (Bhabha *Nation and Narration*).

Indeed, although the Western photocomics flourished in South Africa, they were not popular everywhere.[79] Similarities in the histories of white South Africa and the American West may account for the Western’s particular resonance in South Africa. Such parallels have been explored in a number of studies comparing these two historical frontier cultures.[80] Yet while these works focus on the material and social processes at these shifting zones of contact, few examine the ideological and imaginative similarities condensing in the concept, or myth, of the frontier.[81]

Frederick Jackson Turner’s isolation of the frontier as *the* defining spatial symbol of American identity referred in fact to *a series of frontiers* that moved further west as the country expanded. This expansion encouraged prevailing attitudes towards frontiers—each new acquisition of territory created new frontiers, providing the necessary justification for further territorial incursions. Similarly, although there was a spate of material and conceptual frontiers in South Africa prior to the well-known *voortrekker* movements north and eastwards, it is the nineteenth-century movements north that most

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[79] Altarriba notes, for example, that in Spain an attempt was made to market Western-themed photocomics to a male audience, without success: “At the peak of photoromans’ success there was a decided effort to produce magazines for men (*Fotowest* or *Fotoaudacia* that were founded on the western, spy stories, or adventures). The experience was a failure.” Altarriba, "Le Roman-Photo En Espagne," 44.
[80] Leonard Thompson and Howard Lamar, *The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981). Richard B. Ford, "The Frontier in South Africa: A Comparative Study of the Turner Thesis," Ph.D. University of Denver, 1966.
[81] Explorations of the frontier as imaginative lodestar can be found in Keenan, *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics*. Crapanzano, *Imaginative Horizons: An Essay in Literary-Philosophical Anthropology*. Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890.*

obviously parallel the US shifts westwards. The famous “Go West, young man” is parodied in South African writer Marlene van Niekerk’s 1994 novel, *Triomf*, in the oft-repeated quip made by the character Treppie: “Look north, fuck forth!” (*Triomf* 194)[82]. Indeed, despite the ample differences between the actual, material conditions of the frontiers and the social relationships they produced, in both of these expanding countries the myth of the frontier (and its loss, or reconstruction) was a determinant in the production of national identities.

Fictional and non-fictional narratives about this time describe a world inhabited by “lawless” whites scrambling and squabbling over vast expanses of land; travelers dotting the landscape with their snaking wagon trails; families with gun-toting men and tough but domestic (and domesticated) women. It also meant, as “Look North, fuck forth” suggests, racial mixing through acts of rape and consensual sex. This, in broad strokes, is the vision of many versions of the histories of this period on both continents.

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[82] The term “the West” carries an ambiguous range of significations. On the one hand the West is a conquerable territory, also known as the Wild West or the Old West; on the other, the West is the conquering force, which though mobile (through violence and territorial acquisition) is a fixed place. In the Derridean sense the conjoined signifiers “the West” are sous-rature *twice*. Firstly, the notion of the West as a superpower conglomerate of a certain set of shifting countries is always haunted by the East which it requires for its self-definition. This is the first way the word is under erasure. Secondly, the West *means* the symbolic East, when it is used to describe the place to be explored, the place to go to.

The way the article “the” is always used—recall it is almost always “*the* West” not merely the directional “West” that is invoked—works to solidify, concretize, and to isolate a geographical entity which is unitary and fixed—there can only be one West, the article suggests, as there can only be one master race, and one master gender. By affixing that article in English (as we do in French and German (but *not* in Zulu)) the language attempts to make permanent a certain space as the solitary ruling space, and to hide its instability and its dependence on a whole other set of Wests, including that West that means the unknown, that West which signifies precisely that which has yet to be incorporated into *the* West—*a* West, if we like, of the frontier.

White South African conceptions of indigeneity also bore certain similarities to those described in American narratives. Encounters with members of the indigenous populations are described in corresponding ways by the invading whites in both countries. Again there are further historical parallels[83]. In both instances the white settlers were mostly Calvinist, bringing with them the belief that God *selectively* designated the saved — an idea conveniently used to justify claims to racial, as well as spiritual, superiority. Both countries also relocated large numbers of the indigenous population: into reservations in the US, and later into "Bantustans" in South Africa. And the US and South Africa were both settler states that chose to extend racist legislation into the post-war era, a time largely characterized elsewhere by liberation movements. These commonalities link the two white governments, at least through the religious, geographic, and legal discourses which served to justify the mistreatment of others (Giliomee 495-6).

Alterity in its colonial Manichean expression certainly underwrote many of the stories in the photocomics, including the Westerns. As one reader notes, the themes of the photocomics "were simple — the Power of Good — the Power of Evil — the constant battle between the two — and the Triumph of Good over Evil. Not bad messages for a young mind" (Mellet). Yet the Western, although seeming to reify such Manichaeism, simultaneously undercuts it with heroes as brutal and violent as its villains. An illogical tension underwrites the Western since, much like the state, its hero inhabits a zone of exception in which he may kill without punishment (Agamben *State of Exception*).

[83] Of course this was frequently the case in the encounter between European whites and indigenous groups in places they were colonizing. The similarities have likely as much to do with Western concepts of rationality and Christianity as with anything they perceived upon arrival. Nonetheless, I would argue that the relative synchronicity of the famous treks North and East with the American move West meant that the versions of white supremacy and religion both groups brought with them bore striking similarities.

Indeed, just like Bakhtin's favored novel, the photocomic is characterized by coterminous and contradictory discursive registers—high and low, ancient and modern, familiar and strange. Therefore, while the Western photocomic possesses characteristics symptomatic of the epic (mirroring the apartheid society in which it circulated), nonetheless its hybrid origin coupled with its formal heterogeneity suggest we should think of it as a sometimes conservative genre simultaneously undergoing processes of novelization, occasionally revealing the fractures within apartheid's fantasy of total control.

Within the photocomics there is ample evidence of such heteroglossic dialogism. Afrikaans itself, as Breytenbach puts it, is a "bastard" language (Afrikaners are "*bastervolk"*), a fact willfully ignored by the National Party government, which tried, in declaring Afrikaans along with English, the country's "standard and official language," to solidify an incontrovertible image of Afrikaans cultural, racial, and linguistic purity (*A Season in Paradise* 156).[84] Afrikaans and English mixed in these photocomics much as they must have mixed in day-to-day speech. In one example conflating Afrikaans, English, and a US Southern drawl, characters use an Afrikaans orthography—"waal"—to mimic the English word "well" as it would have sounded if said by an American cowboy (figure 4).

[84] For a discussion of Breytenbach's concept of bastardy, see Sanders, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid*.

Figure 4. From Kid Colt. *Special Collections, Michigan State University Libraries*

Western-themed photocomics also include snippets of Spanish in addition to language culled from many other sectors of society. Heroism, farming, romance, sex, legality and illegality, slang and propriety, third-person narration and orality, irony and honesty, narratorial moralizing, parody, deception, witchcraft, medicine, and capitalism are all dialogic registers of the photocomic.

Displacing Race

If the language of the South African photocomic undoes strict divisions between the dominant and emergent discourses, on the form's sur*face*, or epidermis, they seem to deny interracial intersubjectivity by never depicting cross-racial interaction. In these works it is as though apartheid has been so successfully realized as to preclude *all* interracial contact. It is as though blacks do not encounter whites in public spaces—at work, on the street, or in the form of a policeman demanding to see a person's passbook—or in the private spaces of the home, the bedroom, and the prison interrogation chamber. Photocomics of this period depict a segregationist fantasy in which there are two worlds that are so separated from one another that the existence of the racial other has ceased entirely.

How then, is it possible to talk about the intersubjective encounter between subjected groups and those who exploit them in these works, when there is never an instance of such an encounter? How are subjectivities formed through contact with the everyday oppressing other, when there is no evidence in these works of such instances? We might begin by remarking that the glaring absence of this type of relation—so much a part of apartheid existence, particularly in the urban areas where many of the

photocomics are set—is the first important marker that something is being covered up by this radical erasure of everyday life. Depicting such encounters, from both sides of the creative zone, was so fraught to begin with, that for purely practical reasons, those involved in the production of photocomics often chose to leave out this aspect of existence altogether. Unlike in much literary output of the time which often portrayed interracial encounters, photocomics' production process required actual people, not just imagined ones, to interact and work together to make photographs, presenting, perhaps, the threat of uncontrollable contact between members of different racial groups working as equals towards the same end.

How could a genre like the photocomic, an art form so dependent on synopsis, describe the dangerous friction of everyday interracial encounters? And why should they have? Photocomics, we have been (mis)led to believe, are fun, whimsical distractions from the more challenging or mundane requirements of daily existence. Why deal, in photocomics, with exploring the more difficult, and politically fractious themes of racism and apartheid?

What I argue in the following is that firstly, though these works failed to directly address apartheid, they were in fact doing so in all kinds of alternate ways. Some but not all of these were subversive discussions of apartheid, others were subversion's opposite—namely ideological representations of apartheid thought and practice. No matter the political bent, it is possible to see apartheid's long shadow haunting the pages of even the most seemingly innocuous of photocomics, such as *See* or *Great*[85].

[85] In Marlene van Niekerk's monumental *Agaat*, the main character's husband gives her servant "a little bag of liquorice and a *See* magazine" to express his beneficence,

Yet this white supremacist fantasy was never realized. Different races mingled most often because of the labor demands South African society placed on its black population. In urban spaces interaction was the rule not the exception. Black and white men worked in the mines together (in rigid hierarchies of power) as we saw in Chapter One in Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy*; black farm laborers worked alongside white landowners; black women in domestic work lived in specially designated servant's quarters on the property of their white employers; black police worked with white ones; and despite the ban, black and white men and women engaged in sexual intimacies ranging the gamut from consensual to forced.[86]

There were also cultural connections between blacks and whites, particularly in urban areas. Katie Mooney draws attention to the subculture of the white "Ducktail" gangs, who were known to sell alcohol to blacks "*almost* openly" as one worried woman commented in *The Star* in 1954 (754). (Her qualifying "almost" suggests that the interaction between blacks and whites often hovered just beneath the surface of acceptance.) "Interactions with blacks," Mooney writes, "could be peaceful if business was being transacted or if an activity was consensual" (761). Though the apartheid state fantasized about instituting a total racial segregation—apart-hood—the day-to-day reality

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underscoring the magazine's perceived harmlessness. Marlene van Niekerk, *Agaat* (Portland, Oregon: Tin House Books, 2010).

[86] Sarah Nuttall, *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009) 2. Charles Van Onselen, *The Seed Is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894-1985*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996) 3-11. David Goldblatt's photographic chronicle of life under apartheid attests to the everyday "entanglements" of blacks and whites, particularly in the retrospective David Goldblatt, *Photographs* (Rome: Contrasto Books, 2006) 26, 31, 39, 82-6, 89, 94, 101. Literary works also bear witness to such mixing. Representative examples include: Daphne Rooke, *Mittee* (New York: Penguin, 1991). Sindiwe Magona, *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* (New York: Interlink Books, 2003) 1-56. van Niekerk, *Agaat*.

of capitalist accumulation and socialization required constant interaction between the races.

In addition to a shared hatred of the police,[87] another commonality, often underexplored, between black and white youth culture of the early apartheid period, was the obsession and imitation of all things American. Studies of this Americanization trend in South Africa tend to limit themselves to exploring the U.S.'s influence within one racial group, thus unintentionally strengthening apartheid's segregationist fantasy[88]. Mooney points to the inherent irony in a culture that "despite rock-'n-roll's roots in black rhythm and blues…propelled youth subcultures in the 1950s with young white rebellious males being the aesthetic role models" (761)[89]. Not only were blacks and whites interacting on levels ranging from the intimate to the highly disciplined, they were also often listening to the same music, watching the same films, and wearing the same clothes. A 1963 fear-mongering screed titled *Crime in South Africa* deplores the fact that:

> White Ducktails in jeans and colourful shirts have been known to take their "quacktail" tarts to brothels in African areas. Here they meet the African tsotsis

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[87] Hatred of the police was also a shared sentiment between the ducktails and many groups of South African blacks, as can be illustrated in a ducktail song: "Jolling on the corner with my razor and chain; Down came the ore [police], one took my name,/ He grabbed me by the collar of my charcoal float [shirt],/ Then out came the razor as I slit his throat,/ Singing ducktail boogie…" Katie Mooney, "'Ducktails, Flick-Knives and Pugnacity': Subcultural and Hegemonic Masculinities in South Africa, 1948-1960," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24. December (1998): 759.

[88] For a study of the influence of U.S. culture on black South African identity, see Rob Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem, Hollywood* (New York: Routledge, 1994). Katie Mooney's piece is also a good, brief, introduction to U.S. influence on white youth culture during apartheid. Mooney, "'Ducktails, Flick-Knives and Pugnacity': Subcultural and Hegemonic Masculinities in South Africa, 1948-1960."

[89] This has resonances with Eric Lott's work on the American white working class' consumption and performance of minstrelsy. Eric Lott, *Love & Theft: Black Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

dressed in zoot suits, and their black molls dressed in “Suzie Wong” skirts. They are sometimes joined by Indian boys and girls from Fordsburg. Kwela music or rock-‘n-roll records are played, to liven up the party, and when brandy is taken and “giggleweed” smoked, *the colour line in sex is speedily forgotten* (Qtd. in Mooney 761. My emphasis).

Mixing *was* occurring—and not only racially, but culturally and sexually as well—contradicting the historiographic narrative which overemphasizes segregation at the expense of acknowledging the many and various ways this separation broke down.[90] In this way, despite its surface-level segregation, the photocomic can be said to be the prototypical apartheid genre, promoting at one and the same time a conservative segregationist platform and a hybrid, cross-genre, heteroglot admixture of people, places, times and spaces.

In addition to discursive hybridity in the white-targeted Westerns we also find visual hybridity in the repeated appearance of white actors masquerading as Native Americans (figures 5 and 6).

[90] Wicomb, "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa."

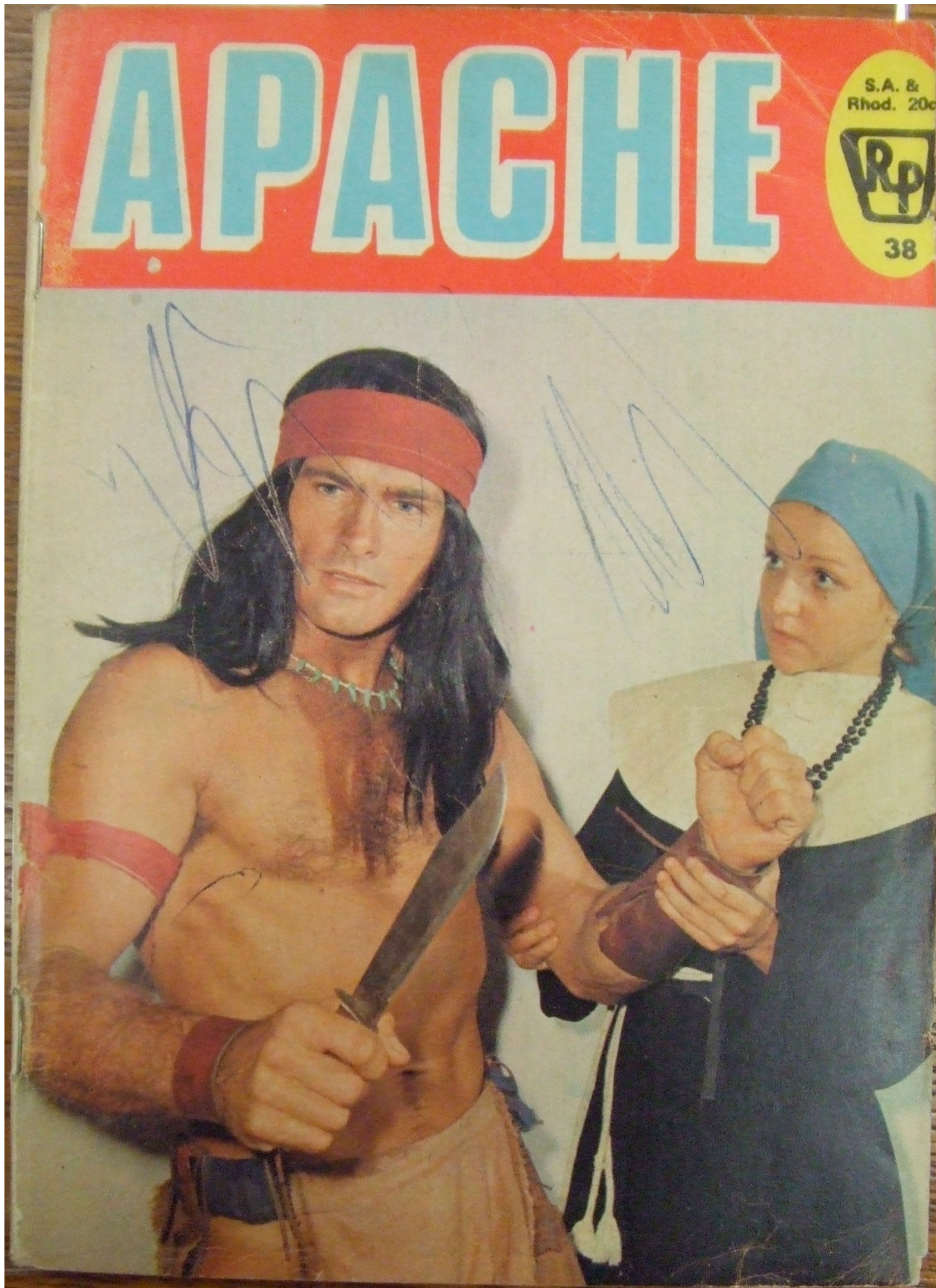

Figure 5. *The cover of* Apache *no.38 depicting Cha, "the last Apache warrior." Special Collections, Michigan State University Libraries*

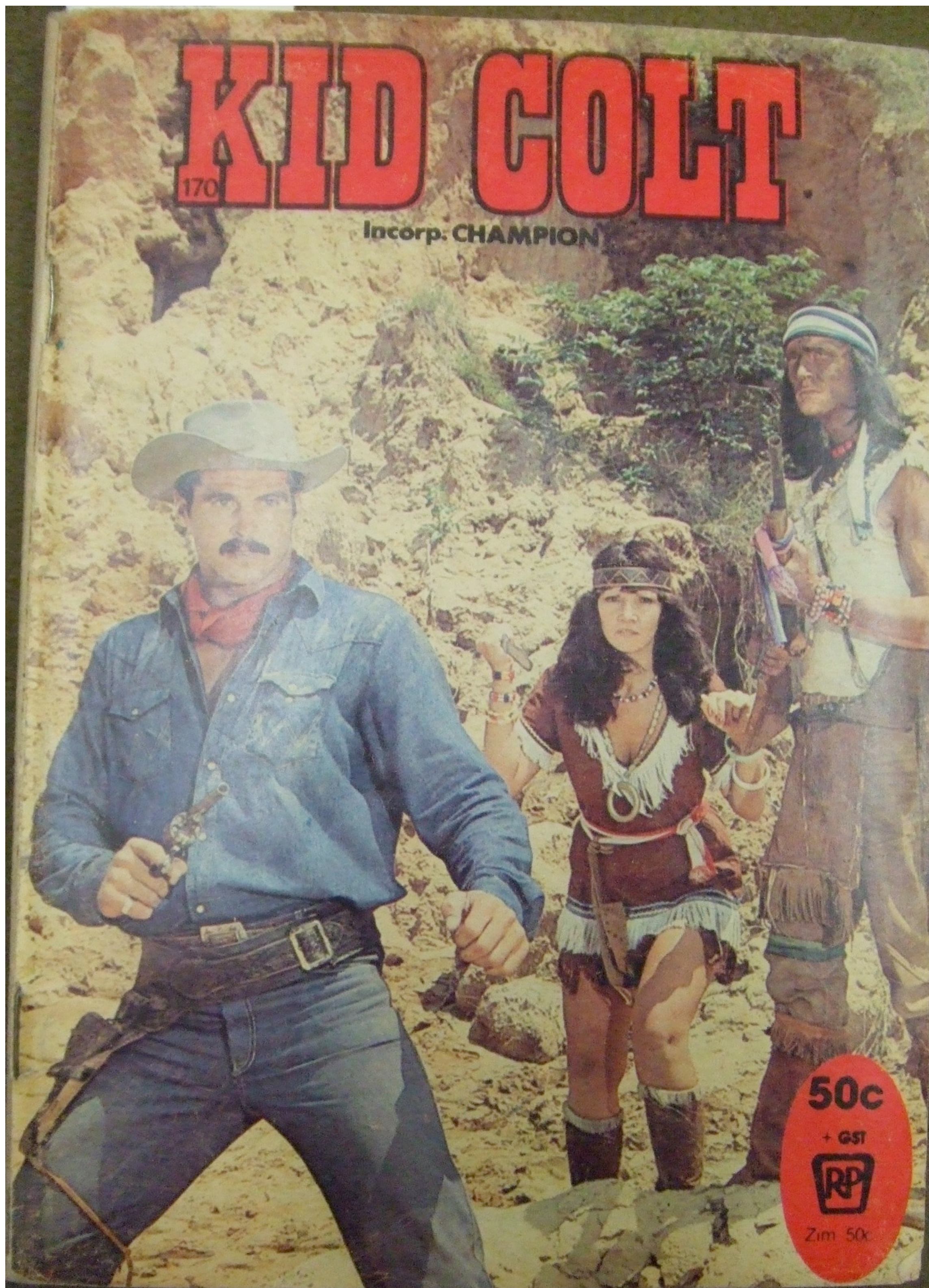

Figure 6. *A* Kid Colt *cover. Special Collections, Michigan State University Libraries*

In some instances this involved face and body paint, and in all cases it involved actors donning what they believed audiences would receive as accurate, authentic, and/or convincing dress and accessories. Practically speaking, these disguises (Barthes writes that the photocomic "has something to do with disguise") were necessitated by the segregationist policies of the country (58). But as performance studies scholars have shown, disguising the body as the "other" blurs the boundaries between self and other, undoing (in the case of the racialist policies of apartheid South Africa) the "naturalist" racial theories that were the cornerstone of the justification for segregation itself[91]. The ambivalence expressed in portraits of Native Americans that alternated between depictions of violent uncivilized savages and idealized denizens of a premodern natural world suggests an inherent instability within the notion of whiteness too (figure 7).

[91] Lott, *Love & Theft: Black Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*.

