

# The Negotiation of Trauma in Postcolonial Culture

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Signed Declaration

‘I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.’

Signed

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## Abstract

This thesis seeks to bring Trauma Studies and Postcolonial Studies into closer conjunction. In recent years, each of these fields has attracted much interest. Recent studies of trauma show that, despite a considerable preoccupation with the Holocaust, other subjects, for example AIDS and sexual trauma (including rape and incest), are worthy of serious focus. The study of postcolonial culture has now become a widely recognized discipline within many academic institutions. This growing discipline continues to emphasize the legacy of historical oppression, cultural imperialism, and economic and political deprivation as an important factor in international relations and global society. Yet watching daily news reports, which survey escalating violence in the Middle East, Sudan, and other regions, suggests that further insight is much needed into the psychological traumas which continue to affect large parts of the globe following colonialism. This thesis will argue that trauma and postcolonial studies need urgently to be brought together in order for, on the one hand, trauma studies to extend its remit and, on the other hand, the ongoing traumatic nature and legacy of a significant number of experiences of postcolonialism to gain greater recognition. Using a comparative study of four different genres of narration, this thesis considers the extent to which different modes of cultural representation may assist in redressing this imbalance. It argues that, in the highly pressurized contexts of postcolonial trauma, strain is placed upon creative processes from which culture is formed. In particular, those who seek to represent experiences of postcolonial trauma through narrative find themselves facing a series of ethical dilemmas. Overcoming these dilemmas proves fruitful for the narrative process, as it forces a meaningful engagement with the past and stimulates creative innovation.

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## Introduction

[H]uman beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions. Partial beings, in all senses of that phrase.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis seeks to bring Trauma Studies and Postcolonial Studies into closer conjunction. In recent years, each of these fields has expanded rapidly. Trauma Studies has developed through a focus on events such as the Holocaust as well as growing concerns over AIDS and sexual abuse. Whilst some might suggest that this reflects an increase in traumatic events in the last century, many argue that it is in fact society's willingness to acknowledge such experiences that has expanded, rather than their frequency. Similarly, the study of postcolonialism has now become a widely recognized discipline within many academic institutions. Like Trauma Studies, postcolonialism has evolved to incorporate contemporary global concerns. In *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (2003), Robert C. Young argues that the ideas explored within Postcolonial Studies are pertinent to such pressing issues as Afghan refugees, terrorism and suicide bombers because of the way in which 'postcolonialism has developed a body of writing that attempts to shift the dominant ways in which the relations between western and non-western people and their worlds are viewed [...] turning the world upside down.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Salman Rushdie, 'Imaginary Homelands' (1982), in Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-91* (London: Granta Books, 1992), 9-21 (12).

<sup>2</sup> Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2.

Both Trauma Studies and Postcolonial Studies are fields which were once on the margins of academic research; now they may be considered central to cultural studies.<sup>3</sup> Correspondingly, the legacy of colonialism at political and economic levels is now widely recognized as deep and ongoing. Yet watching daily news reports which survey escalating violence in the Middle East, Sudan, and other regions suggests that further insight is needed into the traumas which continue to affect large parts of the globe following colonialism. This thesis will argue that Trauma Studies and Postcolonial Studies need urgently to be brought together in order for, on the one hand, Trauma Studies to extend its remit and, on the other hand, the continuing traumatic nature and legacy of a significant number of experiences of postcolonialism to gain greater recognition.

In order to establish the intellectual framework for this study, I will begin by spending some time defining and exploring the term trauma and its historical context. In this brief history, I will outline the key developments in trauma theory and the studies which have evolved to explore traumatic experience. However, I will then demonstrate that trauma theory and studies of trauma have failed sufficiently—so far—to address postcolonial experiences of trauma, despite the fact that trauma is central to many narratives of postcolonial literature. I will further argue for greater attention to be paid to the ways in which postcolonial trauma is narrated.

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<sup>3</sup> This reflects a development in critical disciplines, which Andreas Huyssen describes as a shift in focus in the study of memory from present futures to 'present pasts.' Andreas Huyssen, 'Present pasts: media, politics, amnesia,' in *Globalization* ed. by Arjun Appadurai (London: Duke University Press, 2001), 57-77. Derek Gregory suggests '[w]hat has come to be called postcolonialism is part of this optical shift. Its commitment to a future free of colonial power and disposition is sustained in part by a critique of the continuities between the colonial past and the colonial present.' Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 7.