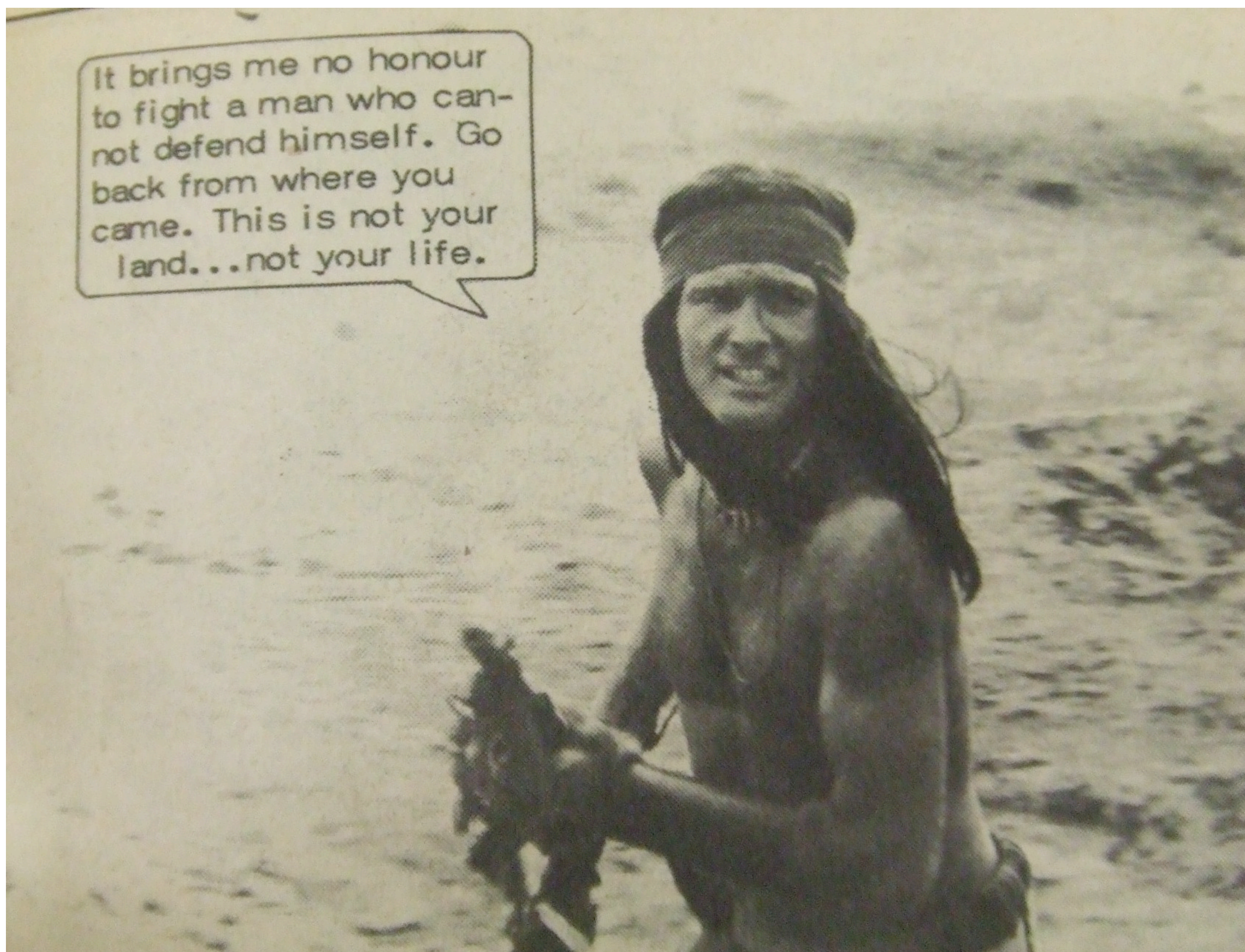

Figure 7. *From* Apache *no.38*. *Special Collections, Michigan State University Libraries*

The need in these photocomics to consistently define whiteness in contrast to the mythologized “noble savage” (by having them engage in endless battles) reveals the deep anxieties underpinning definitions of whiteness.[92]

In her study of American depictions and impersonations of Native Americans, Shari Huhndorf remarks: “Often, these representations and events…reflect upon other power relations within the broader society, including the advent of overseas imperialism, changing gender ideals, and the devastating histories of African Americans in the United States” (9)[93]. For Huhndorf and others, depictions of the Native American were often used as doubles for African-Americans, as a way for white Americans to explore black-white race relations without directly referring to them.[94] Native Americans also provided the perfect foil through which South African whites could explore their attitudes towards South African blacks while seeming to adhere to segregationist ideals by excluding actual black figures and actors from the photocomics themselves. White South Africans could explore race relations through the figure of the Indian, who was further distanced from black South Africans by not being an antecedent of South African history. This twice-deferred substitution—the Native American is neither black *nor* a part of South African

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[92] Deloria, *Playing Indian*. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination*.

[93] That signifiers like “Indian” in popular culture can carry multiple, even contradictory significations has been remarked upon by Jameson, who writes that “the vocation of the symbol … lies less in any single message or meaning than in its very capacity to absorb and organize all of these quite distinct anxieties together. … it is precisely this polysemousness which is profoundly ideological …” Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," 142.

[94] John Lenihan argues that Westerns in the 1950s hid left-leaning racial sentiment in *sympathetic* portraits of Native Americans. John H. Lenihan, "Racial Attitudes," *Showdown: Confronting Modern America and the Western Film* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980) 55-89.

history—attests simultaneously to the lack of representational devices at hand for discussions of race under apartheid, as well as to the volatility that such a direct confrontation in the form of mass-consumed entertainment could provoke. Thus references to intersubjective relations between blacks and whites in South African society had to be doubly masked in shrouds of racial and temporal equivalency.

We can understand this substitution as a collective repression; the obsession with the Indian a symptom of an obsession with black South Africans. Sigmund Freud posits that such displacements are "a product of compromise, correct as regards affect and category but false owing to chronological displacement and substitution by analogy."[95] Collective forms of displacement were of course also famously described in Freud's account of totemism. If we disregard his racist association of totemism with "primitives" and children, we might accept his more basic premise that such forms of symbolic substitution are symptoms of all social groups. Totemism, of course, also involves disguising the self *as* the totem. "The clansmen are there," Freud writes, "dressed in the likeness of the totem and imitating it in sound and movement, as though they are seeking to stress their identity with it" ("Totem and Taboo" 499). In *Apache*, Cha, "the last Apache warrior," is a white man dressed in generic "Indian" clothing. In the photocomic he cuts a patchwork figure as a cross-dressing white man/Apache/Spanish-speaker imitating a nineteenth-century stereotype of the "Old West" in a South African landscape (figures 5 and 7).

When Cha thinks (in thought bubbles), he is ascribed stereotypically "Indian" aphorist thoughts that express themselves in slightly awkward English and refer to

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[95] Sigmund Freud, "The Neuroses of Defence," *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989) 92.

ancestors, nature, and the spirit world. Issue no. 38 tells a story of revenge. Cha is after the man who has killed three of his tribesmen. He confronts the priest Gaston, son of the Mexican bandit who has killed these men, and Gaston "disrobes" to avenge the death of his father. The sexual positioning of Cha's semi-nude body in a range of postures suggests a violent sublimated confrontation with homosexual desire, a topic of much import which unfortunately I can only mention here, as it deserves an entire other study.

Figure 8. *From* Apache *no.38. Special Collections, Michigan State University Libraries*

Cha tells Gaston "Go back from where you came. This is not your land…not your life" yet he refuses to kill a man of the cloth ("Apache" 41). A nun, Maria, sides with Cha and is chastised by the other men. Ultimately Cha befriends Maria and Gaston but leaves them for his "warpath" ("Apache" 98). The narrative invokes the stereotyped "noble savage" who is at once brave, honorable and good, and simultaneously savage, ferocious, and evil.[96] In the Western photocomic, this physical embodiment of the repressed other returns virtually unrecognizable in the guise of the Indian. Only by imitating this totemic figure could whites fulfill their desire for a confrontation with the original inhabitants of their own country.

Disfiguring Gender

The Western photocomic also provided an excellent forum for treatments of Afrikaner identity; as a form it was disguised enough to allow for the erasure of black bodies, but familiar enough to strengthen particular notions of white masculinity, femininity, and power. White masculinity is the primary preoccupation of *Kid Colt*, *Swart Ruiter*, and *Skrikruiter*, however it must always be asserted in contrast to encounters with non-white, non-male others[97]. As conflict with Native Americans in the

[96] "Indian" characters in other photocomics of the period (figure 5) are also stereotyped as "noble savages."

[97] Mooney explains that comics "played a significant role in the construction of masculinist subculture. These were read most avidly by boys on the edge of puberty but remained popular among older boys and young men imprinting themselves deeply on their notions of masculinity. The majority of prized comics were 'super-hero' comics where the main character embodies physical strength and competitive performance. Women were generally absent in comics except for the purpose of 'romance.' These comics—like films and *other forms of media*—disseminated gender images which for boys stressed the need for them to be assertive, successful, to acquire physical strength, to compete with each other and to exert male dominance over girls, young women, 'weaker'

US provided a foil for the production of white American masculinities, so too was Afrikaner masculinity formed at the point of contact with black and female South Africans.

Indeed, South African Western photocomics are characterized by a general ambivalence towards women. Women in these publications may be weak, naïve, and in need of protection; or ill-intentioned and devious. In all cases, however, they are sexually available, peripheral and expendable. As the covers of *Kid Colt* convey through the years, women come and go. They have little agency, existing mostly as sexual satellites of men. The young white nun on the cover of *Apache* (figure 5) is a typical example of the way women play "supporting" roles: she stands behind "Apache," propping him up with both her hands, as if to restrain his purported masculine (and racialized) sexual and violent proclivities. Gazing attentively at Apache who looks away from her into the wider world, she is a picture of youthful concern. While elderly men appear in some issues of *Kid Colt* as tough patriarchs (figure 4), older women are completely absent, an erasure that reveals how the photocomics' narratives are as much fantasies of gender as they are fantasies of race. The cover of *Kid Colt* (figure 6) neatly makes this link apparent through a triangular composition that positions the female "Indian" in the far background. Even the "Indian" man supersedes her in importance.

Yet she brandishes a knife, hinting at how fantasies of tamed women are scored through by women's actual agency, violent or otherwise, and at how the fantasies themselves were ambivalent and contradictory (as are most fantasies). The threat of women's power is often linked to discourses of entrapment, particularly within the sphere

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boys and young men" Mooney, "'Ducktails, Flick-Knives and Pugnacity': Subcultural and Hegemonic Masculinities in South Africa, 1948-1960," 760. My emphasis.

of the home, so Kid Colt doggedly refuses to remain beyond a night or two in any domestic situation. Figure 6 exposes the menacing side of the allure of domestication (and thus emasculation) that women often represent, reaching its apotheosis in the possibility of reproduction. Most anathema to apartheid doctrine of course is the possibility of reproduction that crosses racial lines—so women of colour are the most potent, and frequently most beguiling, threat to white masculinity's societal preeminence. Because the actress playing the Indian woman on the cover of *Kid Colt* is white, she may be endowed with the predictable accoutrements of erotic appeal (the mini-skirt, for instance), thus making of her mimesis a form of racialized role-playing fantasy. Inevitably, however, despite her admiration for Kid Colt, racial boundaries are kept intact and she remains loyal to her Indian partner.

Women are figured in these stories as the anti-frontier, the enclosure, and yet they are paradoxically often the very justification for the hero's exploits and adventures. Kid Colt, Skrikruiter, and Ruiter in Swart frequently commit violent acts ostensibly to protect and/or rescue women. Women in these photocomics serve to kindle male activity but are then asked to passively and adoringly provide an audience for it.

As Kaplan and others have pointed out, heterosexual masculinity requires the gaze of the woman in order to be successfully performed. She is at once the reason for his performance of masculinity and the confirmation of its success. In tandem then with the repressed figure of the black-as-Indian, women, though peripheral to the stories being recounted are enlisted in the construction of South African masculinity.

This places the individual man's masculinity under further threat in its very dependence upon these figures for its assertion. Vulnerable to the possible impermanence

of the woman's gaze, he is thus also ever vulnerable to losing it. Women are thus vital, indeed central, for the justification of a man's life which keeps women at bay, confined, much as the blacks were in their Bantustans within the "home"lands of the domestic. The apartheid fantasy, then, was not limited to race relations, but attempted to monitor and control gender relations and to enforce segregation between men and women in order to strengthen strict zones of difference.

These narratives may have been responding, particularly in the 1970s, to the expanding role of women in the workplace, which disrupted preexisting divisions of space and labor.[98] In such a climate of increasing mobility for white women in South Africa, the possibility of black and white sexual encounters increased, making it even more imperative to erase references to this potential in forms of mass-consumed cultural entertainment. The greater the threat to the apartheid fantasy, the more apparent is its erasure in the Western photocomics. In this fantasy blacks never mixed with whites, and women were confined to domestic spaces of powerlessness and frailty where they could reinforce, but never threaten, the autonomy of the white man.

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[98] Ronel Erwee, "South African Women: Changing Career Patterns," *International Studies of Management and Organization* 16.3/4 (1986/1987). While black women were also entering the wage labor market in larger numbers than before, the avenues most readily available to them were in domestic work (particularly in urban areas). Jacklyn Cock, *Maids and Madams: A Study in the Politics of Exploitation* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1980). Deborah Gaitskell, Judy Kimble, Moira Maconachie and Elaine Unterhalter, "Class, Race and Gender: Domestic Workers in South Africa," *Review of African Political Economy* 27/28 (1983): 102.

Popular Culture and Politics

Popular culture is often accused of creating escapist utopias to sidetrack people from attending to everyday structural inequalities and injustices[99]. The epic can be seen to fulfill this function. Some commentators follow this line of thought in suggesting that photocomics do not depict worlds mirroring reality, but instead portray lives that readers aspire to having[100]. But Kaplan argues that dismissing popular genres as distracting, "light," entertainment ignores how they function politically precisely *because* they invoke escapist utopias in a foreclosed, inaccessible past. "Critics" she writes, "have long dismissed the popular …as a collective form of blowing off steam. … this approach ignores how nostalgia can abet modern imperial force, and *how an outworn genre can be refurbished to represent a new political context*…" (94 emphasis added). In his study of the popular U.S. dime novels, Michael Denning points to the direct link between the escapism of individual daydreams and culturally-determined forms of collective unconscious: "In the case of a daydream which is mediated by the collective and historically specific processes of narrative production and reception, that unconscious is social and political" (66). For Kaplan then, "to call these novels escapist … is to show not their avoidance of contemporary political discourse, but their reproduction of it" (101).

The Western resurfaces in South African photocomics in precisely this way. The genre's revival in photocomic form reflects desires for a racially segregated world, and this utopia is represented by a nostalgic vision of a time and place in which powerful

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[99] Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (London: Verso, 1998).
[100] Sonja Laden, "'Making the Paper Speak Well,' or the Pace of Change in Consumer Magazines for Black South Africans," *Poetics Today* 22.2 (2001). T. O. McLoughlin, "Reading Zimbabwean Comic Strips," *Research in African Literatures* 20.2 (1989).

white men dominate and conquer land, its indigenous inhabitants, and women. Even if the photocomics are forms of escapism it is important to consider why and how these forms are the ones chosen by consumers to effect their escapes.[101] Nostalgia for the past permits fantasies of the present, while simultaneously avoiding direct confrontation with the obstacles of the present that hinder these fantastic visions from becoming contemporary realities.[102]

Kaplan argues that the "modern Western, initiated with Owen Wister's *The Virginian*, finds its immediate genealogy in [the historical romance], which reclaims the American West through the course of overseas empire" (101). This link between the invention of the Western and external colonialism also helps to explain the resurgence of Western narratives in the context of apartheid South Africa's own colonial ambitions. Events in Lesotho, Namibia, Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe—the edge, so to speak, of South Africa's frontier—remind us what a pivotal epoch of decolonization this was for those countries bordering (and surrounded by) South Africa.

The apartheid government strove to retain its regional power by supporting anti-independence movements both financially and militarily. Despite the U.N.'s 1967 declared protectorate status in Namibia (known until then as South-West Africa), South Africa remained illegally in control of the region until 1990. The government was also

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[101] Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1984) 108.

[102] For Scott Simmon, nostalgic genres invent an ideal world separated both temporally and spatially from the present. Scott Simmon, *The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre's First Half-Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 178-92. For Renato Rosaldo, "imperialist nostalgia" misleadingly bestows innocence – nostalgia is childlike, innocent – upon subjects who were actually complicit in creating the loss of the very thing now mourned. Renato Rosaldo, *Culture & Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon, 1989).

closely involved in monitoring the first elections in newly independent Lesotho in 1970 and maintained an antagonistic relation with that country throughout the apartheid years as it welcomed so-called ANC and PAC "terrorists." The successful Angolan and Mozambican independence movements culminated in 1975 despite South African collaborations with the Portuguese to sabotage them, and Zimbabwe similarly gained its independence from the National Party-supported Ian Smith government in 1979-80.

Yet despite these efforts the South African frontiers were rigidifying into fixed national borders that destabilized the identification of white South African nationality with expansion and adventure.[103] The country was also, in a sense, becoming smaller as Bantustans were declared "independent" states by the government. What would happen to that identity if there were no more frontiers to extend? The cultural symptom of this crisis returns in the form of nostalgic genres like the Western. White South Africans returned to the cowboy because it provided an ersatz expression of their nostalgia for the *voortrekker* days, coterminously permitting a series of indirect confrontations with the racial dynamics of contemporary South African society. The nostalgia of the Western could impede change that comes about via historical reckoning and understanding. Christopher Lasch condemns nostalgia because it "undermines the ability to make intelligent use of the past" (82). For Lasch, nostalgia abets the misuse and abuse of

[103] Frederick Turner famously argued that the end of expansion in the US created a crisis in American identity. While US imperial expansion debunks this conceptual cordon, there were certainly parallel predicaments for South African identity with the more rigidified territorial boundaries put in place as surrounding countries gained their independence. Unlike Turner's idealist argument, however, that the frontier produced an American populace characterised by its democratic hybridity, myths of the South African frontier were largely framed around assertions of white supremacy. Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1963).

history. Yet the cowboy figure was also appropriated by black readers, transformed, and reworked as a figure of resistance to hegemonic racial discourse.[104] Bloke Modisane describes how resonant the Western was for black children in Sophiatown:

> Like America, South Africa has a frontier or voortrekker mentality, a primitive throw-back to the pioneering era, the trail-blazing days, when the law dangled in the holster and justice was swift, informal and prejudiced. Instant justice, lynching and horse-whippings are deep in the traditions of these countries; both are compulsive addicts of horse operas, we are always playing cowboys and Indians. The mud pool was the Wild West of America or the dark interior of Africa; and to us, out there in the pool, the white boys were the Red Indians, and we were the cowboys. The symbols were undoubtedly reversed in the white camp …(17).

Thus even in its nostalgic conservatism, there were breaches in the form which allowed for alternative interpretations of the grand narratives, for what Scott calls the "hidden transcripts" of resistance.[105] Despite their apparent allegiances to white supremacist thinking, Western photocomics provided more heterogeneous modes through which to read race, poking holes in the apartheid screen of vision by fostering practices of interracial readership which crossed legal, imaginative and narrative boundaries.

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Clearly reading can play a vital role in the development of the capacity for projective identification during childhood. Practices of reading the South African photocomic help explain how "the black schoolboy…identifies himself with the explorer,

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[104] Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem, Hollywood*.
[105] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992).

the bringer of civilization, the white man who carried truth to savages—an all-white truth" (Fanon *Black Skin White Masks* 147). By theorizing how colonized children read these photocomics we may observe 1) how cross-racial identifications were cultivated to produce docile subjects, but 2) how the modes of sympathetic identification created by reading destabilize the very rigid binaristic relations certain texts aimed to reproduce.

Ideology, as we know following Louis Althusser, is importantly reproduced at the discursive as well as the material level. German Nazi propaganda comic books such as *Der Giftpilz* (*The Poison Mushroom*) were used in this way to inculcate anti-semitic ideas in children. The belief that children's reading practices fundamentally effect their political consciousness is well documented in Julia L. Mickenberg's *Learning from the Left* which explores how communist and leftwing writers in the U.S. aimed to create a generation of anti-fascist leftists through the development of certain kinds of narratives for children (Mickenberg). Children's reading materials (just like all textual documents) are always implicated in the production and reproduction of ideology[106].

In "African Literature as Restoration of Celebration" Chinua Achebe writes, "I did not see myself as an African to begin with… The white man was good and reasonable and intelligent and courageous. The savages arrayed against him were sinister and stupid or, at the most, cunning. I hated their guts" (Qtd. in Franklin 74). Thus the story of

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[106] Because of this direct link between ideology and children's early reading practices, writers of the photocomic have more recently attempted to use it to disseminate a variety of "progressive" discussions of disease prevention and sexuality, for instance. Many studies of comic books and photocomics are indeed interested in how the genre itself is conducive to children's learning—focusing on how they can be used to disseminate information on important topics such as AIDs and child labor—and on how they can be employed in the service of getting young people interested in reading practices. In this regard they might be compared to some of the earlier pedagogically or morally-inclined Onitsha market literature.

Achebe's coming to literature is equally a story of the transformation of the childhood Achebe who identifies with the white hero into the adult Achebe whose novels condemn white colonialists and their legacies. Many colonized children, however, were not able to shrug off the harmful consequences of idolatry and identification that were simultaneously encouraged and denied by the colonial world. Ironically it is often only in the literary descriptions of the awareness of this process, i.e. in the *loss* of such an identification and in the gaining of a new black or colonized subject position, that we know of the existence of such children and adults.

For Freud, this kind of reverse identification was not an infrequent part of childhood development. In "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" Freud identifies the process whereby a child identifies with the object he loses, *becoming* that object in his own mind: "A child who was unhappy over the loss of a kitten declared straight out that now he himself was the kitten, and accordingly crawled about on all fours, would not eat at table, etc." ("Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" 41). This identification, it must be noted, is not the type of identification Freud considers "healthy," indeed it is an incorrect identification brought about in response to the trauma of loss. If we apply this to the context of literary identification during apartheid it is almost as though the loss of power *precedes* its attainment, as if *lack* is the constitutive experience in black children's identity formation, not possession. Lack, perhaps more than loss, was a driving force in black children's identification practices, so that their close identification with white figures like Kid Colt and other cowboys is an expression or imaginary fulfillment of their wish to possess agency and to mold the course of their own lives.

With its Eurocentric focus, most criticism on the photocomic fails to consider the very different effects of reading practices on colonized subjects though they constitute one of the largest groups of their readers. Consider Baetens optimistic statement that, in addition to being a reader, the photocomic's purchaser,

> can also feel himself to be a consumer (incited to buy products advertised in the pages of the photocomic), a citizen (judging the moral attitudes of the heroes, capable of imitating or refusing their behavior), an actor (thanks to the beauty competitions organized by the magazines), a writer (because he is invited to correspond with the actors in the photocomics) or a scriptwriter (if he decides to answer the questionnaires published at the end of each issue of the "open" feuilletons)" ("Le Roman-Photo *in Situ*" 38).

All of these subject-positions were denied to black readers of photocomics. Particularly in the white-targeted photocomics, when blacks are invited to be neither consumer, citizen, actor, writer, scriptwriter, nor even reader, what is left for them to engage with beyond a basic literary response of identification and/or alienation? Even within the photocomics for blacks, which do allow for greater definitions of subjectivity for black readers than the photocomics targeting whites, blacks were not permitted to see themselves as citizens, the most politically necessary subjectivity of which they were unjustly deprived.[107] For Baetens' European subject, the reader's subjectivity and possibilities for alternate subjectivities are multiplied, which explains, for him, the

[107] The photocomics reached their peak successes in South Africa during the 1970s, which was ironically, the most draconian decade in apartheid rule. In 1970 the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act was passed with the express aim of revoking citizenship for all black South Africans, requiring them to relinquish South African citizenship for citizenship in one of the "independent" black Bantustans.

success of the genre[108].

For black South African children reverse identification compensates for this overdetermined lack, but in the reparative process, a new wound is created, namely an awareness that this identification can only be permitted in the fictional space of fantasy. No black child is permitted under apartheid to behave like, let alone *be*, the powerful figure of masculine agency represented by the white heroes of the photocomic[109]. The black child therefore simultaneously experiences identification with and alienation from the white man.

Bloke Modisane's autobiography provides a description of this double trauma and conscientization. First, there is the misidentification with the fantasy of the good white man; it is followed by the disintegration of this identification, a further loss, which leaves Modisane without a substitute for this loss, in his Fanonian words with "a demolition of personality":

> my father wanted me to grow up to be a good man… I was educated into an acceptance that the white man is noble in reason and just, the impression was burned into my mind, until whiteness was invested with the symbol of purity and justice; but this reality was disorganized, the foundations of my faith broken up, when the lie exploded in my face, and in that moment I suffered a disorientation of values, a demolition of personality. The relevation [sic] was a traumatic experience, both shocking and cruel (Modisane 76).

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108 "This pluralization valorizes the reader without contest, thus contributing to affirming the success of the genre." Baetens, "Le Roman-Photo *in Situ*," 38.
109 While white children would also not have had access to becoming these figures either, the power they represented, through violence or less overt modes of dominance much more readily available to them, permitted them to transform their imaginative identifications beyond the realm of the fantastical into everyday interracial relations.

As this passage reminds us, it is important to recognize the detrimental side-effects of over-identification, particularly when such identifications seem only limited to the sphere of fantasy. But, as I have argued, processes of cross-racial imagining and identification simultaneously permit for the construction of alternative narratives of individual lives and social constructions. That black children might imagine themselves as powerful agents of their own destiny, even when apartheid most crudely denied them agency, may have contributed to the strength of South Africa's considerably vocal youth organizations, and thus to the formation and imagining of such powerful, if infamous, protests as 1976's Soweto Uprisings. By placing themselves "in the shoes" of powerful, if fantastical, fictional figures, reading practices encouraged identification practices allowing students to imagine that a national sphere might exist beyond the material confines of apartheid.

In the process, reading practices that involved the photocomic clearly elicited identifications that refused to respect the color line so often adhered to in the photocomics themselves. These imaginative forays into the being of alterity, as I argued in the preceding chapter on passbooks, may not have themselves been enough to provoke subjects to corresponding ethical acts. But they laid the groundwork, through everyday practice, for establishing imaginative connections between racial groups, destabilizing the identities the state was so intent to uphold. With the close of apartheid, as the subsequent chapters show, the ease with which these cross-racial identifications occurred at passchecks and in reading practices, was finally given room for its expression—at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and in writing produced after the transition of power. In what follows, I argue particularly that the transition permitted not only for the articulation of this cross-racial sympathetic attunement, but at times, enabled such

identifications to transform into ethical events, most often through the acknowledgment of shared responsibilities and complicities.

Chapter Three: Sympathy from Below in Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's *A Human Being Died That Night*

> "Responsibilities are infinite, even if humans are insufficient for them."
> (Cohen xxxvii)

Sympathy from Below

Sixteen years after the formal end of apartheid many charge that the ANC government has been devastatingly disappointing. Yet while changes in the economic situation for the majority of South Africans have been negligible, and economic inequality, according to some accounts[110], has even increased, there has been a shift in the realm of imaginative production. It is this type of aesthetic shift, Édouard Glissant claims in *Poetics of Relation*, that can "slowly" change "mentalities." He writes: "No imagination helps avert destitution in reality, none can oppose oppressions or sustain those who 'withstand' in body or spirit. But imagination changes mentalities, however slowly it may go about this" (Glissant 183). While Glissant seems to both refuse and affirm the transformative power of the imagination, his characteristically hopefully phrase reminds us to heed the interlocking relationship between the imaginative and ethical spheres of relation and the equally salient political ones. Chapter Three considers the productive social value of interpersonal and affective relations certain that any viable

[110] Adam Habib: "Economic inequalities in our society increased in the last fifteen years. It's one of the few societies in the world that in the midst of a democratic transition increased its economic inequalities": *Violence Is the Product of the Polarized Nature of Our Society: Interview with Adam Habib*, 2010, Available: http://www.democracynow.org/2010/4/5/violence_is_the_product_of_the, March 25, 2011.

political agenda can benefit from a consideration of the ethics of the everyday interpersonal encounters which form the backbone of social life.

One instance of this change in mentalities Glissant refers to, occurs in works by certain contemporary black South African authors[111] who are replacing the oppositional stance characteristic of descriptions of interracial relation during apartheid with a discourse more concerned with interconnection and sympathy. Such narratives, characterized by generosity towards, and inclusion of otherness, were also present in the social goals and *ubuntu* philosophy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which famously emphasized forgiveness over and above retribution. I will explore some of the consequences of combining sympathetic discourses with juridical ones in the final chapter.

In the first half of what follows I establish the theoretical parameters of the concept of "sympathy from below" and proceed to an exploration of this mode of sympathetic relationality via a discussion of two texts—Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's *A Human Being Died That Night.* The concept of a sympathy from below, simply put, attempts to rectify the way that studies of the sympathetic, and of the ethical more broadly, have tended to focus on sympathizing or ethical subjects in positions of relative ease and privilege who feel sympathy for those in positions more likely to be characterized by suffering than their own. Thinking about sympathy from below provokes a new set of questions about the ethical by theorizing ethical consciousness from spaces of subjection. The disregard of the question of an ethics of the oppressed, or a working-class ethics for that matter, only perpetuates

[111] In addition to those I focus on in this chapter, I also include Phaswane Mpe and K. Sello Duiker's post-apartheid work.

thinking that relies on a conception of subjected peoples as morally apathetic, lacking the complex agency so willingly attributed to the powerful in most discussions of ethical consciousness. My dissertation asks if a subject who is herself a victim of a great injustice such as apartheid can be ethically responsible to others, and in particular, if she can be responsible to the very others who are the representatives and perpetrators of her suffering. What problems arise when the direction of the ethical imperative is reconfigured?

As I showed in Chapter One in the context of pass laws, attending to the subjective experience of the powerful can often guarantee temporary survival for people under their thumb. But mere survival does not make for a fulfilling life even in the worst of circumstances. In what follows I argue that sympathy from below is also an occasion for the articulation of mutual responsibility, redefining the more predictable parameters of relation that usually dictate individual and political responses to social inequity.

Theorists of the sympathetic have tended to conceive of sympathy from the "top down," as an emotion, thought, or action, bestowed from a position of relative ease upon a suffering other.[112] This unidirectional model conceals the fact that sympathy is far more

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[112] Beginning with the third Earl of Shaftesbury and Francis Hutcheson, early eighteenth-century theorists of sympathy insisted that the experience or feeling of sympathy was the province of an elitist few. "For Shaftesbury, the few are those in power, for Hutcheson, it is those with wealth" writes Marcia Kathleen Farrell, "Sympathy and Ambivalence: Identity Politics in Early Twentieth-Century Anti-Imperial Novels," Ph.D. University of Tulsa, 2005, 26. This perception continues in the twentieth century when Max Scheler claims that "in the phenomenon of compassion, which is a heightened commiseration *bestowed from above,* and *from a standpoint of superior power and dignity*, commiseration displays its characteristic consideration for the condition of its object…" Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. Peter Heath (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1970) 40. Emphasis mine.

frequently interpolated "from below."[113] Indeed the ability to imaginatively project oneself into the mind of the other—the process through which sympathy is thought to proceed—is a daily requisite for many subjected people whom, to endure daily acts of overt and symbolic violence, have had no other choice but to cultivate sympathetic modes of relation to their oppressors. Let me be clear: the oppressed bear little moral obligation to their oppressors—indeed those who foreclose morality have no right to expect it to work in their favor—yet the experience of oppression almost universally necessitates and encourages identification with mainstream, hegemonic ideology in order for subjects to survive and even thrive within that system. The openness to alterity theorists such as Emanuel Levinas so famously defend, is a characteristic of oppression, albeit one arrived at more by necessity than out of any philosophical imperative. We can recognize traces of this assertion if we consider the famous theories of race consciousness of W.E. B. DuBois and Frantz Fanon, whose writing exposes the way that blacks in the antebellum and post Civil War United States, and colonized peoples in Africa and the Caribbean, were forced to imaginatively inhabit the structures of power which were often so hegemonic as arbiters of morality, behavior and cultural practice.

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[113] I choose to use the term "below" to indicate as clearly as possible that the form of sympathy under discussion is unusual in that it is directed from the person suffering towards the person responsible for that suffering. Theorists such as Chela Sandoval claim that recent metaphors of opposition better reflect contemporary experiences—resistance occurs less from "below" "under" "subordinate" or "inferior" positions, and phrases such as "from margin to center" "interstices" "borders" "travel" "diaspora" "location" and "positionality" are used instead. For me, pyramidal metaphors such as "below" still carry valency. Sandoval's postmodern view of fluidity as a universal characteristic of power ignores myriad examples of straightforward hierarchical power relations determined by social, economic, material and spatial configurations that continue to operate at both the micro and macro scales.

While sympathy is an everyday practice in the domain of the oppressed, *discourses* of sympathy, at least in their written form are, and have been, the province of the powerful. Philosophers of sympathy have often been more interested in writing about the suffering of others than in doing anything to relieve it (Rancière)[114], while Western writers have often been prone to aestheticizing suffering (Slatoff). Thus while purporting to desire the amelioration of other people's lives, too often the only benefits of such sympathetic discourses have been reaped by those championing them loudest[115]. These benefits include the material and social privileges that come with *being perceived as* compassionate or sympathetic[116]. Indeed discourses of the sympathetic have buttressed the public and private standing of their rhetoricians in all sorts of ways: from gains as immaterial as self-congratulation, to the material bounties of capital accumulation acquired through machinations of "aid" and "development."

In contrast, for anyone living under an oppressive regime, learning to imagine the desires and thoughts of the oppressive other is essential for survival. This act of deduction and projection however, has ramifications beyond the realm of the imagination or the immediate event that may require such imaginative work. For if another person,

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[114] "Rancière argues that in Bourdieu as much as Plato, the poor comprise in their very exclusion from the vocation of philosopher the condition of philosophical possibility. Present as objects rather than subjects of knowledge, appearing only in the guise of philosophy's *exempla*, the poor enable the philosopher to constitute himself—as other than the poor." Jacques Rancière, *The Nights of Labor: The Worker's Dream in Nineteenth Century France* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991) xiii.

[115] The narrator of "Bartleby, the Scrivener" points out these benefits when he is considering Bartleby's "passive resistance." "Here," he boasts, "I can cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval. To befriend Bartleby; to humor him in his strange willfulness, will cost me little or nothing, while I lay up in my soul what will eventually prove a sweet morsel for my conscience" Herman Melville and Jay Leyda, *The Portable Melville*, The Viking Portable Library (New York: Penguin Books, 1976) 480-1.

[116] In the international popular imaginary, recent figures such as Lady Diana and Angelina Jolie occupy these positions.

even, as under apartheid, a legally-sanctioned agent of oppression such as a policeman or judge, if this person is imagined as complexly emotive or intelligent, an abyss has the potential to open up wherein polarizing categories such as black and white, good and bad, are called into question, at times so much so that there is a powerful reconfiguration of the parameters of relation.

The necessary (if reductive) moral imperatives of resistance politics during apartheid meant that the nebulous terrain of ethical and sympathetic relation between blacks and whites was underemphasized by black writers in order to effect the overthrow of the similarly binaristic racist legal and political system. While there is certainly evidence of works written by black and "coloured" authors that address the moral murkiness of race relations during apartheid, these textual eruptions were few and far between compared to those which focused on relations between good and evil characters, aiming to convey apartheid's injustices through rather formulaic lenses of oppression, perpetratorship, and victimization.[117] Njabulo Ndebele famously voiced this critique of so-called protest or resistance literature, arguing that its tendency to rely on a set of overly simplistic symbols and characters set up a "reductively Manichean dialectic between good and evil, thus unintentionally reducing actual experiences of poverty and oppression into types which deny the nuance and complexity of such existences" (*South African Literature and Culture* 20). For Ndebele, this "moral ideology" provokes an indictment of "evil" systems without bringing to consciousness an awareness of the "social processes" which led to such a situation, and thus to the ways a constructed society might be reconstructed.

[117] See Ndebele, *South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary*.

Only in the wake of South Africa's 1996 Constitution which inscribed racial, economic, gender and sexual parities into official definitions of national identity, could the more complicated work begin of transforming legalized equality into cultural production which also re-imagined cross-racial relation. The moment of transition may appear to be (as Spivak once referred to it) "the moment before the failure of independence," but recent writing suggests that a rupture is discernable after all, and that writers can now consider interracial relations as a multidirectional imperative that looks beyond the simple divisions of perpetrator and victim ("Address"). In the ideological shift heralded by the abolition of apartheid a space emerged for this morally ambiguous mode of relation to find room for its formal acknowledgement and articulation[118]. Thus the rupture I am identifying in South African literary production is of a discursive nature, but the post-apartheid articulation of sympathy from below in fact gives voice to a manner of relation that pre-existed its public enunciation. Of course how this shift in imaginative production translates into material practice remains to be determined. But Glissant's argument that it "changes mentalities" should certainly resonate with those of us who see a direct link between the power of the pen and the development of consciousness and action in the world at large.

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Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* (1998) and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's *A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Woman Confronts the Legacy of*

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[118] Allison Donnell makes a similar historical argument in her recent work on Caribbean women's writing suggesting that though its "insistence on representational generosity," and its "rhetoric of inclusion" stretches all the way back to Mary Prince's 1831 slave narrative, it only gathered to a critical mass when social conditions permitted Caribbean women to see writing as a career. Allison Donnell, "Representation and Rapport: Caribbean Women's Writing and the Lives of Others."

Apartheid (2003) both attempt, in the wake of apartheid, to understand and sympathize with perpetrators of violence. While the targets of Gobodo-Madikizela and Magona's sympathy differ—the former is Eugene de Kock, head of the government's infamous Vlakplaas murder squad; the latter, Mxolisi, fictionalized child murderer of American Fulbright scholar, Amy Biehl—both women engage theories of sympathy to explore their relations with these "lost creatures of malice and destruction" (Magona *Mother to Mother* v)[119].

Mother to Mother is dominated by the story of Mandisa, a black South African woman who lives in 1993 (just before the democratic elections) in Gugulethu, a township outside of Cape Town. She works as a domestic for a white family and is the mother of three children, including the fictional Mxolisi, who murders Amy Biehl. Biehl was an American Fulbright scholar working on voter registration efforts in South Africa just before the election of the African National Congress in 1994. She was murdered the day before she was due to return to the United States. In an interview Magona explains how she came to write the novel after learning that one of Biehl's "real" four murderers was the child of a childhood friend of hers. She admits that her interest in writing this novel came about not so much from a need to write to Amy Biehl's mother. Rather she wanted to explain how apartheid produced children who could murder a person there ostensibly to help black South Africans shake off the yoke of apartheid (Attwell, Attwell and Harlow).

The narrative is constructed as a direct address to Amy Biehl's mother—Linda Biehl—and Magona's novel starts with Mandisa imagining Amy on the day of her death.

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[119] See the introduction for a discussion of my preference for the term "sympathy" in lieu of close synonyms such as empathy and compassion.

Nonetheless the novel is primarily an excursion into the biography of Mandisa herself—and in this sense it resembles Magona's earlier works. Magona achieved recognition initially for her autobiographical *To My Children's Children* (1990), in which a Xhosa woman narrates the story of her life to her great-granddaughter[120]. Her subsequent *Forced to Grow* (1992) continues her autobiography from age twenty-four to her departure for New York, where Magona pursued a Masters Degree at Columbia University and then began working at the U.N. Her non-autobiographical fictional forays before *Mother to Mother* took the form of short fiction collected primarily in two collections *Living, Loving, and Lying Awake at Night* (1991) and *Push Push! and other stories* (1996). All of these works, including the stories and the memoirs, focus on the social and economic aspects of life for black women in South Africa, though only *Mother to Mother* examines black female subjectivity after apartheid.

Another common element in Magona's works is an emphasis on storytelling. The most common form of address she writes in is the first person, and the presence of a named reader is often explicit. In the story cycle "Women at work," in *Living, Loving, and Lying Awake at Night* a series of black maids talk to Itini, another maid. Itini opens the story cycle with her own tale of abandoning her children in her rural "homeland" in order to make money to feed them by working as a maid. The maids' uninterrupted monologues allow these women to describe various aspects of their lives—from their conflicts with one another, to their back-breaking days of relentless work, to their

[120] In an interview Magona says "People think I was writing for my grandchildren. I don't even have grandchildren. I was writing for people who will be alive a hundred years from now" Siphokazi Koyana, "A Conversation with Sindiwe Magona in New York," *Sindiwe Magona: The First Decade*, ed. Siphokazi Koyana (Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 1997) 158.

relationships with their white "medems." Christine Loflin points out, recalling Hegel's master-slave dialectic, that "one of the remarkable attributes of these stories is their ability to expose the behavior and thinking of the white employers to the reader: *as Fanon has said of the colonized, the maids know more about their employer than the employers know about them*: their whole lives, public and private, are open to their servants" (111 my emphasis). Such awareness, as I argue below, is what makes sympathy from below far more common than sympathy from above[121]. *Mother to Mother* also evokes this sympathetic mode of relation through its dialogic form of narration, as Mandisa describes pivotal moments of her autobiography directly to Amy Biehl's mother.

In contrast, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's memoir recounts her reactions to a series of interviews she conducted with Eugene de Kock, apartheid-era state assassin who carried out a series of horrifically violent atrocities against apartheid's opponents. Gobodo-Madikizela's book is an attempt to understand one Afrikaner man responsible for the brutal deaths of many of her compatriots. Unlike Hannah Arendt's encounters with Adolf Eichmann at the trials in Jerusalem in 1961-2, *A Human Being Died That Night* describes meetings with de Kock of a far more intimate nature leaving Gobodo-Madikizela invested in de Kock's well-being and simultaneously disturbed by this investment. A psychologist by training, the memoir is a curious exercise in self-analysis: Gobodo-Madikizela attempts to understand how her meetings with "Prime Evil" bring to light her own complicities with and responsibilities for de Kock. That she can articulate her own answerability to South African whites, particularly to those who committed

[121] For more servant's agential consciousness, see Bruce Robbins, *The Servant's Hand: English Fiction from Below* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

severe crimes against her comrades, is a direct result of the abolition of apartheid. This is taken up in *A Human Being Died That Night* and in her other work as a commissioner for the TRC and as a psychologist interested in bringing perpetrators and victims together to elicit what she terms "empathetic repair."[122]

Implicit in my examination of sympathy from below are questions of responsibility that all writers confront.[123] What are the ethics of imagining (or not imagining) others? What, for black South African writers under apartheid, is an ethics of representation? What about in the moment after apartheid? Does oppression annul responsibility to the other, particularly when the other is so despicable? Or is it precisely from this position that the theories of sympathy, intersubjectivity, and responsibility to the other face their greatest test, and thus proffer the highest potential for, to use Glissant's phrase, "a poetics of relation"?

We must understand the experience of oppression not just through "a cult of victimization," nor through the condescending forms of sympathy for victims so predominant in Western liberalism (Mbembe "African Modes" 244). We must ask what means the oppressed have for subverting their entrapment in positions of victimhood, and how sympathy (for the oppressing everyday "devil") offers a methodology for appropriating agency. Alongside these considerations, we must keep in mind that agency is of course first and foremost composed of a redistribution of access to economic, legal

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[122] Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, "Empathetic Repair after Mass Trauma: When Vengeance Is Arrested," *European Journal of Social Theory* 11.3 (2008).
[123] Unlike in many Western countries, the relative privilege of writers in apartheid South Africa did not (and does not) situate them outside of all socially-determined forms of domination. Black writers can more easily *speak about* and *speak for* beleaguered South African blacks, since they too were members of that group, and their work was often irrelevant to the racist state in determining relation.

and political structures. Yet it is also constituted by the oppressed's ability to conceive of their oppressors as victims themselves; to recognize the formative role played by everyday affective relations in producing agential ethical subjectivities.[124]

In contrast to the oppressed who are often predisposed by their very subject-position to identify with and sympathize with the powerful, for those who dominate, imagining the disenfranchised is sporadic. Earnest and consistent at best, whimsical and simplistic at worst, such a witness of another's suffering can choose at will when to care (or when not to) about that other. For the subjected, this aspect of *choice*, of *choosing* to imagine the other, thus by implication choosing to be open to the possibility of sympathy, is not available. As Steve Biko wrote "From time to time the liberals make themselves

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[124] Many scholars have criticized rigid models of guilt and victimhood. Jessica Benjamin problematizes the polarizing infantocentric model of traditional psychology which figures the child *as an innocent victim*—"the self was always the recipient, not the giver of empathy." Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference,* 32. Robert Reid-Pharr also questions these attributions of guilt, responsibility, and victimhood. He enjoins us to remember that "even as we must memorialize and seek to undo the grave human tragedies enacted by our countrymen, and perhaps ourselves…it is nonetheless true that the people most caught up in these ugliest of human dramas (the blacks, the Negroes, the coloreds) were never passive victims." Robert Reid-Pharr, *Once You Go Black: Choice, Desire, and the Black American Intellectual* (New York: New York University Press, 2007) 2-3. None of this thinking is particularly new, though it continues to be absent in much work in postcolonial studies which prefer the oversimplificiation of ethical responsibility in order to effect direct political solidarities. We can find this more complex thinking much earlier in Albert Memmi, Frederick Douglass, and Frantz Fanon for instance, who all note that whites were harmed by systems of racial oppression: Douglass insists that "Slavery proved as injurious to [my mistress] as it did to me." Frederick Douglass, "Learning to Read and Write," *One Hundred Great Essays*, ed. Robert Diyanni, 3rd ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2008) 217. Nor is this a foreign idea in South Africa: "We had kept saying in the dark days of apartheid's oppression that white South Africans would never be truly free until we blacks were free as well," Desmond Tutu writes. He quotes Judge Ismail Mahomed who reiterates the point: "The wicked and the innocent have often both been victims" Qtd. in Desmond Mpilo Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Image Doubleday, 1999) 25. See also Henry Louis Gates, "Ending the Slavery Blame-Game," *The New York Times* April 26 2010. A full study of the failure of such thinking to predominate would be an important contribution to postcolonial studies.

forget about the problem [of black oppression] or take their eyes off the eyesore. On the other hand, in oppression the blacks are experiencing a situation from which they are unable to escape at any given moment" (22).

For the perpetrators, or to use Mahmood Mamdani's phrase—the "beneficiaries"—of apartheid, imagining blacks and coloureds as complex human individuals was in no way a daily requirement for most whites' survival (Qtd. in Krog *Country of My Skull* 146). Despite the well-documented Enlightenment interest in sympathy, what those philosophers do not explore is how, paradoxically, the positions from which they wrote made them *least* likely to be moved to acts of sympathy. Although traditionally understood as a sentiment of the powerful, sympathy is in fact an exception amongst them, and is, in contrast, such an inherent part of everyday subaltern practice, that it is taken for granted or willfully ignored. When Breyten Breytenbach bemoans the lack of sympathy he receives at the hands of his black jailors in the employ of the apartheid government—"How stupid I was, Mr. Investigator! I thought these blokes at least must have some sympathy left in them somewhere. Aren't they *black* after all, members of the oppressed majority…"—we see how sympathy from below is *expected* by whites, and becomes notable only in its absence (*The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* 36).

Though sympathy has traditionally been deemed a trait of the powerful, this has reinforced their power rather than bringing them closer to those for whom they profess sympathy. By monopolizing discourses of sympathy in addition to deriving manifold moral and personal benefits, they further their dominance by wresting away from the

subjugated another part of their self-definition[125]. It should come as no great surprise that it is most often the powerful themselves, whom many philosophers have invested with the highest ability to feel sympathy, who are indeed most likely to refuse to offer compassion of any sort to those less fortunate.

The (Shoddy) Politics of Sympathetic Discourses

The phrase most commonly called upon to explain how sympathy operates is that of imagining oneself "in somebody else's shoes." Consider novelist Sol Plaatje's 1916 plea protesting the Natives Land Bill of 1913 which was a precursor to the apartheid era laws dispossessing blacks of their land:

> Some readers may perhaps think that I have taken the Colonial Parliament rather severely to task. But to any reader who holds with Bacon, that "the pencil hath laboured more in describing the afflictions of Job than the felicities of Solomon," I would say: "Do, if we dare make the request, and place yourself in our shoes" (Plaatje 17).

Here Plaatje calls on canonical Western philosophy in order to represent himself as a "civilized" writer who might use words to elicit sympathies which could themselves be manifested in fairer land distribution practices. By appealing to a shared cultural touchstone—Bacon—he emphasizes commonalities between himself and the white

[125] It should be acknowledged that part of the reason moral philosophers have dominated this discourse, is because they were fortunate enough to be able to follower the *vita contemplativa*. As Hannah Arendt notes, "it is only natural that active life has always been described by those who themselves followed the contemplative way of life." The problem she fails to recognize here is how inadequately they did so, being so far removed from many of the spheres of the *vita activa* with which they claimed familiarity. Hannah Arendt, "Labor, Work, Action," *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. Peter Baehr (New York: Penguin, 2000).

members of parliament in order to convince them to reject the differences that led them to consider the Native Land Bill at all. But the phrase "place yourself in our shoes" is an equally class-bound reference, though not necessarily one that either Plaatje or his addressees would have picked up upon. It assumes that everyone *has* shoes, that sympathy would only ever be requisite for someone wearing shoes, those markers of a "civilized" subjectivity.

Magona too reminds us of this linguistic link in English between shod feet and material success when she affirms in the second volume of her autobiography, "…with everything that I cherished taken, broken or out of reach, I resolved I would become self-sufficient. I would work hard. I would study. I would pull myself up by my bootstraps. Yes, even though I had still to acquire the boots" (*Forced to Grow* 25). Magona's important revision of the famous "bootstrap" ideology, epitomized in writer Horatio Alger's stories, cannot be underemphasized in her work, since in 2004 Magona mentioned in an interview that she was working on a (yet-to-be published) novel titled *Without Bootstraps* (Koyana *Sindiwe Magona* 12). The phrase may have traveled to South Africa, yet its assumptions are laid bare when it is not the possibility of social mobility that matters (figured in the civility one presumably acquires by possessing the proverbial bootstraps), but the far more immediate need for boots themselves.

Despite dominating the discourse of sympathy, paradoxically, the powerful are the least likely to *be* sympathetic or *express* sympathy, since they are the least likely to *need* to imagine themselves in someone else's shoes. Imagining the bodily being of the other is more imperative for marginal or oppressed groups than for the representatives of the hegemonic. Yet benevolent *discourses* such as paternalism are also employed beyond

descriptions of intersubjective relation to provide metaphorical justification for exploitation at the national level (Genovese *Roll Jordan Roll*). Such rhetorics of protection and beneficence permitted apartheid law for instance. In the first volume of her autobiography, Magona bemoans:

> THE LAW! The greatest hardship we labored under was not that we had no protection from the law. No! That was the lesser evil. The worst was that we were *burdened with protection* by the master race via an unwieldy plethora of laws, by-laws, rules and regulations passed by a parliament with whose existence we had naught to do and whose raison d'être appeared to be our exclusive 'protection' (*To My Children's Children* 1-2 my emphasis).

Condescension and self-aggrandizement was probably the more frequent outcome of this protection racket than any ostensible relief from existential or material suffering. Professions of sympathy often obscured selfish motivations while simultaneously upholding ideologies that divided the world into groups categorized by relative superiority or inferiority.

One classic justification for segregation favored by both colonizers and white supremacists has been to view the dispossessed as animals, reducing whole groups of people to non-human, objectified others. But animalistic discourses are also employed by subjected groups to describe their oppressors. "*AmaBhulu, azizinja!*" declare the Xhosa-speaking youth in *Mother to Mother*. "Whites are dogs!" Magona/Mandisa translates, "Not a new thought, by any means. We had said that all along" (*Mother to Mother* 74-5). In one scene, policemen ransack Mandisa's home in the effort to find Mxolisi, her son. She describes a policeman who asks:

> “Where is he?” The voice is raised and angry. It is a hideous voice, quite startling. There is something not human about it. And one look at his face and you know he robbed some poor bull frog [sic] of his… and an ox for his neck and eyes.
>
> “Where is he?” bullfrog-face snarls at me. Only the snarl is not at all successful — it is a cross between a growl and a bray. The voice comes straight from a donkey (Magona *Mother to Mother* 85).

Here Mandisa’s shuttling between various animal analogies mirrors the mayhem occurring in her home. And even the comparisons she comes up with seem insufficient for conveying the inhumanity of the man’s demeanor and behavior. Animals (“some poor bullfrog”) barely deserve the injustice of having their characteristics “robbed” by this policeman; in Mandisa’s search for the appropriate image she suggests that animals themselves come closer to being human than this man ever can. Instead he appears as some grotesque distorted figure who escapes delineation—part frog, part ox, part dog, part donkey, part disembodied man (he has after all “the voice”)—the policeman occupies some third space of being which cannot to be contained within the limited boundaries of species definition.

Though imagining whites in such a way as non-human was common, survival necessitated that blacks and coloureds just as frequently imagined whites to be as human as themselves. Over a quarter of a century earlier than Magona’s text, in his 1973 novel *In the Fog of the Season’s End*, Alex La Guma also ponders whiteness as otherness. He writes, “the thought entered his mind that possibly the Whites were the same as his people, except that their skin was different” (*In the Fog of the Season's End* 76-77). If

whites are "the same" under apartheid, La Guma raises the question of how to exist as an ethical being in the world—should one choose to do so— while facing the problem of what it means to be responsible to those who are either the representatives or the perpetrators of one's own suffering. What kind of attempts can be made—or should be made—to identify with, sympathize with, and forgive, the architects and beneficiaries of apartheid? Does the only way to understand the oppressing other involve erasing his difference and imagining him only as "the same" as oneself? Where is there room for difference in a sympathy from below?

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As I have been arguing, sympathy for and identification with the oppressor is a near inescapable characteristic or symptom of oppression. For Emannuel Levinas, it is this very crisis of ethical relation—"the state of being a hostage" of another that *creates* the possibility for an ethics. What Levinas suggests is that when individual survival is most at stake, any notion of uniform coherent subjectivity comes apart, and thus the possibility of an interpersonal ethics arises most clearly. In the context of apartheid South Africa this would mean that at the moment black South Africans' existence was most under threat (a constant feature of everyday life for many under apartheid), they were also the most open to responsibility. And at this very moment of responsibility-in-crisis the stubbornly reductive lens of right and wrong gives way to the more ambiguous recognition of the possibility of the goodness of the other, *in tandem with her cruelty*, and thus, to the potential for a being-in-togetherness, if not in fact to the potential for love[126].

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[126] For more on love as a product of imagination, see Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. I am not arguing that ethical and interpersonal

For Levinas it is this recognition of the absolute difference of the other that is the condition for the potential for ethics. Sympathy, of course, regardless of its origin may not always tolerate difference. Spivak and others have shown how sympathy has actually often functioned in colonizing ideology to justify the annihilation of difference[127]. Insistence that the colonized deserved sympathy because they were "savage," "uncivilized," "animal," and "instinctual," replaced actual difference with simplistic and starkly hierarchical categories of human and sub-human. This so-called sympathetic attitude, and its attendant civilizing missions served of course primarily as a way to assert the sympathizers' superiority.

Other modes of colonial sympathy did recognize the humanity of the colonized, but insisted on interpreting any difference, cultural or otherwise, through more familiar European epistemologies. In this approach, colonizers worked to assimilate others into their own structures of thought and behavior, refusing to acknowledge the value of alternate ways of knowing and interpreting the world.

Though this problem is more one for the powerful than for the powerless we must certainly entertain the idea that this kind of epistemological erasure can occur in modes of sympathy that arise from positions of subjection as well. Wouldn't it make sense to imagine that the oppressed also interpret their oppressors with their own culturally-specific conceptual maps? Was it impossible during apartheid, for instance, for blacks to

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relation undid the apartheid state, rather that political and ethical structures of relation can work together to undermine structures of inequality.

[127] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Donna Landry and Gerald M. MacLean, *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (New York: Routledge, 1996). Todorov, *The Conquest of America*.

imagine whites merely through a projection of the self ? Could white difference be erased by assuming whites behaved and thought and felt in similar ways to blacks?

Surely the social and historical circumstances in which imaginative acts occur play some determinate role in the degree to which imagination can annihilate the other's difference. Apartheid mostly foreclosed the possibility that non-hegemonic racial groups might imagine whites as thinking and behaving just "the same" as themselves . It is unlikely that black and coloured South Africans could assimilate their figurations of whiteness and white identity entirely within their own cultural models. Their sympathy with whites is thus not benevolence, since it has not historically been accompanied by the power necessary to ignore or devalue difference[128]. Blacks instead have been adept at imagining or *feeling* whiteness since its cultural manifestations were violently hegemonic, and thus whiteness or whiteness' attendant norms were unavoidable truths of the everyday.

Critics of more recent, neocolonial benevolence aver that it constitutes "…a denial of difference" and reasserts hegemony.

> The production of Western sovereign self is disguised by other-ing the Third World disenfranchised as lacking appropriate agency. Thus, in benevolent discourse, difference is accepted and denied at the same time, that is to say, it is made into a natural hierarchy…. Rather than representing or helping the subaltern, benevolent discourse performs the hegemony of the neo-colonial subject and constitutes his/her world as naturally superior. This blocks the possibility of talking with the subaltern (Mutman 33).

[128] This is the case despite the paranoid claims of some contemporary white South Africans.

Marlene van Niekerk's 1994 *Triomf*, provides a metaphorical description of this failure of white South Africans to see blacks outside of their own frame of reference. As the white character, Lambert puts it, echoing Fanon and Hegel: "He wishes the kaffir would take off those sunglasses, 'cause he doesn't know where to look when he looks at him. *All he sees there is his own reflection. He feels the kaffir can see him better than he can see the kaffir*" (*Triomf* 249 emphasis added).

This distinction I insist upon here between a sympathy open to difference and a sympathy that erases difference is important because it identifies multiple forms of sympathy, and suggests that certain *sympathies* might have productive rather than condescending or destructive results. Sympathy from below resists the problematic enfolding of other into self which often occurs when the sympathetic urge to relate to another's suffering originates from a subject who is the representative and torchbearer of hegemonic ideology. Our task is firstly to identify the mechanisms through which such a sympathy works, remaining receptive to a difference without end, and secondly to begin to think about how such an intersubjective sympathy from below might augment social and political planning.

The tools we have for thinking about otherness in a colonial situation have almost universally been calibrated towards a consideration of this problem from the position of the colonizers. To think about the ways in which colonized or oppressed groups imagine, think, and feel the oppressors is *not* to simply apply these same articulations of otherness, but to conceive of a new set of relations to the other. Tzvetan Todorov challenges us to transcend the thought that "human life is confined between… two extremes, one where the *I* invades the world, and one where the world ultimately absorbs the *I* in the form of a

corpse or of ashes" (247). This consideration of otherness as experienced by subjected populations aims to feel a way towards an alternate vision approaching what Levinas has called "transcendence." "Transcendence," he writes "cannot…be felt otherwise than as a subjectivity in crisis, that finds itself facing the other, whom it can neither contain nor take up, and who nonetheless puts it in question" (Qtd. in Hayat xiv).

To repeat: Because sympathy from below originates in subjection, its bearers cannot facilely equate the other with the self. Blacks under apartheid would have been hard pressed to perceive whites solely through their own modes of perception. While La Guma acknowledges that blacks could see whites as "possibly" the "same" as blacks, his hesitation also attests to how uncommon such an idea was—indeed the idea exists more in the realm of potentiality than in lived experience (*In the Fog of the Season's End*). Gobodo-Madikizela also couches white similarity in the language of the hypothetical when she asks: "If they can *feel* like human beings, if they can share a human moment with those on whom they inflicted trauma, pain, and misery, why did the good side of humanity fail when it was needed most?" (*A Human Being Died That Night* 16). Black South Africans living during apartheid had to recognize a system outside of their own in order to survive, a system to which they belonged as laborers, but rarely as cultural agents. Whiteness was the yardstick against which to measure power and privilege and white people were generally uninterested in assimilating to forms of black South African culture.

Mother to Mother and the Ethics of Inclusion

In an interview Magona explains how she came to write *Mother to Mother* after learning that one of Biehl's murderers was the child of a childhood friend of hers, Evelyn Manqina:

> Well, we grew up together! As we say in the township, "I know her saliva!" because I have eaten candy from her mouth. I was horrified that someone I knew…I thought of the little Mandisa—how was she handling this?... I had a vague kind of *sympathy* for the Biehls, whom I do not know; I did not know them. But now I thought of Mandisa and I thought, my God, how is she? I wonder what has happened? How is she feeling? How has she dealt with it? I didn't go to see her. I came back [to New York], and for two years I was in grief for her. For two years I had this urge to go to the Biehls, especially the mother, to explain how this woman Mandisa was as a child… And I imagined the rest of her life. The horror, the poverty" (Attwell, Attwell and Harlow 284-5).

There is a lot to say about this statement—and I will return to way she formulates her impulse to write through a list of questions—but firstly we may simply note that Magona's admitted focus of connection is that between women, particularly between herself and her childhood friend Mandisa, and between herself and Amy Biehl's mother—"especially the mother" she states—suggesting that shared history and gender offer the opportunity for forging connections[129]. This kind of intersubjective relation,

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[129] Recognizing mutuality in motherhood is not, however, the cure-all to fix national trauma. As Samuelson insists, "…this relationship is not romanticized. Though shared maternity provides the channel through which Mandisa is able to address Biehl's mother, maternity *per se* is not shown necessarily to create the conditions under which this dialogue can take place." Meg Samuelson, "The Mother as Witness: Reading *Mother to Mother* Alongside South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *Sindiwe*

idealized though it may be given the distance that imaginative work provides, certainly refuses the apartheid ideology that offered race as the only identitarian framework across which solidarities might be formed.

The narrative alternates between three dominant forms of storytelling. First there is Mandisa's direct address to the mother of Amy Biehl, Linda Biehl, which frames the novel and sporadically interrupts the other two strands of narrative. Then there are a series of sections narrated by Mandisa that describe the events that took place over the 25th and 26th of August, 1993, the day of Amy Biehl's death and the day after. The most dominant narrative however is Mandisa's first-person narration of her own life as a fifteen and sixteen year old girl in 1972 and 1973. In this anachronous way, Magona accomplishes the three goals she describes in her interview with David Attwell: to tell Mandisa's story as well as the story of Mandisa's son and the death of Amy Biehl, and to tell it all to "especially the mother," Linda Biehl.

The longest part of the book narrating Mandisa's biography focuses on the social and economic consequences of apartheid on black South African women and in this *Mother to Mother* resembles Magona's earlier works, such as the story cycle "Women at Work" (*Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night*). In *Mother to Mother* Mandisa tells Amy Biehl's mother (and the reader) about her family's forced removal from a residential area in the rural Western Cape to Gugulethu township; narrates the unwanted pregnancy that resulted in Mxolisi, her son; recounts her mistreatment at the hands of her husband and the family she is forced to marry into; and tells of her attempt to recreate a life for herself with a family and a new husband, still in the township. Mandisa's story we

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Magona: The First Decade, ed. Siphokazi Koyana (Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2004) 139.

should note, in many ways resembles Magona's own, as described in her autobiographical *Forced to Grow*.

A major difference between *Mother to Mother* and Magona's earlier autobiographical works which also explicitly address external readers—is that a shift has taken place in terms of the addressee. The dialogue is now explicitly interracial. In *Mother to Mother* Magona intentionally makes the act of a black woman addressing a white woman the narratological fulcrum of the book. "My Sister-Mother," Mandisa tells Amy Biehl's mother, "we are bound in this sorrow," gesturing towards a global family united neither by blood, race, nor nation, but by the shared experience of human suffering (200).

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"My son killed your daughter" (1). Thus begins Magona's novel, making explicit through one independent clause, the fundamental *inter*dependency of the four main personae of the book: Mandisa, the narrator; Mxolisi, her son; Linda Biehl, the woman to whom the novel is addressed; and her daughter, Fulbright scholar, Amy Biehl. The simple grammatical union of all four that Magona brings about in one sentence highlights the centrality of themes of communality and togetherness that dominate the rest of the work[130]. But the central verb—the pivotal word that cleaves the sentence and those it

[130] Jennifer Wenzel refuses the ethical implications of the novel's dialogic structure. For her, "The only image of sociality as sustaining community, rather than menacing, mindless crowd, is a nostalgic recollection of Blouvlei, where Mandisa lived as a child until the community was scattered by the 'whirlwind' of forced removal…" Jennifer Wenzel, "Weapons of Struggle and Weapons of Memory: Thinking Time Beyond Apartheid," *Bulletproof : Afterlives of Anticolonial Prophecy in South Africa and Beyond* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). For McHaney, however, "Magona gives Mandisa a voice that is at once stream-of-consciousness as well as conversational, suggesting throughout the novel that Mandisa is one mother speaking relentlessly and

describes—“killed”— also introduces the reader to less conciliatory themes of perpetratorship and victimhood, of crime and punishment. In addition to the act’s undeniable violence, a violence mirrored in the sentence’s own abruptness, Magona’s opening sentence neither explains nor excuses the fact of the murder. It is a factual claim about the past that seems initially devoid of any value judgment.

Yet Magona chooses to have this sentence stand on its own on the page, unattached from the paragraphs below to stress its importance. Its simultaneous expression of togetherness and division insists from the start on the ambiguity of Magona’s experience of apartheid and the time that has followed it, during which she writes. This thus differentiates Magona’s writing from the “protest lit” of the apartheid period. That Magona is now articulating this ambiguity, and in fact marking it as the very starting point for her entire story, suggests an imaginative shift that refuses both the simplistic thinking of apartheid, as well as that of someone like Amy Biehl herself, whose “naiveté,” “tricked her into believing in the blanket, uniform guiltlessness of those whom she came to help” (209). In this, we see again how it is that the black author is more aware of the ambiguity of moral codes than whites, even though in this instance Biehl reductively imagines blacks to be “uniformly” guiltless rather than uniformly culpable. Magona’s entire novel hovers in between these poles of guilt and guiltlessness, and refuses to come down on either side with any resolution. It is in this nebulous zone of shared responsibility, her book suggests, that the most productive work can be done in

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intimately with another mother and seeking a gendered, personal reconciliation.” Pearl Amelia McHaney, "History and Intertextuality: A Transnational Reading of Eudora Welty's *Losing Battles* and Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*," *Southern Literary Journal* XL.2 (2008): 173.

order to both process and repair the past, and imagine and confront the present and future of South Africa.[131]

Magona's opening gambit also leads us to a consideration of the structural and generic strategies she assumes, particularly her explorations of the links between oral narratives and written ones. *Mother to Mother* continues the organization established in her earlier work *To My Children's Children* in which a Xhosa woman narrates the story of her life to her grandchildren. As previously mentioned, her story cycle "Women at Work" also overtly uses the form of a conversation between women. By relying on first-person narratives addressing a clearly identified audience, Magona's texts underscore the dialogical nature of narration, while reconfiguring the novel to dovetail with traditional forms of oral storytelling. Meg Samuelson suggests that Magona's use of the oral tradition reveals her disconnection rather than her attachment to a community of oral storytellers since she is writing, after all, in print.[132] For Samuelson, Magona's narrative choice is evidence of Magona's desire to assert her authenticity as a South African voice writing from the position of a township dweller, while actually being a writer who has left South Africa for a position amongst the urban middle-class as an employee at the U.N. While this may seem a compelling critique, it suggests rather ungenerously that all of Magona's work has been part of a strategy to construct herself for the outside world as

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[131] Wenzel refuses to acknowledge the political possibilities inherent in the novel's dialogic structure: "Magona's narrator can imagine the future only as an extension of an entropic present. Although we may want to assume that there is some distance between author and narrator, or that Biehl's optimistic presence enables a broader view than Mandisa's, Magona's own concern about the false hopes of 1994 reinforces Mandisa's pessimism, if not her melancholy ignorance (or dismissal) of current events" Wenzel, "Weapons of Struggle and Weapons of Memory: Thinking Time Beyond Apartheid," 171.

[132] Meg Samuelson, "Reading the Maternal Voice in Sindiwe Magona's *To My Children's Children* and *Mother to Mother*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 46.1 (2000).

an authentic apartheid subject, and denies the influence that dialogic forms of storytelling may well have had on Magona's development as a writer, *before* she left for the United States as an adult. In the tenth chapter of *Mother to Mother* Mandisa recounts being told the history of South Africa by her grandfather—a very different history than that taught in schools. She lovingly recalls his narration as "soft and far-away, as though he were talking to many people, whose ears were filled with nothing else except the sound of his voice" (174). The lessons he teaches her about the history of resistance of the Xhosa people are polyphonic and dialogic as Mandisa the child participates in his narrative by interrupting him with questions, and they frequently stop to "wet [their] mouths at the gourd" or her grandfather "[says] his voice would go unless he kissed his pipe" (181). Embedded then within this larger dialogue between Mandisa and Amy Biehl's mother, is another series of dialogues between young Mandisa and her grandfather. Indeed, the fact that almost all of Magona's works take some variant of this dialogical form suggests that the conversational, relational approach is a way of writing herself into a conversation with the world rather than the articulation of a unified, non-dialogical "pure" apartheid subject. By insisting on open dialogue, Magona's post-apartheid novel, in the words of intellectual historian Martin Jay, "compel[s] us to reflect on the costs of moral absolutism, the violence latent in trying to construct fully realized ethical forms of life" (9) The only certain ethical approach Magona promotes is that of conversation as the narrative form least conducive to closure.

Writing *to* someone is a way of writing herself into the world which long refused her participation in any process of communal, political, or national creation. For Magona, the presence of an explicit (rather than implied) reader is a way to ensure, via

her own creation, that she receives the recognition so long denied her. In addition, the novel's structure might be read as both a request *for* forgiveness and a simultaneous granting *of* forgiveness. Gobodo-Madikizela has argued that "the process of forgiveness is always specific to, and 'co-created' within the particular dialogue encounter that produces forgiveness" (Gobodo-Madikizela "Empathetic Repair" 343). In psychoanalytic terms, Mandisa's dialogues reproduce the intersubjective encounter essential to the establishment of mutual recognition, which is itself a precursor for any kind of forgiveness.

Part of what apartheid rule denied blacks and "coloureds" was the recognition vital for productive intersubjective relations. What characterizes the need for recognition, in Hegelian terms, is conflict, for while the ego strains to resist annihilation by the other, it must also receive recognition from that other while paradoxically remaining capable of recognizing her as other and thus as impenetrable. Indeed, "the demand for recognition is mutual" (Singer 78). But apartheid dogma *institutionalized* a psychic imbalance in which the white other (and the black other) was most frequently understood as object, as an imagined fantasy version of the real outside subject; as mere intrapsychic irreality (J. Benjamin). The "'outside' other," to use Jessica Benjamin's terminology, was so often "cancelled" by the "'inside' other," to produce distorted versions of that other, not to mention of the self as well. Magona's novel insists on revisiting her own distortions of those "outside" others, and by repeatedly identifying audiences, she constructs a politics of readership that resuscitates the importance of mutual recognition in the post-apartheid moment.

Though Mandisa's projected listener is Biehl's mother, Magona's listeners are a larger group of implied readers. In a 1997 interview Magona explains that she writes mostly in English because she is not as famous as writers like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o who argue that African literature should be written in African languages. Such writers, Magona says, "have already established their readership…. How can I, a relatively unknown writer, start writing in Xhosa and think that somebody is going to translate my work to English and other languages? That would be unrealistic if I want to communicate with a large number of readers… I need to find my readership, my space, and then I will see what other language I want to write in" (Koyana "A Conversation" 154)[133]. Instead, as an author, she promotes an ethics of reading that aims to include as wide an audience as possible.

Certain signs may suggest initially that like the narrator of *Mother to Mother* Magona is writing for a Western audience. The text, for instance, translates itself. From the very first page, Xhosa words appear in the text, usually emphasized through the use of italics or capital letters. An argument could be made that such textual eruptions are there to alienate and disrupt readers unfamiliar with Xhosa, to emphasize a Levinasian encounter with inscrutable alterity, or to perform an "ethics of withholding" as Lawrence Buell calls Doris Sommer's discussion of minority writers who intentionally "create strategic opacities and misrecognitions for mainstream readers" (Buell 10). Yet Magona chooses mostly to translate the Xhosa immediately after the original[134]. This translation

[133] Magona has actually translated *To My Children's Children* into Xhosa. For her reflections on this process see Koyana, "A Conversation with Sindiwe Magona in New York," 154.
[134] As Joseph Slaughter recently pointed out, this habit of polyvocal in-text translation has been characteristic of African literature and postcolonial literature since its inception.

could be a publisher's requirement, or instead the mark of an inclusive politics of generosity. For instance, Mandisa describes waking up her children the morning Mxolisi goes missing: "The ritual is unchanging. First I try [Siziwe], then I go to her brothers, both older than her. Standing at the back door, the kitchen door, facing the back yard, where the boys sleep in the tin shack, the *hokkie* (you know these one-size-fits-all houses of Gulguletu don't expand as the children come), I holler… 'Hey, you two! Time to get up!'" (6). Here, though the word *hokkie* is Afrikaans[135], we see how Mandisa interrupts her story to address Linda Biehl, "you know," in order to justify and explain the impoverished situation she finds herself in. This pattern of Xhosa or Afrikaans expressions always contextualized alongside English explanations and translations continues throughout the novel, and is as much there for Linda Biehl as for the implied Western and white South African reader.

But there are also instances in which Mandisa does not translate or explain non-English words and expressions to Anglophone readers, suggesting that Magona not only interpellates an "imagined community" of cosmopolitan, mostly white readers, but also one composed of Xhosa and Afrikaans speakers, readers, and listeners—those among whom she grew up. The narration thus includes several groups, opening itself up to a multilingual diverse audience, embodying a literature of inclusion and generosity.

Indeed, Mandisa can be seen to enact reparation through narrative. The act of imagining Amy Biehl's final hours that is one of the opening sequences of the novel both performs an ethics of reparation, through Mandisa's willed attempt to think herself into

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"Dulcificant Properties: An Unliterary Look at World Literature." Unpublished talk. February 9, 2011. New York University.

[135] *Ihoko* is a loanword in Xhosa.

the mind and body of a white woman, while it indicates the facility with which Magona (and Mandisa) can do this. This shows, as I have already suggested, that imagining the interiority of the representative of oppression comes almost naturally to those in situations of subjection.

Which is not to say that Magona is not aware of the difficulties inherent in such a conjectural move. A series of questions informs us that she is not entirely certain of Biehl's final hours, not entirely certain that her efforts to imagine them result in anything accurate at all. Yet as I have said, the very attempt to imagine Biehl's last hours differentiates Magona's text from her earlier works which make no such projective leap into the being of alterity in the form it took in South Africa, namely as whiteness. Mandisa asks "Does your daughter drive with others to school or is she by herself? Is the car radio on or does she put in a cassette, play a song that brings to mind her young man so far away? What plans does she have for the evening?" (9). Pearl Amelia McHaney suggests that the novel "arise[s] out of questions," questions like the ones listed here, and those Magona ponders in the interview I quoted earlier. If Mandisa's series of interrogatives expresses uncertainty, her creativity emerges from not knowing; the questions are what provoke her to write (171). Questions simultaneously convey meaning and the absence of meaning, leaving space for error. This linguistic preference suggests an ethics of imagining alterity, since curiosity and awareness of the potential for error dominate instead of oblivious certainty and the erasure of difference. As we can see in the interview referred to earlier, when Magona recalls the thought process leading her to write *Mother to Mother*—"I thought of Mandisa and I thought, my God, how is she? I wonder what has happened? How is she feeling? How has she dealt with it?"—she is

articulating how it is that for her, much like for her character Mandisa, creative acts are born out of acts of imaginative interrogation. Clearly Magona values this stylistics of ambiguity since she makes it Mandisa's as well as her own (Attwell, Attwell and Harlow 284)[136].

In *Mother to Mother* she intentionally makes the addressing of a white woman by a black one the central organizing axis of the book. Here the writer is operating as a mediator in this literary kind of reparative work—her function is to bring these different experiences together, to draw the lines of similarity and difference in order to foster an awareness of the complexity and complicity of being.

I am arguing that this work both expresses a rupture coterminous with the end of apartheid at the same time as it gives voice to a continuity that existed but remained unexpressed. It is the articulation of this ethical mode that is the rupture, though Magona's novel expresses a characteristic of marginal and disenfranchised peoples that has long existed. What contributions might such re-theorizing provide for an examination of modes of relation both historically and in the present moment? What does it mean for a black women raised under the apartheid regime to say to white interviewers: "For having allowed such a climate to thrive in South Africa, we are all culpable. We are all culpable" (Attwell, Attwell and Harlow 285)? In an interview Magona explains her task: "It is not in loving our neighbor that we become better human beings: the challenge before us is in learning to understand and perhaps one day love our enemy" (Qtd in Schattemann 183).

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[136] For a discussion of how Mandisa is a figure for Magona, and also, a figure for black South African women more generally, see Samuelson, "The Mother as Witness: Reading *Mother to Mother* Alongside South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission."

Unlike "…Magona's recognition that beneath the media story of Amy Biehl's murder that evoked international sympathy was a story of individual and personal empathy of motherhood, loss, cultural and political anger," Gobodo-Madikizela's memoir cannot only be read through the lens of personal, or individual "healing." (McHaney 174). Her work on the TRC in particular suggest that Gobodo-Madikizela's psychological approach intends to disturb the compartmentalization caused by apartheid, both at the personal and national levels. What joins the two texts is, in Magona's words, their similar interest "that it is not enough to love one's neighbor — we have to love our enemies" (Koyana "Home at Last!" 195).

Gobodo-Madikizela: When Killers Become Victims

In 1997 Gobodo-Madikizela conducted a series of interviews with Eugene de Kock while he was imprisoned in Pretoria's maximum-security prison serving a 212-year sentence for crimes against humanity. At the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), shortly before she interviewed him, de Kock made a series of admissions about crimes he had either participated in or arranged.[137] Gobodo-Madikizela witnessed this in her capacity as a TRC commissioner, but she had no previous personal contact with him.

After her initial shock at being in the same room as "Prime Evil"—his "bright orange prison overalls" remind her of *Silence of the Lambs*—Gobodo-Madikizela soon develops responses to him she describes as characterized by "sympathy," "empathy," or "pity." Even her first description of de Kock suggests he is more for her than a stock

[137] A version of de Kock's accounts of his crimes can be found in Eugene de Kock, *A Long Night's Damage: Working for the Apartheid State*, ed. Jeremy Gordin (Saxonwold, South Africa: Contra, 1998).

figure of brutality: "…this was the closest I had ever been to Eugene de Kock. As he smiled shyly, perhaps politely, rising to greet me, I saw a flicker of boyishness, of uncertainty" (*A Human Being Died That Night* 6). Indeed she finds it difficult to see the "banality of evil"[138] in this lackey of the apartheid government, who committed a horrifying number of acts of premeditated and sadistic violence. Almost from the start, Gobodo-Madikizela affirms how important sympathizing with de Kock is to ensure the creation of a South Africa that is not another one of the "countless examples in history of government by people who have risen out of oppressive rule to become oppressors themselves" (*A Human Being Died That Night* 16). Like Magona, for Gobodo-Madikizela, sympathy from below is a key mode of relation that will differentiate past regimes of injustice from that which she wishes to see constructed in South Africa. "If showing compassion to our enemies" she writes, "is something that our bodies recoil from, what should our attitude be to their cries for mercy, the cries that tell us their hearts are breaking, and that they are willing to renounce the past and their role in it?" (*A Human Being Died That Night* 15). Forgiveness, a central principle for the TRC, is a crucial aim for Gobodo-Madikizela; more so than for Magona, who is more interested in dialogue than in the Christianized acts of atonement or pardon. For Gobodo-Madikizela "it is the recognition of the victim's pain that awakens remorse in the perpetrator. Remorse lays the groundwork for the empathetic movement towards the other" (Gobodo-Madikizela "Empathetic Repair" 344). In contrast, following Levinas and Derrida, I argue

[138] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Viking, 1964).

that the “empathetic movement” she identifies, actually precedes the perpetrator’s announcement of contrition.[139]

Gobodo-Madikizela believes forgiveness works on a pragmatic level too, and argues that “…forgiveness in politics is an appropriate response particularly if, as in South Africa, victims have to live together with perpetrators and beneficiaries in the same country” (Gobodo-Madikizela "Empathetic Repair" 335). For her, forgiveness is the final step on a continuum that begins with “Trying to understand, and then to find compassion, and hence empathy and even forgiveness” (Gobodo-Madikizela "Empathetic Repair" 342). Magona, I am suggesting, has less ambitious desires, consisting only of “trying to understand and then to find compassion.”

<u>Of Feet, of Faces, of Hands</u>

> Asked whether he thought it was unreasonable for a man like de Kock to lay some of the blame on the president, [Willem] de Klerk shot back “My hands are clean” (Gobodo-Madikizela *A Human Being Died That Night* 60).

As I argued above, for eighteenth-century moral philosophers, it is feet—and particularly shod feet—that serve as the metonymic device for imagining the other. In “Big Toe” Georges Bataille explains how feet have also been traditionally maligned in Western thought. “Since by its physical attitude [of erectness] the human race distances itself *as much as it can* from the terrestrial mud… one can imagine that a toe, always more or less damaged and humiliating, is psychologically analogous to the fall of a

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[139] Derrida also dismisses remorse as a requisite for forgiveness. Jacques Derrida, *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

man—in other words, to death" (22). It is thus no coincidence that the other is represented in Western philosophy through the figure of the other's feet, since this association of alterity with that which is considered the most base solidifies the difference between self and other, all the while professing to draw the two together.

For Levinas, it is the face that signifies the humanism of the other, and the recognition of that otherness precedes consciousness and culture. "The nudity of the face," writes Levinas, "is a stripping with no cultural ornament," which "by its nakedness, by its destitution…is [a] summons to respond" (Levinas 32-33). This "summons" announces the entrance of ethics into human relations and, for Levinas, it precedes cultural knowledge. Levinas' first philosophy includes a moral responsiveness to the other's face —thus it precedes consciousness of race, for instance, or any other "cultural ornament." Since for Levinas, "before cultural expression, before the said, lies the universal but deformalized humanism of the other" there can be no discussions of race in his philosophy since its appraisal is subsequent to the ethical imperative signified by the face of the other (Cohen xxxii). Given the extensive evidence we have that many colonial, postcolonial, and indeed postmodern descriptions of alterity employ racial or pseudo-racial discourses, this seems a rather metaphysical fantasy of preconscious reflex. And indeed he uses a similar bodily image to describe the sensation one experiences when this full humanism, provoked by the encounter with the face, emerges. "To be human" for Levinas,

> is to care for the other above oneself, to overcome the natural indifference and countercurrent of being in nonindifference and compassion toward the other—the 'wisdom of love.' It is a painful wisdom, *'a skin turned inside out'*…providing for

> the other the food one would enjoy eating, the clothing one would enjoy wearing, the money one would enjoy spending (Cohen xxiv).

When skin is turned inside out—any skin, human or otherwise—the cultural markers that we have come to use to identify difference—be it racial or gendered, for instance—disappear, and only the flesh and blood of the subcutaneous insides (the *prima facie*) remain. While Levinas disregards the importance of culture in determining ethical response, this may be because, for him, in its fullest expression—"a skin turned inside out"—race has been replaced by that which unites us in our vulnerability—in our blood and bone, and thus in our mortality, which always precedes social constructions. But his theory's preclusion of considerations such as race (or gender, or ethnicity, for that matter) suggest that despite his own treatment during World War Two as a Jew interned in a military prisoner's camp, Levinas was unfettered by other more visually blatant race relations.

If the face and the feet present certain difficulties as contemporary metonyms for sympathy from below, the hands in both Gobodo-Madikizela and Magona's work present us with an alternative. Early on in her memoir Gobodo-Madikizela recounts her struggle to cope with the contradictory feelings she has for de Kock. In the U.S. working on her Ph.D. she recounts how "[she] braced [her]self for the tapes and transcripts of the interviews with de Kock. Alone with this material, thousands of miles from the streets of Pretoria, I was afraid, not of the memory of the evil schemes that were concocted in that city but of my own empathy for de Kock" (116). In a pivotal scene de Kock becomes emotionally distraught by the conversation, and she reaches her hand across the table to comfort him. She explains:

> I asked de Kock to talk about the meeting with Pearl Faku and Doreen Mgoduka. His face immediately fell, and he became visibly distressed. I could hear the clatter of his leg chains as he shuffled his feet. Sitting directly across from me in the small prison consulting room, his heavy glasses on the table that separated us, he started to speak. There were tears in his eyes. In a breaking voice he said: "I wish I could do much more than [say] I'm sorry. I wish there was a way of bringing their bodies back alive. I wish I could say, 'Here are your husbands,'" he said, stretching out his arms as if bearing an invisible body, his hands trembling, his mouth quivering, "but unfortunately…I have to live with it."
>
> Relating to him in the only way one does in such human circumstances, I touched his shaking hand, surprising myself. But it was clenched, cold, and rigid…(*A Human Being Died That Night* 32).

After touching "the trigger hand" she recoils, yet the intimate act provokes Gobodo-Madikizela to reflect upon responsibility and victimhood. In one way "[she] was angry that the same society that had created de Kock, that had accepted his murderous protection of their privilege, had ostracized him and was now standing in judgment of him" (*A Human Being Died That Night* 34). Yet,

> in touching de Kock's hand I had touched his leprosy, and he seemed to be telling me that, even though I did not realize it at the time, I was from now on infected with the memory of having embraced into my heart the hand that had killed, maimed, and blown up lives…. My act of empathy had drawn me into *intimate complicity* with him (*A Human Being Died That Night* 40, 46 my emphasis).

While Levinas' "humanism of the other" is figured in the other's face, for Gobodo-Madikizela it is contact with and through the hand that forces her recognition of de Kock's human otherness. While his face—described in her initial encounter with de Kock—marks his otherness as a call to ethics, it is her hand reaching out that instantiates political action. In spite of, or rather *because* of touch's collaborative, contaminated, and complicitous pact, Gobodo-Madikizela's intimate gesture transforms the ethics of eighteenth century moral philosophy and Levinas' also, into a political act.

Hands (and fingers) as Bataille points out, "have come to signify useful action and firm character…" (22) and it is certainly true that in Magona and Gobodo-Madikizela's works they are agents of political encounter. In *Forced to Grow* Magona provides another example of hands' metonymic symbolization of intersubjective contact. In a passage describing how her neighbors would look after her children when she went to work, she explains that "there was no charge made for this neighborly act. However, as we say, '*Isandla sihlamba esisihlambayo*. A hand washes that which washes it'" (*Forced to Grow* 38). Here, the proverb elaborates a social configuration based on mutuality and shared responsibilities—the hand again a figure for a practice of living-togetherness, precisely the kind of mode of relation that the TRC hoped to produce in an interracial, post-apartheid form. *A Human Being Died That Night* recounts Pearl Faku's feelings meeting with de Kock before his TRC appearance. Faku is the widow of Sergeant Temba Faku, a man de Kock murdered by car bomb in an incident known as the Motherwell Four. She told Gobodo-Madikizela: "I hope that when he sees our tears, he knows that they are not only tears for our husbands, but tears for him as well…. *I would like to hold him by the hand*, and show him that there is a future, and that he can still change" (*A Human Being*

Died That Night 14-15 my emphasis). Expressions of forgiveness, such as Faku's, were precisely the kinds of individual narratives the TRC hoped to provoke. I discuss some of the problems of this emphasis in Chapter Four.

While the metonymical reflex driving explanations of intersubjective relation in all these cases could be conceived of as evidence of a kind of amputation of relation, there are other ways to cast this isolation of body parts. By breaking relation into discussions of feet, hands, and faces, wholeness, the fantasy of a discrete subject is replaced by bits of bodies that touch, infect and repulse, constantly affirming while also undermining notions of absolutism, thus affirming relation as *the* mode of being over and above individuation. To put this in Lacanian terms, as the *objet petit a*, these fragments of a body stand both as the temporary object that fills the gap in symbolic reality while simultaneously marking the gap or void in that reality. This paradoxical affirmation of meaning that appears along with its absence, allows us to recognize such attempts to know, imagine and experience otherness, as an always temporary, always contingent process, emphasizing exchange between parts rather than discrete and separate individuality.

For Gobodo-Madikizela, the question of politics and political transformation is central to her project. She asserts that "the TRC was essentially a political project…" and then directly engages with Levinas' thought, asking: "Is Levinas' ethics compatible with the political realm?" ("Empathetic Repair" 346). Relying on Simon Critchley's reading of Levinas to answer her question, Gobodo-Madikizela suggests that Levinas' ideas encompass the political but particularly insist on the importance of another, relational, sphere. I would call this the affective, or intimate realm, since it recognizes the vital

importance of intersubjective relations in the instantiation of a broader politics, in tandem, but also sometimes in contest with large-scale organizational efforts and the policies of nation-states.

Conclusion

What this chapter is ultimately suggesting, building upon Sanders' ideas, is that complicity, traditionally maligned as reprehensible and even unforgivable, can also constitute a productive mode of relation. Recognizing this allows us to acknowledge the importance of relations that refuse absolutist categories, refuse, as T.S. Eliot put it: "the eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase" (483). Such economies of the visual ("the eyes") and the discursive (the "formulated phrase") simplify and solidify identity as apartheid's systematic categorization of race did. In contrast, articulations of sympathy from below are productive manifestations of actual ambiguous experiences simultaneously commensurate with complicity as with mutual responsibility.

As examples of works that elaborate this shift in the affective terrain covered by black writing after apartheid, *Mother to Mother* and *A Human Being Died That Night* certainly make clear how ambiguous a mode of relation fellow-feeling towards whites continues to be. Indeed Gobodo-Madikizela's ideas about sympathy, forgiveness, and compassion frequently contradict one another, and she is hard pressed (though she tries) to come up with a cohesive politics of relation.[140] The potential for such cross-racial

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[140] For Gobodo-Madikizela relations are still articulated through the language of power and hierarchy. Justice is had *because* the tables have turned, *because* it is de Kock, a white man, who sits shackled to the table while being interviewed by a "free" black woman. But this is unsatisfactory since it seems merely to reverse relations of power. For

proximity in solidarity ultimately seems better expressed in Magona's work of literary fiction than in Gobodo-Madikizela's memoir particularly in its recognition of the ambiguity of imaginative acts. But we can also read Gobodo-Madikizela's failure to convincingly designate such an ethics as an instance of her openness to that which is unknown, unknowable, and resolutely other. While her conclusions can feel disappointing when she constructs excessively rational psychological arguments about her experiences with de Kock, in her failure to erect the airtight imaginary system she desires, even while trying, we may see how her openness to otherness becomes part of her writing style and her logic, however unwilled this may be.

To consider apartheid as having any productive outcomes is an inherently dangerous undertaking. Yet in the hope of denying it its tyrannical valence by refusing its categories of good/bad, black/white, perpetrator/victim, I have attempted to delineate modes of relation that help us to escape the trap such binaries inevitably catch us in. For this, I am grateful for the work of Glissant, which forged the way for such counter-thinking when he refuses to think of the plantation systems and of the slave trade solely as harbingers of evil. Instead Glissant identifies a set of productive forces of "Relation" that emerge out of the contact caused by these systems of oppression and dominance. "The Plantation," he writes, "is one of the focal points for the development of present-day

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Gobodo-Madikizela the important difference lies in her capacity "to forgive," much as the witnesses to apartheid atrocities forgave the perpetrators of these crimes at the TRC. In her words "forgiveness is a kind of revenge… [it] does not overlook the deed: it rises above it. 'This is what it means to be human,' it says. 'I cannot and will not return the evil you inflicted on me.' And that is the victim's triumph. I sometimes sensed this feeling of triumph myself while visiting de Kock" (117). This language of victory is unsettling. If we heed Walter Benjamin's chilling observation about history being written by the victors Gobodo-Madikizela's language warns us to attend to the histories she has left out of her self-professedly "deeply personal account" of her meetings with de Kock (170).

modes of Relation. Within this universe of domination and oppression, of silent or professed dehumanization, forms of humanity stubbornly persisted. In this outmoded spot, on the margins of every dynamic, the tendencies of our modernity begin to be detectable" (65). And this modernity, for Glissant, is characterized "not [by] the absolute ontological possession regarded as sacred but [by] the complicity of relation" (147).

The recent emergence of South African black and "coloured" literature articulated through this discourse of the sympathetic allows for the articulation of sympathy from below alongside the newly dominant discourse of black governance. The political shift that occurred in 1994 with the official close of the apartheid regime permits us to attend to how sympathy emerges from below, yet can be articulated from above. The fusion that occurred in the moment after apartheid, in which some of those considered "below," came to occupy positions "above," produced the kind of ambiguous in-between state of power that necessitates a deconstruction of historical definitions and experiences of ethical being. Though there is evidence of black sympathy "for the devil" in apartheid novels, the "strategic essentialism" that provided a kind of united front against white supremacy is no longer required (Spivak, Landry and MacLean 214). More nuanced portraits can be written, and perhaps just as importantly, more nuanced portraits can be published and read.

Chapter Four: Forgive and Forget? Witnessing History at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

> "All the rest is silence
> On the other side of the wall;
> And the silence ripeness,
> And the ripeness all." (Auden 404)

> "Here, have a cigarette, mate. Help yourself, chommy."
> "You's funny people, mister." The child-face with the ancient bitter eyes, frowned. "Here me, mister. All this stuff about our people getting into the government, too. You reckon it will help people like us? People in prison, like?"
> George Adams said to this strange boy who was also a murderer: "There will certainly be more sympathy, I reckon."
> "You reckon that time will come?"
> George Adams said feeling sad: "You'll see." (La Guma *The Stone Country* 118-19)

In light of historical precedents involving the transfer of power between starkly different political regimes, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)'s central contribution to processes of transition lies most notably in its refusal of violence. Yet the critiques[141] that have arisen in the years since its final hearing, and the fundamentally unchanged economic inequalities that continue to divide classes along racial lines, suggest that the non-violent, Christian-inflected approach touted by Archbishop Desmond Tutu as chairman of the TRC, may have been inadvertently quietist, effecting the continuation of capitalist modes of production and exploitation along largely racialized class lines, barely interrupted by the political upheaval of transition.

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[141] See especially Mahmood Mamdani, "Amnesty or Impunity? A Preliminary Critique of the Report of the Truth and Reconcilation Commssion of South Africa," *Diacritics* 32.3/4 (2002). Richard Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa : Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

The Commission's reliance on the testimony of witnesses has largely been conceived of in both popular and theoretical circles through a psychoanalytic language that sees the storytelling of the victims of apartheid as a cathartic process of uncovering repressed material—a process that was understood to inherently offer the possibility of personal or communal reconciliation. The paradigm established by the TRC that insisted upon the psychological and redemptive value of "speaking the truth"—be it personal or forensic truth—placed the act of witnessing at the heart of the process of transition from apartheid to democracy. That this was never straightforward, and that it often involved a partial or incomplete recovery of the repressed material is certainly acknowledged in much of the literature covering the TRC. A work such as the collaboratively produced *There Was This Goat* reminds us that commissioners' and audience's expectations about how the testimony should sound and what narrative form it should take often hampered their ability to really understand the witnesses.

These narratological structures of truth commission testimony have been discussed at some length by legal scholars such as Ruti Teitel, who see individuals' particular narratives as forming part of a larger national narrative of transition that is ultimately comedic—narrating the transition from a state of depravation, cruelty and darkness to one characterized by resolution, gratification, and well-being for all. This structural logic, typically terminating in expressions of forgiveness[142] in the case of

[142] Definitions of forgiveness form an important part of the discussion of the moral and philosophical implications of the TRC. While this chapter does not take up the question of forgiveness and its conditions of possibility, important elaborations of this discussion can be found in Jacques Derrida's essay "On Forgiveness" given on the occasion of his first visit to South Africa, and in the fourth chapter of Mark Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing : Law and Literature in the Time of a Truth Commission* (Stanford: Stanford

victims' testimonies, and in repentance in the case of applicants applying for amnesty, formed part of the expectations of the commission around individual acts of testimony.

But in keeping with my larger argument, this moment of transition is also the moment that makes public, indeed *institutionalizes as a defining national characteristic*, a reliance on black sympathy for whites that, as I explain earlier, long preceded the close of apartheid. That public narratives of black and coloured political agency could move so quickly from language demonizing and condemning white behavior during apartheid to language that "forgave" and "forgot" the wrongs of the past, indicates not so much a sudden change in attitude as a politico-historical shift allowing for the public expression of conceptions of interracial relations characterized by recognition rather than alienation. At the TRC, this was articulated primarily through the African philosophical notion of *ubuntu*—in the form of a shared humanity. As Sanders and others have pointed out—the *ubuntu* philosophy arguing that "a person is a person through other people" (in Zulu *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*)[143]—despite its notable absence during apartheid and the colonial period, extended to include whites within the framework of the *abantu*, expanding and shifting the language's earlier signification ("Reading Lessons" 182)[144].

Thus, as I argued in Chapter Three, the discursive rupture occurring at the close of apartheid is less a shift in modes of imagining relation than a shift in its articulation. That

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University Press, 2007). Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

[143] *Ubuntu ungamntu ngabanye abantu* in Xhosa, *Motho ke motho ka batho* in seTswana.

[144] In Zulu, and in other indigenous South African languages, there are separate words for people—*abantu*—and white people—*abelungu*—thus traditionally marking whites as radically different from people. The extension of the South African notion of *ubuntu* to include whites within the category of *abantu*, represented a fundamental act of generosity as well as a flexibility and expansion of South African indigenous languages in response to the dismantling of apartheid. For Sanders, invocations of *ubuntu* always imply its absence.

black sympathy for whites could be verbalized, and indeed that it was encouraged by representatives of the TRC epitomized in the figure of Archbishop Tutu, marks a move from a strategic silencing of such ethically complex acts of imagining in the name of a unified black resistance movement—unified against white tyranny (fascist *or* liberal)—to a new emphasis on interracial unity and cooperation.

This shift was merely on the level of public discourse, not an ontological shift in psychic or affective states of identification and imagination. Despite the various forms of confession, self-abasement, and shame exhibited by the so-called perpetrators of apartheid who took the stand at the amnesty hearings, the onus for a successful transition remained linked to blacks' continued ability to imagine white consciousness, and to forgive it. While whites often did have to hear the stories told by blacks on the stands, and were thus forced necessarily to engage in unprecedented acts of cross-racial identification, they were rarely asked to forgive blacks[145]. The bestowal of forgiveness tended to be unidirectional. It also required an active ethical engagement with otherness far exceeding any imaginative act of identification that might have occurred through the experience of listening to another person's story. To listen certainly may beget the ethical potential provoked by literary encounters, yet to forgive turns the potential into an imperative, placing the burden for the reparation of the nation's wounds in the hands of those who had already suffered for many decades as its victims. The hardest labor of

[145] A well-documented exception to this can be found in the case of Amy Biehl's parents, who travelled to South for the hearings, and have been vocal participants in the process of forgiveness, both by issuing a public statement of forgiveness of their daughter's killers, and in their participation in the "New South Africa" via the Amy Biehl foundation which funds a wide variety of educational and recreational projects http://www.amybiehl.org/. Their position as Americans complicates their own complicity in the apartheid system.

apartheid and the hardest labor of transition were therefore undertaken by the same people. Bhekizizwe Peterson describes the TRC as a moment in which:

> …the difficulties and imperatives of forgiveness are recast and turned into yet another trial of the compassion and humanity of those who have been offended and hurt. As far as reconciliation is concerned, there seems to be little appreciation that its pertinence exceeds the boundaries of black and white relations. Individuals… need to come to terms with themselves and their experiences, relatives need to reconcile with families, relations between neighbors and communities need to be restored where they have been broken (Peterson and Suleman 20-1)[146].

This emphasis on the need for alternate forms of post-apartheid reconciliation is echoed in "A Possible Black Conversation," which explores various hypothetical responses blacks might have had to the TRC's structure. One imaginary discussant asks: "Why should it always be the indigenous people who have to reconcile and teach whites about the pain that apartheid inflicted on us?" (Krog, Mpolweni and Ratele 33).

Acts of forgiveness, recitations of traumatic experience, as well as statements made with an eye towards receiving amnesty, were all predicated on the guiding idea that

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[146] Mamdani also suggests that South Africa faced a challenge that was not comparable to other countries which had employed Truth Commissions in their transitions between governments: "[The Commission] obscured the fact that, unlike political dictatorships that could look back to a time in history when today's adversaries were members of a single political community—and could thus speak of reconciling and thereby restoring that poitical community—South Africa was confronted with a unique challenge: how to bring erstwhile colonizers and colonized into a single political community *for the first time ever in history.* For the simple fact was that whereas white South Africans had lived under a rule of law, the people of South Africa—white and black—had yet to live under a single rule of law, the basis of a single political community" Mamdani, "Amnesty or Impunity? A Preliminary Critique of the Report of the Truth and Reconcilation Commssion of South Africa," 56.

speaking and listening are essential processes necessary to the healing of individuals, groups, and nations[147]. But as Peterson suggests, reconciliation requires many different avenues. The failure of the TRC, in some people's eyes, lay in its willingness to admit this—Archbishop Tutu said: "This Commission is said to listen to everyone. It is therefore important that everyone should be given a chance to say his or her truth as he or she sees it…" (TRC 1:112)–but its simultaneous foreclosure of the possibility of doing so by only allowing certain types of narratives to qualify at the hearings, and certain modes of processing traumatic and/or repressed material. Richard Wilson suggests that:

> …the dominant TRC approach sought to isolate victims' stories and universalize their suffering, to treat all suffering as morally equal, to valorize it by placing it within a wider discourse on liberation and, crucially, to excise vengeance from individual narratives. This approach was effective in certain cases, but…it often clashed with a widespread desire for vengeance… (155).

This chapter seeks to hold the TRC accountable to its mission to recognize the plurality of experience during apartheid—"the underlying objective of the legislators was to make it possible for the Commission to recognize and acknowledge as many people as possible as victims of the past political conflict"—by looking at reactions to apartheid that contrast with and disrupt the kinds of narratives valorized at the TRC (TRC 1: 71).

In a very different geopolitical context, Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman link the "linguistic rupture" heralded by the advent of Stéphane Mallarmé's free verse poetics,

[147] The Act [establishing the formation of the TRC] explicitly recognized the healing potential of telling stories TRC, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, 7 vols. (Cape Town: The Commission, 1998) 1:112.

with the advent of a new politics. New poetic forms, they argue, undid extant formalisms dictating how, and to what, poetry could testify (18-24). Though described by Mallarmé as an "accident" of form, for Felman and Laub, Mallarmé's "precocious testimony" articulates the link between the poetic and the political by attesting to the transformation of tradition into something different, even if what it heralded, what was to come, remained badly understood both by those listening to the testimony and by the authors of these acts of witnessing. Such testimony "makes language… speak ahead of knowledge and awareness and break through the limits of its own conscious understanding" (Felman and Laub 21).

Felman and Laub draw primarily on Mallarmé's contemporary, Sigmund Freud, to explore the unknowable via his unexpected admission in *The Interpretation of Dreams* that "there is no possibility of explaining dreams since to explain a thing means to trace it back to something already known" (qtd. in Felman and Laub 23), but they are particularly useful to me here in their recognition of how linguistic and formal anomalies may herald political change. "Paradoxically enough," they write,

> the political upheaval and the civil shaking of foundations brought about by the fall of governments and the collapse of institutions may not be in fact as profound and as radical a change as the one accomplished by a linguistic or by a poetic transformation. Insofar as the accidenting of the verse narrates the drama of the accidenting—the disruption and the shattering—of 'this ultimate dogma,' insofar as the resistance of tradition is now finally and formally dissolved and that traditional hierarchical divisions between poetry and prose—between *classes* in language—are now disposed of and inherently unsettled, the breaking of the verse

> becomes itself a symptom and an emblem of the historical breaking of political and cultural grounds, and the freeing, or the *liberation* of the verse—through its decanonization—implicates the process of a vaster desacralization, of a vaster liberation taking place in social consciousness and in culture at large (20).

I argue that the seemingly narratologically incoherent testimony of Notrose Nobomvu Konile as explored in Krog, Ratele, and Mpolweni's *There Was This Goat*, the silence of the title character in J.M. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K*, and the anger and refusal of those unwilling to speak or forgive at the TRC, represent important linguistic ruptures in the narrative of apartheid constructed by the TRC. Following the TRC's official mandate to recognize all stories, these counter-narratives represent an important challenge to the standardized narratological structure of those primarily promoted by the TRC. These other ways of witnessing history include testimony at the TRC that did not adhere to the standard narratological requirements of the hearings, and also, importantly, instances of *the refusal to speak*, which stand as potent challenges to the overwhelmingly dominant notion that talking is the only, or "best" way to process history. This latter point is largely explored through J.M. Coetzee's 1983, apartheid-era novel, *Life & Times of Michael K*. These narratives serve as counterpoints to the hegemonic narratological structure established by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which emerged despite the commission's avowed mission to validate all subjective "personal or narrative" truths, alongside "healing," "social," and "factual or forensic" truths (TRC 1: 110-14)[148].

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[148] One response to apartheid that I do not take up in this chapter is that of revenge. For a discussion of the popularity of retribution as an alternative to the TRC see Chapters 6 and 7 of Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-*

An important scene in *Mother to Mother*, (Magona's novel, discussed in Chapter Three), crystallizes the problem of too facilely equating testimony and truth-telling with psychic well-being. Instead, it draws attention to what Felman and Laub have referred to as the silence at the heart of trauma. As a young boy, Mxolisi, Mandisa's son, innocently betrays the whereabouts of two older friends of his who are hiding from the police in a wardrobe. When the police arrive searching for the boys, the adults in the house manage to make it look as though they have escaped through the backyard over the fence by going "to the back in 'witness' to the fleeing boys" (*Mother to Mother* 147). After expressing some frustration at losing the boys, the police leave to go. Then,

> the last of the three men had one foot out of the door when he suddenly whirled around, stopped short by a small, shrill voice. "*Naba'*" clear as spring water high up the mountains, rang the voice, once more raised in excitement.
> "*Nab'ewodrophini!* Here they are! Here they are, in the wardrobe!" screamed Mxolisi, pointing to the wardrobe. A clever little smile all over his chubby face (*Mother to Mother* 147-8).

Mxolisi's kneejerk obedience to authority unfortunately results in the tragic death of both friends, who "jumped out and made for the window. But when they hit the back garden the police were waiting, and shot them then and there" (*Mother to Mother* 148).

After this incident, Mxolisi stopped talking, "and would not say one word. Not one word more—for the next two years" (*Mother to Mother* 148). The passage describing

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Apartheid State, 156-222. It is interesting to note that the concept of non-vengeance occurred in ANC doctrine as early as The Freedom Charter of 1955 which insisted that: "Imprisonment shall be only for serious crimes against the people, and shall aim at re-education, not vengeance..." South African Congress Alliance, *The Freedom Charter*, 1955, Available: http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?include=docs/misc/1955/charter.html, March 3, 2011.

these events frequently employs the language of witnessing, revealing, if not a conscious invocation of the TRC's proceedings, evidence at least of the prevalence of legal discourse in the everyday English Magona draws upon. As witness to their hiding place, and then as witness to their sudden death—"he said those terrible words, and swift as a wink, witnessed their outcome" (*Mother to Mother* 148)—this episode foregrounds a central concern with the relationship between speaking the truth and trauma.[149] It is of vital importance that Mxolisi's ability to speak produces a failure of ethics that results in a corresponding refusal to signify in language, since communication and symbolization becomes equated with betrayal. Mxolisi succumbs to the imperative to witness, and this act of speaking becomes the source of his guilt. Along with de Man and Rousseau in Felman and Laub's reading of their own acts of witnessing, Mxolisi's tale places the imperative to tell within his complex network of life events that leads him to repeat the trauma of apartheid in his murder of Amy Biehl. "The resonance between Rousseau's text and de Man's past" and Mxolisi's story, "lies …in the structural resemblance of a primal scene of guilt that links an act of speaking with the unpredictable and devastating consequences of this act" (Felman and Laub 142)

This moment figures the way that the trauma of apartheid is reinscribed during the post-apartheid transition as a supplemental trauma of telling or not telling, a trauma of speaking or not speaking, of whether or not one should bear witness. Coetzee's novel, I argue subsequently, provides an exploration of the ethics of choosing not to testify when the overriding trend encourages, and even insists upon, acts of witnessing.

[149] See also Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

In particular, I want to trouble the now almost hegemonic assumption, popularized most successfully by psychoanalysis, that speaking or bearing witness to the truth begets a confrontation with trauma that is always therapeutic, and even potentially "transcendental." This emphasis on the power of storytelling and acts of witnessing undergirded much of the philosophy of South Africa's TRC which championed the testimonial as the ideal form for healing the psychic and material wounds caused by apartheid and as effecting a successful transition to democracy[150].

This textual event highlights the centrality of speech in the moment of transition from apartheid to democracy—a moment which placed acts of testimony and witnessing at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission at the heart of the formation of the "New South Africa." While recognizing the vital importance of speech in processes of reparation and healing—the transformative power of story-telling so central to the TRC's mission—I argue that the hegemony of this equation of speaking with healing obscured other modes of processing historical and personal traumas that remain obscured and ironically "unspoken" due to the emphasis placed at the hearings on the power of speech. In Spivak's terms, I argue that the institutional structures of the TRC foreclosed the possibility for certain subaltern voices to be heard, despite, unfortunately, its expressed mandate to do so. While I do not pretend to know of what these unheard speech acts consisted, I examine ruptures in the TRC's meta-narrative in the belief that these may

[150] Although, as Wilhelm Verwoerd points out, "…the limited potential healing of victims appearing at a single, public hearing should not be evaluated with an intimate, long-term therapeutic relationship in mind," this important detail of the psychoanalytic reparative process was largely ignored in the desire to link story-telling with psychic recovery. Wilhelm Verwoerd, "Towards the Recognition of Our Past Injustices," *Looking Back, Reaching Forward: Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa*, ed. Charles Villa-Vicencio (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press 2000) 157.

bring us closer to discerning the presence of these other voices, however difficult they may be to hear[151].

Ironically, despite its clearly stated mission to provide a forum for multiple forms of response to apartheid violence and trauma, in the end the commission expressed a clear preference for testimony that followed certain formulaic narrative arcs that ended either, in the case of the victims, with forgiveness, or in the case of the perpetrators, with requests for amnesty and public admissions of guilt. This chapter holds the Commission to its original inclusive intent, by drawing attention to some of the alternative methods for processing and articulating historical trauma that have haunted the peripheries of public discussions of how best to produce democracy and to stay open to narratives of difference. As Krog, Mpolweni and Ratele put it, "to ignore these oral narratives that had gathered their innate knowledge at the price of grief and death and were delivered before the Truth Commission at high emotional cost, boils down to a perpetuation of the former neglect that victims had been exposed to" (100).

Though Mrs. Konile's testimony provides an example of the ways formal ruptures may indicate social changes, it is largely outside the quasi-legal realm of the TRC that we find these alternative instances for processing history[152]. The ambiguity so integral to the literary permits for counter-narratives that disrupt state-mandated ones—however experimental and innovative they seem to be—allowing for far more voices, and far more complex narrative forms to coexist alongside more mainstream, hegemonic ones.

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[151] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).
[152] I follow Krog, Mpolweni and Ratele in their use of the formal and respectful "Mrs" when referring to Mrs. Konile.

Narratives of History at the TRC

The official report published in 2003 in the wake of South Africa's TRC underscored how the commission "explicitly recognized the healing potential of telling stories."[153] Alex Boraine, the deputy chairperson of the commission under Desmond Tutu, puts it as follows in his memoir *A Country Unmasked*:

> The ritual, which was what the public hearings were, which promised truth, healing, and reconciliation to a deeply divided and traumatized people, began with a story. This was the secret of the Commission — no stern-faced officials sitting in a private chamber, but a stage, a handful of black and white men and women listening to stories of horror, of deep sorrow, amazing fortitude, and heroism… It was a ritual, deeply needed to cleanse a nation. It was a drama. The actors were in the main ordinary people with a powerful story. But this was no brilliantly written play; it was the unvarnished truth in all its starkness (Boraine 99).

Boraine and the other commissioners were impressively attuned to the necessity for storytelling in the reconciliation process, and thus they implicitly also recognized the vital role of the literary. Despite this awareness, there was nonetheless a marked *inattention* to the nation-narration function of the TRC, to the way it contributed to the inscription of a certain kind of story both about the past and about the future of South Africa, to "a new-master-narrative" (Bhabha *Nation and Narration;* Krog, Mpolweni and Ratele 26). Instead, representatives of the TRC—its commissioners and public figures in the ANC government—all stressed the commission's role as *mediator*, ignoring the

[153] Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

constructed nature of the story the TRC was itself authoring (Sanders *Ambiguities*). For these commentators, the commission's function was to uncover and amass the "truth" for a present in stark contrast to apartheid's past history of untruths. Of course which "truths" were deigned valuable contributions to the process of reconciliation, and which inadmissible reflected an overt act of selection (for instance, the TRC's mandate only to recognize acts of violation committed under the aegis of the political)[154], and this selective truth inevitably produced a fiction of history like any other[155]. Thus, while relying on the literary in the form of storytelling to effect a successful transition between a bloody past and a promising present, the representatives of the TRC, the media, and government officials, also collaborated in the effacing of the literary in their failure to recognize their own constructivist, and thus literary, narrative of transition. In this case, the particular narrative was a comic tale of redemption.

Writing the nation, or as Spivak calls it, "geo-*graphy*,"—inscribing meaning onto place—is an ongoing process, but in moments of historical crisis like those offered by the transition between governments, that transition narrative may potentially overturn the occlusions of past narratives (*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*). In the rush to do so, such transition narratives often unfortunately produce new ones. Thus while there was a clear recognition of the healing potential of storytelling on the level of the individual citizen-subject, the failure to recognize the equally transformative function of the literary

[154] See Mamdani for a full critique of the TRC's attempts to inclusively redress the injustices of apartheid at the level of the individual.
[155] Deborah Posel reminds us that the Commission did acknowledge the subjectivity of truths, by officially recognizing four different types of truth that would be admissible at the TRC Deborah Posel, "History as Confession: The Case of the South African Truth Commission," *Public Culture* 20.1 (2008). See also Deborah Posel and Graeme Simpson, *Commissioning the Past: Understanding South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2002).

in the narration of nation reveals how the link between literature and law was selectively employed by the new ANC government. When it served its purposes of producing a public image of non-violent reconciliation and individual healing, the "story-telling" story emerged time and time again, but when it made transparent the contingent, shifting, and constructed narrative of ANC rule, the literariness of politics was entirely ignored.

The interdependence of the literary and the legal may perhaps be most clear in such quasi-juridical forums as Truth Commissions, with their emphasis on personal testimony. As in more traditional law courts, the Truth Commission relies on the production of a truth narrative, which as Sanders has explained, ontologically assumes the existence of an untruthful narrative—what we might term a fictional narrative (*Ambiguities*). When a witness is called upon to testify in an institutional setting such as the courtroom, that witness is being called upon to speak the truth, and as Sanders asserts, law becomes predicated on the literary—on the fictional—as a necessary condition for its existence. In other words, without untruths, there can be no law.

This interdependent relation between law and literature exceeds the testimonial, extending, as I remarked a moment ago, into stories of nation building. Nowhere perhaps is this more obvious than in the legal proceedings which write a new nation into being. But it is here that the legal systems betray their allegiance to and dependency on the literary. For in a people's desire for transition, there also lies dormant the new government's equally strong desire to proscribe future transitions. It hopes that by writing a nation narrative built on a convincing rhetoric of future achievement, no new nation narrative will ever be needed again, since the teleological climax will have already been achieved in the establishment of the new government. Beginning then, in 1995, the

TRC, with the ANC government behind it, publicly produced a testimonial narrative to address the "gross violation of human rights" of the defunct apartheid regime, yet privately, this narrative also smoothly secured the ANC government in a new position of normativity, that would ideally evade challenges in the future (TRC 1: 60).

Unfortunately, at the Truth Commission, the onus for reconciliation was placed squarely on the shoulders of the victims of apartheid. While the perpetrators were asked to disclose the full details of their political crimes during amnesty hearings, no affective or moral requirement was exacted from them. Because it was agreed that perpetrators would not need to express remorse, and because it was agreed that once an individual was granted amnesty he could no longer be liable in a civil trial—and thus the victims or the victims' family members could not be financially compensated beyond the pittance they received as financial reparation from the state—the entire responsibility for effecting a successful transition lay at the feet of those who had persistently been ignored by apartheid structures of moral responsibility. While black South Africans finally were given a forum to tell their own stories, the absence of any kind of real reparation for them meant the TRC managed to reinscribe moral hierarchies, putting blacks once again in the position of having to identify with (and forgive) white guilt. As one writer puts it in a quasi-fictional context, "the burden to change is again shoved onto us, onto the indigenous people" (Krog, Mpolweni and Ratele 35).

Guided by Desmond Tutu's approach to reconciliation, with its Christian emphasis on forgiveness, victims of apartheid were encouraged to cultivate self-abnegating modes of empathetic identification with the perpetrators of violent crimes. Many refused, though their refusal has largely gone undocumented. Sanders shows how

the victims testifying at the TRC did sometimes empathize with their own torturers. Though the men confronting Jeffrey Benzien, a notorious torturer of the apartheid era, "repair [him] just enough for them to empathize with him" (109), Benzien does not reciprocate this empathy in his responses to their inquiries: "[Benzien's] replies" says Sanders, "force them to encounter an absence of reciprocity—of memory, of affect associated with that memory and thus, ultimately, an absence of empathy" (107). Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, one of the commissioners at the TRC, recognizes that episodes such as this which demand a level of forgiveness from the victims "may indirectly bestow power back on the perpetrator instead of empowering the victim…" (*A Human Being Died That Night* 100). Sanders confirms this problematic, when discussing Jane Taylor's play *Ubu and the Truth Commission*. He writes that "the wooden puppets representing witnesses disclose ambiguity and equivocality—a voicing of testimony but also the possibility of mistranslation and therefore of ventriloquism—of semic and thus of wider cultural violence, which may, against the best will in the world, compound the violations to which a witness testifies. From [William Kentridge's] [*Ubu Tells the Truth*], the music, and the play with its puppetry we perceive how *an inauguration of voice may also be an inauguration or repetition of violence* (*Ambiguities* x my emphasis).

Instead of seeing a need for the perpetrators to publicly atone[156], Sanders locates a fundamental strength of the TRC's structure in the role the commissioners played as perpetrators-by-proxy—stand-ins for the perpetrators to whom victims could direct their anger and sadness via direct questioning and explicit storytelling. Through "its

[156] See Paul de Man on confession for an explanation of how public confession fails to remedy a wrong. Paul De Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

willingness to make good the wrongs of the one it represented… a phantasmatic perpetratorship became available" alongside "a phantasmatic agency of reparation" (9). Each commissioner thus transmogrified into the "perpetrator-who-makes-good." (11). Indeed "taking the place of the other—in Levinasian terms, taking on the responsibility for the responsibility of the other for the other—was basic to the operations of the Truth Commission" (19).

Nonetheless, despite the reparative and reconciliatory gains that the Truth Commission may have effected for a whole host of affected individuals, the teleological absolutism that got written into the final and finite report of the Truth Commission denies the essentially processual character of transition and the ongoing character of the literary. It is to literature, then, that we must look for more nuanced narratives of nation narration. Many of the literary productions that emerged in the wake of the TRC refuse to understand the transition through the narrative proffered by the ANC; for these writers, transition is neither comic nor transcendental, and it is always still in the process of being written[157].

For countries attempting to publically come to grips with past atrocities, what is perhaps more necessary than the symbolic, partially-successful truth commission, is a continued and flexible reconciliation process; a transition narrative redefined and rewritten as new abuses of the past come to light, and as the present's requirements of the

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[157] Examples include Njabulo Ndebele, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (Banbury, UK: Ayebia, 2003). Phaswane Mpe, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001). Zoë Wicomb, *David's Story* (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2001), Zoë Wicomb, *Playing in the Light* (New York: New Press, 2006), Zoë Wicomb, *The One That Got Away* (New York: New Press, 2009). Marlene van Niekerk, *Triomf*, trans. Leon de Kock (Woodstock: Overlook, 2004), van Niekerk, *Agaat*.

past shift. In *Nation and Narration* Bhabha demands the following: “To encounter the nation *as it is written* [is]…in keeping with the problem of closure which plays enigmatically in the discourse of the sign (*Nation and Narration* 2).” Indeed, “…the ambivalent, antagonistic perspective of nation as narration will establish the cultural boundaries of the nation so that they may be acknowledged as ‘containing’ thresholds of meaning that must be crossed, erased, and translated in the process of cultural production” (Bhabha *Nation and Narration* 4). Literature and literary critique can play vital roles in keeping the boundaries of transitional processes flexible and perduring; indeed literary efforts emerging during and after the commission are characterized by a resistance to the narrative of transition put forward, and offer, in particular, alternatives to the closure that the publication of the TRC report was meant to enact. After all, they seem to acknowledge, justice and accountability might need to be ongoing and enduring rather than partial, discrete, or staged.

Since the advent and success of Freud’s therapeutic “talking cure” there is an increasingly globalized consensus that storytelling has a curative, and even redemptive power. This idea has been particularly popular in cases where the storytellers are victims of wrongdoings that were publicly or privately unacknowledged, often vehemently denied. The relationship between storytelling and power has proved a particularly compelling conundrum for postcolonial studies where questions of voicelessness, of who gets to speak for whom, and of political and linguistic representation, achieved canonical status in Spivak’s seminal “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Deborah Posel links this ideological trend to the TRC when she writes:

> …by now, in many societies where the power of Western cultural forms is marked, the idea that "speaking is healing"—that the way to deal with any inner emotional turmoil, frailty, or damage is to talk about it—has entered the domain of common sense, as has the presumption that untold inner pain is inevitably damaging and that in order to "heal," one must expose the pain and thereby… acknowledge and comprehend it (Posel 137-8).

Posel's discussion, via Foucault, of the secularization of confession admits that the popularity of this mode of reckoning with trauma may come at the expense of other, perhaps equally successful methods. But she is unwilling finally to level this critique. Part of what I seek to consider, in the context of coping with South African apartheid and its legacy, is whether or not acts of witnessing—of speaking personal truths, and of telling one's own stories—should so thoroughly monopolize approaches to healing at the expense of "silencing" others.

Literature too has often been thought of as an alternative medium for witnessing trauma, and much of Toni Morrison's literary project has aimed to set about "re-memorying" through creative fiction, the lives and stories of those who have historically been silenced from official histories. Her project has consistently been to "rip that veil drawn over 'proceedings too terrible to relate'" as she puts it (Morrison 191). Similarly, J.M. Coetzee's novel *Life & Times of Michael K* is also involved in rendering the "terrible," by forcing the reader to confront the protagonist, K's, lifetime of tragic experiences. Yet while Morrison wants to give a voice to those who "were silent about many things," Coetzee's novel reveals a deep suspicion of the spoken word's ability to

rectify the tragic abuses of history (Morrison 191). *Michael K i*nstead teeters on the edge of a large silent chasm, which questions the very notion and function of self-expression.

Another Way of Telling: Witnessing History In a Different Voice

As Sanders has pointed out, all witnesses have the potential to surprise their interlocutors—their exact testimony can never be fully predicted by their audience, even if certain expectations about its content do exist. This irony, or ambiguity, Sanders sees as constitutive of the literary, but it comes via the law, which contains the power to verify or refuse the accuracy of testimony[158]. "The idea that literature exists apart from the law," Sanders writes, "…betrays the integral relationship between the politics of democracy and the privilege of the literary as irony." He goes on to quote from Jacques Derrida's *Rogues*:

> "is it not also democracy that gives the right to irony in the public space? Yes, for democracy opens public space, the publicity of public space, by granting the right to a change of tone (*Wechsel der Töne*), to irony as well as to fiction, the simulacrum, the secret, literature and so on" (Qtd. in *Ambiguities* 7).

While this potential certainly makes testimony an inherently ambiguous mode of speech, this does not mean that all testimonies are as ambiguous as one another. Certain testimonies provide particular conundrums to their hearers, for reasons of comprehension, of surprise, or otherwise. While testimony is always already inherently ambiguous, this fact does not ensure that such ambiguity is really attended to within legal and quasi-legal

[158] An even more recent book that makes a similar argument about the instability of testimonial discourse is Janet Malcolm's *Iphigenia in Forest Hills: Anatomy of a Murder Trial*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

procedures, indeed the law can only make decisions by ultimately refusing the ongoing ambiguity of testimony.

As Felman and Laub point out in the psychoanalytic context, for a trauma to move from the silent space of repression, the witness requires a listener who participates in the emergence of the narrative articulating the trauma for the first time. To speak or write of traumatic events presumes a willing and attentive listener, attuned to "the landmarks, the undercurrents, and the pitfalls in the witness and himself" (Felman and Laub 58). But at the TRC, as Krog, Mpolweni, and Ratele have shown, such attentiveness—particularly to linguistic, cultural, and narrative difference—was not always in evidence.

As Deborah Posel has pointed out, it is more important to consider the effects of the testimony on the formation of the post-apartheid state narrative, than to study the TRC's final five-volume report, since the latter, "has probably had a miniscule popular readership… [and the] summary final report… passed almost unnoticed in the South African public, attracting brief mention in some of the more serious national newspapers but little in the way of sustained public discussion or engagement." "It is to the hearings," that were broadcast nationally and internationally, or television and radio, "that we need to look to understand the most powerful articulation between the TRC and the popular imagination…" (131). In what follows, I look briefly at a work produced after the hearings that has the express purpose of understanding one witness's testimony that, at the time of the hearings, proved particularly difficult to parse, both to the commissioner's charged with receiving the testimony, and with wider South African and international audiences. The one record of her testimony on the TRC's website misspelled her name so

that effectively, there is no direct trace of her in the official public archival record (Krog, Mpolweni and Ratele 4).

There Was This Goat, examines the TRC testimony of Notrose Nobomvu Konile, a woman whose son, Zabonke John Konile, was killed in 1986 by the apartheid police in an incident that came to be known as the Gugulethu Seven killings. Seven male anti-apartheid activists were killed in an ambush by the apartheid security forces. The action was celebrated on apartheid television in a gruesome broadcast featuring policemen dragging the bodies of the dead "terrorists" along the ground. The TV spot was then callously followed by a piece about record low temperatures in Britain. Some of the mothers of the victims unfortunately saw this broadcast when it aired initially, and then were controversially exposed to it again when it was played as part of the TRC hearings covering the incident.

At the time they wrote the book, the authors of *There Was This Goat* worked in several departments at the University of the Western Cape—Antjie Krog came from the Arts faculty, Nosisi Mpolweni from the Xhosa department, and Kopano Ratele from the Psychology and Women and Gender Studies departments. The book was the result of two years of verbal and written exchange culminating in the production of a polyvocal text that incorporates multiple textual forms, some of which were produced collaboratively, some individually. They all set about to better understand Mrs. Konile's testimony within the larger context of reconciliation and repair in post-apartheid South Africa.

Beginning with the official English translation of Mrs. Konile's testimony, Krog, Mpolweni, and Ratele procured the Xhosa original and in conjunction with videos of her

testimony that allowed them to see Mrs. Konile's gestural and non-verbal modes of communication, they produced a new translation of her original testimony. Eventually, in 2006, ten years after her initial appearance at the TRC in 1996, they travelled to rural Indwe in the Eastern Cape, to talk with her further, and this visit in tandem with their previous work on her testimony permitted them all to draw further conclusions about her testimony and her life, producing a new narrative of Mrs. Konile's experience, that "underline[s] the importance of refraining from 'un-strang-ing' the strange—to allow it to be strange—but within its original logical and coherent context" (100).

Their visit also forced them to confront the inadequacy of intellectual exercises in textual interpretation, as certain contextual clues provided straightforward answers to questions they had had about certain moments of her testimony—particularly her dream about a goat, and her discussion of being hit by a fallen rock—moments that they had wanted to read metaphorically. In Indwe they discovered that goats were commonly sighted—"to dream about a goat in Indwe was like dreaming about trucks in Johannesburg" (Krog, Mpolweni and Ratele 170). They also learned that many of the impoverished residents resorted to "coal-picking" at the surface-level outcropping characterizing Indwe's geological terrain. The authors' willing admittance of their own failings, and their self-conscious attentiveness to the possible misinterpretations and articulations of power dynamics in the context of their reading of Mrs. Konile's testimony and their subsequent visit, produce a text committed in its very structure to the recognition of collaborative and contradictory narratives. They also note:

> It was clear how difficult it was for the full extent of the devastating poverty and deprivation that characterized Mrs Konile's life after the death of Zabonke, to

> enter readily the framework of the Truth Commission and its audience sitting in Cape Town. A framework that was legislated to find heroes, victims and perpetrators, and to compensate with reparations or amnesty, is not necessarily equipped to understand the ways in which "confused" (or "thick") narratives of women actually present a "broader set of truths about systemic injustice…the lacerating sting of ethnic discrimination and the futility of seeking justice from the legal systems (176).

From the outset, Mrs. Konile's testimony does not follow the same narrative arc of that of the other Gugulethu Seven mothers testifying at the commission. Watching the videorecording of their testimony, or reading the official transcription, one may initially understand why the commissioners struggled to cope with her statement, as it appears to lack temporal and spatial logic. Asked by Comissioner Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela to "tell us about your family and…who you are before you tell us about 1986 incident," Mrs. Konile begins a long monologue that, at times, seems almost completely without narrative coherence. Describing the day she discovered her son had been killed, she explains that the news was brought by one of his comrades, Pheza:

> At the time when Pheza arrived we were on our way to the grants office that day, if I'm not mistaken, it was on a Thursday. Just when I was on my way out, I was just thinking, I saw Pheza, he [*looked at us*] and said, "No it's this one!" I—my heart just throbbed. I thought maybe it's because Pheza was a person who frequented Cape Town, although I didn't even know Cape Town [*deep breath*]. We left and went to the grant's office and he [*Pheza*] said, "Let's leave her!" I didn't know now who is who, the one who must be left because there were only

> two of us *mos*. We [*Mrs. Konile and her friend accompanying her*] went and came back from the grants office. I said to the one I was going with, I said, “heyi! You know what, my heart is palpitating with a strange feeling after having seen Pheza who lives in Cape Town but is suddenly now at Indwe [where she lived], and it persists. Last night I had a bad dream. I dream that here at the door there was a goat that was standing, like this [*gesturing*], ehh—standing like this [*gesturing with her hands*], and my friend laughed and said, “Eyi! You really had a bad dream.” Next to the tree! (Qtd. in Krog, Mpolweni and Ratele 75-6)

In the video, there is also palpable discomfort in the body language of the other mothers, who seem to find that Mrs. Konile’s testimony disturbs their own position as reliable participants in the process of truth and reconciliation. Fortunately, through the careful efforts of Krog, Mpolweni and Ratele, Mrs. Konile’s testimony has been reconsidered in light of her biographical background, and her particularly marginalized position as a poor black woman living in a rural part of apartheid South Africa. Re-representing her speech, the authors of *There Was This Goat* parse her meaning in such a way that it becomes accessible to a modern audience accustomed to certain narratological requirements, and in so doing, reveal the considerable failings of the TRC commissioners and of modernized audiences in their capacity to listen to stories of trauma as they come into voice.

Mrs. Konile’s testimony threatens firmly entrenched ways of understanding the world so that the temptation is clearly to dismiss her as incomprehensible, rambling, mad, even. Read this way her testimony reveals more about ourselves, about those of us who have this reaction to her, than it does about Mrs. Konile’s intentions. Responding to Mrs.

Konile's testimony with discomfort is a response that includes the other mothers of the Gugulethu Seven, in their bodily expression of shame and distance during her testimony. Those whose worldview is called into question by Mrs. Konile are not necessarily delimited by race or class, or even culture. Indeed to entirely attribute the difficulty of comprehension to cultural difference is often a way to dismiss, rather than to engage with the discomfort of the unknown. Mrs. Konile makes apparent the possibility of other forms of knowledge, and draws attention to the very limits of the epistemological system shaping the psyches of the audience and commissioners at the TRC, and of our own.

What is this worldview that seeks knowledge only in particular forms? The disorder of her narrative (if we can even accept such a thing as order, a way to rearrange Mrs. Konile's words into something more palatable for our trained tastes) is testament to the disorder of apartheid itself—it is Mrs. Konile's way of making order, and as such is no less valid than ours, perhaps more so, because it represents a challenge to the hegemony of our mode which erases so much.

If we refuse to approach Mrs. Konile's words through this bifurcation of meaning and non-meaning, what is this something that emerges in Mrs. Konile's testimony that is neither/nor? How can we, trained in the Western tradition of chronology-as-narrative-as-rationality, even write about Mrs. Konile using the patterns of speech that conform so predictably to this very process of Western meaning-making we are trying to call into question?

And what about those victims of apartheid who refused to take part in the Truth and Reconciliation hearings? What of the family of Steve Biko, and of those others who found it impossible to forgive the perpetrators of violent crimes against themselves and

their loved ones? Family members such as the mothers of “the Cradock Four” who in 2004 filed a challenge to the National Prosecution Authority to allow them to prosecute the killers of their sons?[159] Jann Turner, a journalist covering the TRC, whose own father was shot and killed in front of her, sees this desire to hurt the killers of your loved one as the healthy reaction to the trauma of their absence. The response encouraged by the TRC—to just sit and ask perpetrators carefully why they committed the crimes they did, seems an anomalous one to her, rather than a healthy, understandable reaction. This desire for retribution is “more normal” she says, “than wanting to sit down and face [the perpetrators] in this extraordinary Kafkaesque Truth Commission, where we sit and listen and go in the breaks and have cups of tea” (Reid and Hoffmann).

As I have indicated above, an alternative response to both vengeance and the public expression of suffering, is that of silence. Attending to silence shifts our attention to difference, and it is in this vein that I make an argument for considering the silences surrounding the TRC and its particular mode of nation-narration. What the rest of this chapter sets out to do, via an engagement with Coetzee’s apartheid-era novel *Life & Times of Michael K* is to elaborate a politics of silence that recuperates non-responsiveness from its commonplace association with powerless subalternity, to suggest it may also at times be an agential discursive mode of resistance.

<u>The Silence of Michael K</u>

The novel is split into three sections, the first and last of which, narrated in the third person, follow Michael K’s peregrinations through a series of colonized spaces in an

[159] For interviews with these mothers see the documentary film *Long Night's Journey into Day*, dir. Frances Reid and Deborah Hoffmann, California Newsreel, 2000.

allegorical South Africa. In section one, K is a gardener in the public parks system in Cape Town, but his mother is unwell and he resolves to help her return to the farm of her childhood. She dies en route in the opening pages of the novel, and K is left to determine the course of his own life. He continues on to the farm, but is caught during a road block and temporarily forced to work in a labor gang until he slips away, arriving at the farm where he sets himself up on the land by planting pumpkin and melons. After the arrival of the white landowner's son, he leaves, and after near starvation in the mountains, he is subsequently picked up by soldiers. After a stint at a work camp, from which he eventually escapes, he ends up in the hospital ward of a detention camp. The anomalous middle section of the novel is narrated by an unnamed medical officer whose is increasingly disturbed by K's virtual speechlessness. K "means something" (*Michael K* 165) to the officer, something which throws his whole conception of himself and of his life, into question. In the final section, after K escapes the camp he journeys back to Cape Town where, after a brief encounter with a man named "December," and a return visit to his mother's original flat, he prepares to die.

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Despite early criticisms that branded Coetzee's work as evasively allegorical and overly aesthetic, it has become generally more accepted that for a work to be politically resistant it is not requisite that it present a straightforward criticism of the regime or system under fire. Derek Attridge has argued against an allegorical reading of Coetzee's novels, suggesting they be taken at face value.[160] And as Coetzee's oeuvre has expanded, it has become clearer that his works, while frequently reflections on South Africa's

[160] While the medical officer insists, "Michaels means something," Attridge suggests that he should not mean anything but what he is (*Michael K* 165).

political situation, are also deeply philosophical meditations on questions of power raised by colonialism, war, and ideologies of race and gender. His writing is frequently, to apply Theodor Adorno's comment on lyric poetry, "the subjective expression of a social antagonism" (45). He does not try to speak for a group, nonetheless he achieves a wider identification though his voice may not claim universalism[161].

In tandem with Adorno's claim in "On Lyric Poetry and Society" that it is paradoxically, the inherent subjectivity of the lyric voice that makes it universal, Deleuze and Guattari insist in their exploration of Franz Kafka that a minor literature gains its very collective, possibly revolutionary resonance, from the isolation of its author. They write that, "[Kafka's] solitude opens him up to everything going on in history today. The letter K no longer designates a narrator or a character but an assemblage that becomes all the more machine-like, an agent that becomes all the more collective because an individual is locked into it in his or her solitude" (Deleuze and Guattari 18). In a clear nod to Kafka, Coetzee adopts the letter K for his main character who wanders, very much alone, a stranger, if not within his own language, then most definitely within his own land. We learn early on that "[K] was easiest when he was by himself" (*Michael K* 4). A subsequent requisite Deleuze and Guattari propose for a minor literature is that the author's voice be a solitary one, and indeed it is only this solitude that can appeal to the

[161] Luc Boltanski argues that the object of pity must be part of a mass group. Primo Levi describes them in such terms as well: "All the musselmans who finished in the gas chambers have the same story, or more exactly, have no story…Their life is short, but their number is endless: they, the *Muselmänner*, the drowned, form the backbone of the camp, *an anonymous mass*, continually labour *in silence*, the divine spark dead within them, already too empty to really suffer. One hesitates to call them living…" Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* 90. Emphasis added.

collective. It may be, as Luc Boltanski has pointed out in another context, that the subjective language and story is *most* effective in communicating collective meaning.

While what Homi Bhabha has said of the critic may equally be applied to the fiction writer, that "the critic must attempt to fully realize, and take responsibility for, the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present," Coetzee simultaneously, and paradoxically, doubts this impulse each step of the way (*The Location of Culture* 18). Coetzee's novel pushes towards a paradigm that refuses the deeply entrenched notion of Western literary and philosophical thought that privileges words over all other modes of communication.[162] Considered alongside the TRC's reckoning with history, Michael K represents alternative responses to experiences of history, reminding us to hesitate when the now hackneyed association of speech with successful memorializing is called upon in the name of national unification.

To take as a literary project the re-inscription of lost, forgotten, and erased voices, a writer must unquestioningly accept the supremacy and importance of speaking. Giving voices, however, to underrepresented characters, may in fact only reshuffle priorities, and reconfigure power relationships, which, while beneficial in the short term, only serve to prolong a system in which some are silenced while others speak. A redistribution of words always creates new silences and erasures. This problematic is one that Coetzee insists on exploring in his fiction.

As writers such as Morrison have theorized, imagination may serve a reparative function, and the narratives it creates confront traumas by giving a voice to them. This

[162] The novel immediately following *Michael K* in 1986—*Foe*—continues Coetzee's exploration of problems of speaking and silence, positioning the theme as an abiding one in his overall oeuvre.

articulation of traumatic events in order to cope with, and possibly resolve them, has obvious parallels in psychotherapy's "talking cure." This rewriting, or re-remembering, is much like the notion of counter-memory, defined by George Lipsitz as that which:

> …forces revision of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past… Counter-memory focuses on localized experiences with oppression, using them to reframe and refocus dominant narratives purporting to represent universal experience (Lipsitz 213).

As the TRC made concrete, by rendering public the specific narratives that were previously repressed and by making public memories that were not previously recognized in that sphere, a healing process began. Coetzee's literary project certainly seems to aim at a redressal of wrongs through testimony. By making public what has been suppressed, whether through the repressions of the past or the present, this emphasis suggests a slightly uncharacteristic underlying optimism in his work.

Coetzee's project in *Michael K*, however, is not so much to combine imagination with memory, as to use his imagination to bear witness to the apartheid system under which he was living during the time he wrote the novel. He is not rewriting history; instead, he rewrites the present, insisting that the present admit other, less familiar voices. The gap Morrison attempts to bridge with the aid of imagination is one of time; but the obstacle Coetzee must overcome is a bodily one—race. She imaginatively leaps in such works as *Beloved* to another time; he leaps to another body.

While he can imagine a body, Coetzee's third-person narrative refuses to unreservedly invent or imagine a voice for K. As a white South African writer, he may be incapable of imagining such a voice though he can imagine the existence of so

dispossessed a person[163]. Does Coetzee's refusal to give K a voice somehow therefore re-inscribe the voicelessness of people in his predicament? Or, is Coetzee acknowledging that his imagination is limited by his own subject-position? How could a writer living in a white body in South Africa know the experience of living in a black one?[164] Precisely because, as Adorno explains, "poetic subjectivity is itself indebted to privilege," Coetzee takes it upon himself to attempt, to the best of his ability from his specific position, to represent others, to draw attention to "those who not only stand alienated, as though they were objects, facing the disconcerted poetic subject but who have also literally been degraded to objects of history" (Adorno 45).

Coetzee may not feel comfortable giving voice to K's internal unseen language, but his body is seen and known by all who encounter him. As the final passage of *Foe* insists: "this is a place where bodies are their own signs" (Coetzee *Foe* 157). If not through words, it is through the body, and its navigation of the colonial space of an allegorical South Africa, that Coetzee can apply his creative talent, and invent a narrative for someone previously erased from history.

In the world Coetzee's novel emulates, K's voice and body are routinely dismissed. But his body cannot be denied because it is always materially and spatially present, resolutely forcing itself upon the viewer. It is this body the doctor finds most disturbing, it is this that, despite even Michael's resistance, forces upon the viewer the existence of Michael, first in his harelip, then later in his emaciation. Is Michael's

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[163] For a recent discussion of the complexities facing white South Africans who wish to attempt to imagine black experience, see Antjie Krog, *Begging to Be Black* (Cape Town, South Africa: Random House Struik, 2009).

[164] This is, in many ways, precisely the struggle the young medical officer is forced to face in part two of the novel.

experience so traumatic it cannot actually enter the narrative? In an interview, Coetzee says that,

> …in South Africa it is not possible to deny the authority of suffering and therefore of the body. It is not possible, not for logical reasons, not for ethical reasons… but for political reasons, for reasons of power. And let me again be unambiguous: it is not that one *grants* the authority of the suffering body: the suffering body *takes* this authority: that is its power. To use other words: its power is undeniable (Coetzee and Attwell 248).

It is Michael's body that repels the medical officer—a body that cannot be ignored while words can be. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault locates the political power of the body in its very ability to be "caught up in a system of subjection… the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body" (26). That K repeatedly chooses not to work, nor will he be confined within institutions—be they orphanages, work camps, or hospitals—is *his* refusal of subjugation[165]. And the silence of his body underscores that refusal.

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Derek Attridge examines Coetzee's syntactical choices, noting that they reflect an unwillingness to speak for Michael K (Attridge). Coetzee is adept at the use of free indirect discourse, but in this novel, his almost obsessive use of the indicator, "he thought," constantly reminds the reader of the narrator and author's outside presence. In

[165] During a period of time K is forced to work on a damaged railroad line, instead of accepting the painful drudgery of the work as those around him seem to do, he asks the foreman "Why have I got to work here?" and manages to escape the labor gang during a moment of respite J.M. Coetzee, *Life & Times of Michael K* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985) 42.

Disgrace and *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee is more comfortable collapsing the line of difference between narrator and protagonist, but something particular to K makes Coetzee resist this narrative approach. Attridge suggests that this resistance to free indirect discourse "allows Coetzee to sustain throughout the fiction the otherness of K's responses: although we learn in moving detail of his thought-processes and emotions, we never feel that we have assimilated them to our own" (Attridge 50). Coetzee is reluctant to speak for K then, not only because of his own position, but also because he is wary of allowing his readers the narrative ease they are accustomed to. We cannot simply identify with K but instead are forced to recognize how different from ourselves K remains, despite our familiarity with some of his innermost thoughts[166].

How uncomfortable are we in our reading of *Michael K*? Attridge identifies this unease as a motivating factor in his decision to write his book on Coetzee, and indeed, part of this discomfort stems from our inability, as readers, to easefully, or comfortably know and understand K. What Michael K does not say is precisely the absence that disturbs us. The voice that K hears a couple of times throughout the novel unseats the reader, as it becomes an example of an occurrence beyond our knowledge. After starving in the mountains, K decides to return to humanity,

> … the last light was fading by the time he entered the town. The smell of peach-blossom enveloped him. There was a voice too, coming from all sides, the calm even voice he had heard the first day he saw Prince Albert. He stood at the head of the High Street among the verdant gardens, unable to make out a word, though

[166] Attridge also highlights other narrative devices that Coetzee uses to prevent both the narrative voice and the reader from finding Michael K an easy character to identify with. These include Coetzee's alienating use of the letter K to stand in for the protagonist, and the use of the distancing past tense.

he listened hard, of the distant monotone that after a while blended with the twitter of the birds in the trees and then gave way to music (*Michael K* 69).

What are we to make of this voice that in its earlier description “pervaded the air like a mist or an aroma” with words “if there were words, if the voice were not simply lulling or chanting tones…too faint or too smooth to hear” (*Michael K* 49)? All we can take from K’s experience of the voice, is that it is without words, or at least with words that are meaningless because they are incomprehensible to K, and therefore incomprehensible to us; and also, that the voice becomes music, or sound. This *unheimlich* reference disturbs our narrative ease, and in order to continue reading, we are forced to accept the story’s irreducibility and intangibility.

But beyond the voice that K hears, what can we say about voices in this novel anyway? Are they desirable? Or is this fight for vocality, for words, merely a struggle to obtain power? As K muses, “Perhaps in truth whether the camp was declared a parasite on the town or the town a parasite on the camp depended on no more than on who made his voice heard loudest” (*Michael K* 116). When one person (or institution) speaks, in order for communication to occur at any level, for that voice to be heard, another must be quiet. This, as Krog, Mpolweni, and Ratele point out, is only the first step in actually hearing what that voice is trying to mean, since cultural cues—“the landmarks, the undercurrents, and the pitfalls in the witness and in [the listener]” may not be noticed, as was the case with Mrs. Konile’s testimony (Felman and Laub 58).

While a rectification of the balance of power is certainly desirable, how much does forging a voice merely reinforce and ensure an eternal division between the silent and the speaking? Speaking, as testimony or not, is an assertion of the ego, an insistence

on the "I" of the speaker. For many, to speak is also to exist. But it is also to exist in a world that prefers speaking to thinking; sound to silence. Noise, one might suggest, over peace. Perhaps Coetzee's most novel gesture in *Michael K* lies in his exposition of a character who attempts to live and exist outside of the norms of this type of society, who refuses to speak, not only because he has been silenced, but because silence is preferable. Michael K's silence may be interpreted as a form of resistance to normative regimes that privilege speaking. He refuses to speak because he refuses to be included in the world around him; speaking in it would obtusely mean belonging to it. Even gestures of hospitality are outside the purview of verbal acknowledgement for Michael K, despite them coming closest to tempting him towards actual articulation. In once scene he stays with a family that feeds and houses him for a night; "At the table the urge again came over him to speak. He gripped the edge of the table and sat stiffly upright. His heart was full, he wanted to utter his thanks, but finally the right words would not come" (*Michael K* 48).

In Coetzee's work we can of course recognize the persistent appearance of voiceless characters: Friday, in *Foe*, whose tongue has been removed; and the "barbarian girl" in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, for instance.[167] The silences of some of Coetzee's dispossessed characters are not only the silences of oppression and erasure, but also purposeful acts of resistance on the parts of the characters, challenging the prioritizing of speech, at least, within existing structures and divisions of power.

[167] *Foe* tapers off with the statement: "this is not a place of words. Each syllable, as it comes out, is caught and filled with water and diffused…" J. M. Coetzee, *Foe* (New York: Viking, 1987) 157.

An explanation for this challenge can be found in Coetzee's essay "Idleness in South Africa" in which Coetzee reads "idleness since 1652 as an authentically native response to a foreign way of life" ("Idleness" 35). "Pre-capitalist humans," whom Max Weber identified as presenting the largest force of resistance to the advance of capitalism, represent an alternative system of living, which might, in addition to resisting the oppressive work-sleep routine of the West, also provide a more satisfying and peaceful means of existence. The essay was first published in June 1982, so Coetzee may well have been thinking about the very ideas raised in this chapter as he was simultaneously working on *Michael K*.[168] Indeed the essay's argument about "native" resistance finds many parallels in K's behavior.

Beginning with the accounts of the first Dutch settlers on the Cape, and continuing through the later British ones, Coetzee draws our attention to the narrative of laziness that is quickly ascribed to the "Hottentots" by these writers.[169] Despite their myriad occupations—they were missionaries, surveyors, merchants, prospectors, slave traders, and "gentlemen" travelers—Coetzee adeptly shows the pervasive hegemony of this discourse of laziness. Linking this conception of indolence to Western civilization's obsession with work (stemming from both the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment period's humanist ethic), Coetzee argues that Western writers particularly abhorred laziness, torpor, sloth, etc., because the very *lack* of activity meant that writers

[168] "Idleness in South Africa" appeared originally in *Social Dynamics* in June of 1982 while *Michael K* was published the following year. J. M. Coetzee, "Idleness in South Africa," *Social Dynamics* 8.1 (1982).

[169] I use the word Hottentot after Coetzee, who uses it presumably because he is discussing the construction of the idea of the "Hottentot" by the Dutch settlers. The word, now derogatory, refers to the Khoikhoi, inhabitants of south-western Africa for about 30,000 years.

had nothing to describe, which made it difficult to prove how they themselves differed from the Hottentots. “The moment when the travel writer condemns the Hottentot for doing nothing,” Coetzee writes, “is the moment when the Hottentot brings him face to face (if he will only recognize it) with his own preconceptions” ("Idleness" 24). These writings reveal the universal prevalence of the Protestant work ethic, not any “true” description of the Hottentots, whom in fact thwart description.

Drawing on Rousseau’s distinction between idleness and leisure (*oisir* and *loisir*)—the phase of leisure is the phase after Man has invented tools, but before Man creates civilization— Coetzee suggests, in accordance with Rousseau, that this intermediary state is the state of Mankind’s great happiness, in which leisurely activities contribute to “the happiest, and most stable of epochs” (qtd. in "Idleness" 24). Nonetheless, the Hottentots, Coetzee points out, were excluded from this kind of Edenic description, as they did not work with tools towards constructing a civilization based on the division of labor, but seemed instead content to subsist as they were, surviving on what they could find to maintain the status quo.

There are few proponents—in Western literature—of the Hottentot manner of existence until perhaps, the publication of *Michael K*. Instead,

> …the consensus is that the Hottentot way of life, characterized by low-level subsistence maintained by the minimal resort to wage-labor (“laziness”), wandering in search of greener pastures (“vagrancy”), and a sometimes casual attitude toward private property (“thieving”), will have to be re-formed by *discipline* (a key word of the age) if the Hottentot is to have any stake (“pull his weight”) in the Colony ("Idleness" 26).

No one seems to acknowledge that “given a choice between idleness (with accompanying poverty) and the wretchedness of lifelong manual labor, people may deliberately choose the former” ("Idleness" 27).

The question none of the Western colonists asked themselves (in reference to the Hottentots), but which Coetzee seems to be asking throughout *Michael K,* is “which is better, to live like the ant, busily storing up food for winter, or like the grasshopper, singing in the sun all day, heedless of the morrow?” ("Idleness" 19). Throughout the novel, K’s behavior parallels the descriptions of idleness so noticeable in these early colonial texts. He is completely uninterested in building a civilization, let alone a place in which to live out his solitary years. Finding the farm where he believes his mother once lived, he decides to stay, but not to put down roots.

> … he thought: I am not building a house out here by the dam to pass on to other generations. What I make ought to be careless, makeshift, a shelter to be abandoned without a tugging at the heartstrings. So that if ever they find this place or its ruins, and shake their heads and say to each other: What shiftless creatures, how little pride they took in their work!, it will not matter (*Michael K* 101).

What those in control of his existence from his earliest days *say* “will not matter.” K refuses to build any emotional attachment to any physical thing, as his experience of life has only been as an undoing of attachments. As K “… had grown older [he] had stopped wanting.”

> His last years at Huis Norenius[170] were best, when there were no big boys to torment him, when he could slip off to his place behind the shed and be left alone. One of the teachers used to make his class sit with their hands on their heads, their lips pressed tightly together and their eyes closed, while he patrolled the rows with his long ruler. In time, to K, the posture grew to lose its meaning as punishment had became an avenue of reverie; he remembered sitting, hands on head, through hot afternoons with doves cooing in the gum trees and the chant of the tables coming from other classrooms, struggling with a delicious drowsiness. Now, in front of his cave, he sometimes locked his fingers behind his head, closed his eyes, and emptied his mind, wanting nothing, looking forward to nothing (*Michael K* 68-9).

Basking in this meditative position, K emerges as a Buddha-like figure with no thoughts and no desires. K increasingly resists encapsulation in dominant Western modes of thought, much as the Hottentots resisted description for the early European settlers. His behavior, and contentment seem more fittingly paralleled in non-Western discourses of self-fulfillment. In this context, K is not a mute, lazy, native, rather he is willful and wise, fully cognizant of the inherent failure of speech to arrive at transcendence.

K's resistance to work is increasingly noticeable as the novel progresses. In the camp one day, he simply decides not to work, and lies lifelessly on the ground, letting the children crawl over his immobile body. Later, back on the farm, the narrator relates:

> … he was learning to love idleness, idleness no longer as stretches of freedom reclaimed by stealth here and there from involuntary labor, surreptitious thefts to

[170] The state-run boarding school Michael attends.

be enjoyed sitting on his heels before a flowerbed with the fork dangling from his fingers, but as a yielding up of himself to time, to a time flowing slowly like oil from horizon to horizon over the face of the world, washing over his body, circulating in his armpits and his groin, stirring his eyelids (*Michael K* 115).

For K, as for the Hottentots, time is indomitable, and should be lived in, not on. Instead of trying to control or resist being controlled by time, K becomes a part of it. By criticizing the accepted Western ideas of work and time, Coetzee's character proposes an alternative way of living in this world that might be more conducive to individual contentment (and less likely to harm others).

Indeed, following the normative path proves deeply unsatisfactory for the other central character in the book—K's medical officer—who, despite his adherence to societal rules and regulations, discovers how "…it came to me with great force that I was wasting my life, that I was wasting it by living from day to day in a state of waiting, that I had in effect given myself up as a prisoner to this war" (*Michael K* 157). In contrast, K insists, " 'I am not in the war,'" because K refuses the system *in toto* (*Michael K* 138).

K seems virtually without drives. After burying his mother's ashes, he spends the rest of the book wandering without a goal. His only two desires are that he remain free to wander (i.e. outside the control of the authorities who lock him up in a variety of institutions), and that he be free to grow food on the farm. Even this latter impulse is relinquished without much resistance. But Michael is not passive so much as unwilling to participate in society *as it is*. Were society different, were its values reworked, and reevaluated, Michael's role would perhaps be less subdued. As it is, however, K is "like an ant that does not know where its hole is..." because unfortunately, there is no place in

the world of this novel for someone who refuses its premises (*Michael K* 83). Similarly, I am arguing, the TRC, despite its far greater efforts to accommodate difference, simultaneously created a new a discursive field that only allowed for certain types of voices and stories. In the unexplored silences before, during, and after the commission, lie alternative narratives about the experience of apartheid, and the ongoing experience of the period following it up unto the present.

K is noticeably unwilling to tell stories about his life and it certainly resists encapsulation by traditional Western standards for storytelling. "It struck him too that his story was paltry, not worth the telling, full of the same old gaps that he would never learn to bridge. Or else he simply did not know how to tell a story, how to keep interest alive" (*Michael K* 176). Storytelling is not innate, but learned—even forcibly—he claims:

> And if I had learned storytelling at Huis Norenius instead of potato-peeling and sums, if they had made me practice the story of my life every day, standing over me with a cane till I could perform without stumbling, I might have known how to please them. I would have told the story of a life passed in prisons where I stood day after day, year after year with my forehead pressed to the wire, gazing into the distance, dreaming of experiences I would never have, and where the guards called me names and kicked my backside and sent me off to scrub the floor. When my story was finished, people would have shaken their heads and been sorry and angry and plied me with food and drink… (*Michael K* 181).

Storytelling, in this context then, is merely another form of oppression, another performance that someone like K must learn in order to please those in control. This too K resists, and his experience of life is instead one that moves in the Beckettian order from

speech towards silence. The novel ends with Michael K's thoughts: "I was mute and stupid in the beginning. I will be mute and stupid at the end" (*Michael K* 182).

As I have repeatedly pointed out, the structure of *Michael K* is such that K never speaks his own tale; there is the narrator's third person description relying sometimes on free indirect prose, and the medical officer's guilt-ridden account of liberal anxiety. We quickly learn that Michael K's silence was cultivated early. As a child, "Michael K sat on a blanket watching his mother polish other people's floors, learning to be quiet" (*Michael K* 4). On his first stay at the farm he reflects, "I could live here forever, he thought, or till I die. Nothing would happen, every day would be the same as the day before, there would be nothing to say" (*Michael K* 46). This eventlessness and silence is what he craves—the exact opposite of a world in which value is only placed on accomplishment, improvement, and change, mediated through the guise of words and speech.

Only certain sounds, that do not contain words, can encapsulate his being. "He coughed, and gave a little hoot like an owl, and heard the sound depart from him without trace of an echo. Though his throat hurt, he made the sound again. It was the first time he had heard his own voice since Prince Albert. He thought: Here I can make any sound I like" (*Michael K* 56). Sounds, much like the sound that Friday makes at the end of *Foe*, do not contain the taint of language, with its failures and oppressions. Adorno argues that it is precisely the dispossessed who "have the same right, or a greater right, to *grope for the sounds* in which sufferings and dreams are welded" (45 my emphasis). Sounds convey the presence of life, but refute the supremacy of any system of language.

When soldiers discover K on the farm, they try to make him speak but he refuses to. Then, when the medical officer, with his misguided good wishes, similarly attempts to force him to speak, K finally complies:

> "I am not clever with words," he said, nothing more. He moistened his lips with his lizard-tongue.
>
> "We don't want you to be clever with words or stupid with words, man, we just want you to tell the truth!"
>
> He smiled back craftily.

The conversation continues:

> "This garden you had…what did you grow there?"
>
> "It was a vegetable garden."
>
> "Who were the vegetables for? Who did you give them to?"
>
> "They weren't mine. They came from the earth."
>
> "I asked, who did you give them to?"
>
> "The soldiers took them."
>
> "Did you mind it that the soldiers took your vegetables?"
>
> He shrugged. 'What grows is for all of us. We are all the children of the earth" (*Michael K* 139).

Marc Augé writes that "Place…is in one sense… an invention: it has been discovered by those who claim it as their own" (43). K, however, is forced to wander precisely because he is not among those who have a claim on a place. He comes close to enacting a claim, while not asserting his ownership over it—it is instead an innate belonging. Much like

his relationship to time, the land is not owned, it is partaken of. He lives in the land not on it.

The importance the Western world attaches to speech emerges most clearly in a speech given by the medical officer.

> "*Talk*, Michaels," I resumed. "You see how easy it is to talk, now *talk*. Listen to me, listen how easily I fill this room with words. I know people who can talk all day without getting tired, who can fill up whole worlds talking…Give yourself some substance, man, otherwise you are going to slide through life absolutely unnoticed. You will be a digit in the units column at the end of the war when they do the big subtraction sum to calculate the difference, nothing more. You don't want to be simply one of the perished, do you? You want to live, don't you? Well then, *talk*, make your voice heard, tell your story! We are listening! Where else in the world are you going to find two polite civilized gentlemen ready to listen to your story all day and all night, if need be, and take notes too?" (*Michael K* 140).

The medical officer's insistence exemplifies the tyranny that can accompany injunctions to testify—vocally—to personal history. K's testimony is perhaps of another kind, albeit unsingular in the state's eyes, that would simply see him as a "digit in the units column." For the medical officer, K can only access history through speech. In a world obsessed with individual experience and individual expression, the horror of his anonymity frightens him. In a letter he writes to Michael K he suggests:

> We have all tumbled over the lip into the cauldron of history: only you, following your idiot light… have managed to live in the old way, drifting through time,

> observing the seasons, nor more trying to change the course of history than a grain of sand does. We ought to value you and celebrate you… there ought to be a plaque, nailed to the racetrack wall commemorating your stay here. But that is not the way it is going to be. The truth is that you are going to perish in obscurity and be buried in a nameless hole… and no one is going to remember you but me, unless you yield and at last open your mouth. I appeal to you Michaels: *yield*! (*Michael K* 149-50).

Acknowledgement of these silences, silences that are certainly not empty silences, remind us, paradoxically, of the persistence of that which cannot be forgotten or forgiven via verbal processes of national reconciliation. The more troubling implication of limiting the period of reconciliation and truth-telling to the brief period of the Truth Commission hearings—not to mention the very proscribed way the truth of apartheid injustices was allowed to enter those hearings—lies in its suggestion that the nation could be healed, could forgive and forget, once the reckonings of the Commission were over. As a character in Albert Camus' *The Plague* reminds us, "one can't forget everything" (Qtd. in Felman and Laub). Nor can everything be told, and the persistence of these aporia of articulation confront psychoanalytic dogma that optimistically insists on the transformative supremacy of the spoken word.

Sympathy, as opposed to forgiveness, is momentary, immediate, and instantaneous; always a new event. Not caught in the temporal, it functions outside of history, in a way that acts of forgiveness, linked as they always are to past events, cannot escape. When Winnie Mandela begrudgingly apologized at the TRC, she attested less to any form of actual remorse, than to how easy notions of forgiveness could be

manipulated to accord with TRC's symbolic, Judeo-Christian demands. Reading Paul de Man's commentary on confessions, Felman and Laub concur that:

> the trouble with excuses (with confessions) is that they are all too *readable*: partaking of the continuity of conscious meaning and of the illusion of the restoration of coherence, what de Man calls 'the readability of… apologetic discourse,' pretends to reduce historical scandals to mere sense and to eliminate the unassimilable shock of history, by leaving 'the [very] assumption of intelligibility…unquestioned." Confessions (or excuses) thus allow one, through the illusion of understanding they provide, to forgive and to forget. But de Man precisely faces, in the history that cannot be confessed, what is both unforgivable and unforgettable (Felman and Laub 151).

Which returns us to Mrs. Konile and her testimony. For while, unlike Michael K, she agreed to tell her story to a listening public, she refused, unlike the other mothers of the Gugulethu Seven, to forgive their killers and those who had participated in the ambush of her son. I would suggest that it is her refusal to speak these words of pardon that ultimately gives Mrs. Konile the agency that her history of poverty denies her. By refusing to speak certain words, both she and the fictional Michael K, attest to the possibility of alternate experiences of apartheid, of the years that followed, and alternate ways to process personal and national history.

This chapter calls, therefore, for a consideration of testimonial acts that fall outside the narratological expectations established under the aegis of the Truth Commission. As I have argued throughout the dissertation, narratives, in whatever form they may appear, call listeners and readers to step outside themselves in order to enter the

nebulous terrain of alterity. As Felman and Laub's reading of Mallarmé's speech suggest, those narratives and modes of testimony that seem the least conducive to straightforward comprehension often signal the emergence of otherness at its most incomprehensible. Attunement, via imaginative engagements with such disconcerting narratives may prove near impossible, yet it is through an openness to such unconventional difference that the conditions for the possibility of an ethics of mutual responsibility arise, so we must attend carefully to their iterations.

Conclusion

As I have shown, cultural narratives, ranging from the passbook to the photocomic, to the novel itself and the Truth Commission testimony, are all involved in the production of modes of sympathetic engagement. Each one, in a manner sometimes visual, sometimes textual, and occasionally both, provoke readers and viewers into conscious and unconscious acts of imaginative identification, allowing for the possibility of ethical acts of relation.

However, as I have tried to make clear, neither imagination itself, nor the attunement specific to sympathetic imagination, leads necessarily to ethical ends. Indeed, the imaginative faculties of the interrogator, say, or the sadist, may be essential to the successful completion of their respective tasks—both for the extraction of information, or for the enjoyment of another's suffering. In both these instances imaginative identification works towards thoroughly unethical ends. Yet imaginative identification in less extreme situations—even perhaps in those very situations of coercion and abuse—is requisite for the emergence of any ethical act. To return to Rousseau's claim that "he who imagines nothing is aware only of himself," we see how the failure of imaginative identification, at least, results in the absolute failure of the conditions for human interconnection, or to use the African term, the failure of the conditions for the emergence of *ubuntu*. ("Essay on the Origins of Language" 32).

This emphasis on imagination, then, is a thoroughly optimistic one, even in the acknowledgment of imagination's more pernicious possibilities. That nearly each one of us is provoked to acts of imagination via our consumption of cultural materials, and that such acts draw us closer to living ethical interactions, suggests a near universal

predisposition for ethics. The question this begs, therefore, is how and why such systems of governance as apartheid can come into being; how and why the potential for ethical consciousness and action gets precluded despite the virtual omnipresence of opportunities for imaginative identification. Rather than directly explaining the reasons for the absence of *ubuntu* during apartheid, this study aimed to consider and recognize how forms of imaginative sympathy might be better channeled to fulfill their promising ethical potential. What kinds of politics might be possible via a reliance on sympathetic identification?

Less ambitiously, I have challenged the notion that identification with representatives of mainstream or hegemonic culture is necessarily only a counterproductive form of indoctrination. This reductive way of understanding practices of identification with power denies both the agency that can be appropriated through such identifications, but more importantly, denies the decentering effect such practices involve, and the way they cultivate an openness to alterity, albeit an alterity charged with all sorts of dangers and pitfalls to the self that remains open to it.

Additionally, this study attempts to take up the task of applying ethical criticism to all genres and indeed, to *all* narrative forms. While a book cannot hope to cover the vast array of narratives that provoke and enjoin ethical response, by expanding the purview of the discussion via the introduction of genres such as the passbook and the photocomic, I aim to provide an example of the kinds of textual and non-textual materials that should be included in examinations of the production of ethical consciousness. A further examination of other popular genres in South Africa—particularly those of newspapers, film, and television—would be a useful addition to this study. Wayne C.

Booth asserts in his weighty consideration of ethics and literature, *The Company That We Keep*, that,

> in principal… [the] subject must be all narratives, not only novels, short stories, epics, plays, films, and TV dramas but all histories, all satires, all documentaries, all gossip and personal anecdote, all biography and autobiography, all "storied" ballets and operas, all mimes and puppet shows, all chronicles—indeed, every presentation of a time-ordered or time-related experience that in any way supplements, re-orders, enhances, or interprets unnarrated life. (14)

With the addition of these other narrative forms into the ambit of what ethical criticism might examine, I hope to have opened up certain new scholarly avenues of pursuit. But this is not the only reason that is important to consider these other narrative forms. Certainly, as this dissertation argues, one purpose for such considerations is of an overtly ethical nature itself—to include in considerations of ethical subjectivity reading publics who often most engage in ethical acts of "reading" via popular texts.

But from a formal or aesthetic standpoint, it is also crucial that we consider how different forms of narration produce different *ethos*. What narratives communicate as ethical and *how* they communicate the ethical depends upon the formal properties of the genre or narrative as much as it depends upon the contextual situations of their consumers. This dissertation only begins to address the complex nexus of relations between generic form and the production of ethical consciousness, yet I hope it suggests at least the necessity for returning to ethical criticism from this more nuanced consideration of the ethics of form.

Such considerations obviously extend beyond the realm of South African literary and cultural studies, and even beyond the far broader scope of postcolonial studies, widely conceived though the field may be. As an example of how genres and practices of cultural consumption work to produce sympathetic and/or ethical subjectivities, I hope to suggest to scholars working in different fields, how important it is for us to complicate our understanding of the relation of cultural consumption to the articulation of politics. Where state and internationally-proscribed systems of identification documentation continue to dictate planetary movement, this study calls us to consider the ways that formal and informal practices of documentation remain fundamentally important in the production of social and political relations. On par with the networks of migration and immigration as well as the high walls and prisons that span the globe, documents of very different natures interact with audiences at home, and for some, at far remove from their place of origin. It is not enough to merely consider, as Pascale Casanova has done, the ways in which literary markets reflect and perpetuate cultural and economic disparities, we need also to look at other travelling cultural forms such as Nollywood videos, newspapers, on-line media, and popular zines and magazines, to better understand how cultural production can be employed in the construction and reconstruction of a politics. Where such popular genres are involved in the production of collective affect we might better understand how such feeling translates into collective action guided by and committed to ethical imperatives.

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