## Introducing Trauma

‘Trauma’ comes from a Greek word meaning ‘wound.’ Initially used to describe a physical wound,<sup>4</sup> today the term is commonly used to describe psychological and emotional injury of a deeply painful and long-lasting nature.<sup>5</sup> Nancy Miller and Jason Tougaw suggest that the tendency in popular discourse to conflate the term with any experience of psychological intensity reflects the current social fascination with extreme experiences: ‘if every age has its symptoms, ours appears to be the age of trauma’.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Ruth Leys identifies a problematic inclination to use the concept of trauma to describe a wide spectrum of experiences, some of which debase the term and undermine its significance.<sup>7</sup> However, when the term first acquired its specifically psychological meaning, its application was restricted to a very small group of people. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, developing studies of psychology and psychiatry, which included thinkers like Sigmund Freud, Jean-Martin Charcot, and Pierre Janet, began to use the term to describe their findings about deeply troubled patients. Their work re-conceptualized trauma as a wound to the mind, caused by a sudden unexpected, emotional shock. Leys describes how this understanding emphasized ‘the hysterical shattering of the personality consequent on a situation of extreme terror or fright.’<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ruth Leys suggests that modern understanding of ‘trauma’ began with the work of British physician John Erichsen in the 1860s to describe the distress of shock and concussion experienced by victims of railway accidents. Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Ian Hacking uses the term ‘wounds of the soul’ to describe trauma and suggests that the term first acquired its new meaning in France between 1874 and 1886. Quoted in Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 25. Other contemporary thinkers about trauma, including Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Judith Lewis Herman, Ruth Leys, Dori Laub M.D., Shoshana Felman, Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw generally agree in their usage of the term to indicate ‘the wound of the mind—the breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world.’ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw, in *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community* (Chicago: Illinois University Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Leys, 2. Miller and Tougaw also note that ‘trauma has become a portmanteau that covers a multitude of disparate injuries.’ in Miller and Tougaw, 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Leys, 4.



The work of Charcot, Freud and Janet focused initially on a disorder known as ‘hysteria,’ which became a popular focus of enquiry into a certain kind of nervous condition found in women. Its first proponent, Charcot, generated much interest in his work at Salpâtrière hospital in Paris, where he used female patients to explore hysterical symptoms, which included amnesia, convulsions, sensory losses and motor paralyses. Charcot’s work brought credibility to an area of study previously considered unworthy of serious attention; yet understanding of hysteria remained limited. His followers, including Janet and Freud, were each determined to locate its cause and develop treatment.<sup>9</sup>

In *Studies In Hysteria* (1895), Freud (who was working with Josef Breuer at this time) presented eighteen case studies, which began to outline a scientific understanding of trauma, its causes and symptoms. From this, Freud began to explore ways of dealing with experiences of trauma, to facilitate a process of patient recovery. He and Breuer developed the investigative style of one-on-one treatment, which would provide the foundation of modern psychotherapy and which Freud later named ‘psycho-analysis.’ From these studies, several predominant aspects of trauma emerge which continue to characterize its description today. These include the ideas that trauma is an assault on categories of identity; that trauma produces certain symptoms which can be described under the term ‘compulsion to repeat’ and which represent the unconscious negotiation—or avoidance—of traumatic experience; and that recovery involves a process of working-

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<sup>9</sup> Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (London: Rivers Oram, 1992), 11.

through, which must take place at a conscious level. I shall now briefly describe each of these characteristics.<sup>10</sup>

The first characteristic of trauma—as a crisis of identity—was identified by Freud and Breuer in the most famous case in *Studies in Hysteria*, which involved a young woman to whom they gave the pseudonym ‘Anna O’ (1880). Anna O.’s illness was thought to have begun whilst she was nursing her father in a sickness from which he later died. Freud and Breuer observed in Anna O. a psychological wound resulting from her anxiety—or fright—over her father’s illness. When her father later died, her physical state weakened, and Anna O. experienced ‘severe disturbances’, or ‘interruptions,’ including loss of memory, disrupted vision, and altered states of consciousness. The latter included a melancholic, anxious state, which gave way, by turns, to hallucinations, ‘naughty’ and abusive behaviour. As Breuer described:

At moments when her mind was quite clear she [Anna] would complain of the profound darkness in her head, of not being able to think, of becoming deaf and blind, of having two selves, a real one and an evil one which forced her to behave badly, and so on.<sup>11</sup>

From this investigation, Freud conceived of traumatic experiences as a threat to identity and sanity, because they cannot be assimilated by the conscious and therefore remain repressed within the unconscious. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), he further developed this understanding of trauma in medical terms:

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<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that Sigmund Freud is not the only figure who is indispensable to the origins of trauma theory as we know it today. In fact, renewed interest in the work of Janet has recently suggested an alternate genealogy for the field. See Leys, 7. However, Freud’s status as the chief proponent of ‘psychoanalysis’ confirms his present centrality to early explorations of traumatic neuroses. Furthermore, it is also important to acknowledge the inconclusive nature of Freud’s early research which can be seen to be reflected in the intermittent growth and contradictory opinions which continue to characterize this dynamic field. Leys argues that Freud is ‘unavoidable [to the genealogy of trauma] precisely because his aporetic and contradictory writings about the neuroses, including the traumatic neuroses, exhibit a simultaneous preoccupation with and evasion of the question of mimesis in a manner that exemplifies the tensions and paradoxes that have continued to trouble the field to the present day.’ Leys, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, ‘Anna O.’ (1880), in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Peter Gay (London: Random House, 1995), 60-78 (64).

we describe as 'traumatic' any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break the [mind's] protective shield. It seems to me that the concept of trauma necessarily implies a connection of this kind with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli. Such an event as an external trauma is bound to provoke a disturbance on a large scale in the functioning of the organism's energy and to set into motion every possible defensive measure.<sup>12</sup>

This 'continuous stream,' which Freud also described as an 'invasion,' or 'flood,' follows the moment of the mind's initial 'disturbance.' It overrides the mind's normal processes, and assaults an individual's identity and behaviour. Freud continued to suggest that the serious nature of traumatic experience means that patients repress their emotions and anxieties. In 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' he wrote that, 'I am not aware, [...] that patients suffering from traumatic neurosis are much occupied in their waking lives with memories of their accident. Perhaps they are more concerned with *not* thinking of it.'<sup>13</sup>

Freud noted that following a traumatic experience patients regularly experienced involuntary repetitions of the traumatic event, often in the form of flashbacks, nightmares and hallucinations, breathlessness, amnesia, distorted memories, or uncontrollable behaviour. His observations led him to conclude that trauma is not contained in a single moment, but is experienced twice: once in the initial moment of disturbance, when the psyche is first disturbed, then again, when this event is consciously received–relived and revived–to become an internal trauma. In order to illustrate the uncontrollable or compulsive aspects of acting-out, Freud referred to an incident in Torquato Tasso's romantic epic, *Gerusalemme Liberata*:

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<sup>12</sup> Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920), in Gay (ed.), 594-626 (607).

<sup>13</sup> Freud, in Gay (ed.), 594-626 (598).

[The hero,] Tancred, unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda, in a duel while she is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders' army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again.<sup>14</sup>

According to Freud, as Clorinda cries out to Tancred, the traumatic experience of killing his beloved, which he had not truly acknowledged before, is finally understood. From this incident Freud concludes that, 'there really does exist in the mind a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle.'<sup>15</sup> Leading trauma theorist Cathy Caruth notes that a traumatic experience consists of an event that is 'not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event.'<sup>16</sup> Herman states similarly that: 'Long after the danger is past, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present. They cannot resume the normal course of their lives, for the trauma repeatedly interrupts.'<sup>17</sup>

Freud noted that his patients were caught in an intolerable cycle of psychological torment, unable to truly recover from the original traumatic incident or its ensuing symptoms. Rather than recover the actual event, he believed that, '[sufferers were] obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it as something belonging to the past.'<sup>18</sup> In order for healing or restoration to take place, Freud argued that the mind must first tackle what may seem to be impossible: accessing deeply hidden recesses of the mind

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<sup>14</sup> Freud, in Gay (ed.), 594-626 (605).

<sup>15</sup> Freud, in Gay (ed.), 594-626 (605).

<sup>16</sup> Cathy Caruth describes this as 'history [occurring] as a symptom'. Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 4-5.

<sup>17</sup> Herman, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Freud, in Gay (ed.), 594-626 (602).

and breaking the destructive cycle. Freud believed that the most effective way to alleviate traumatic symptoms and the emotions that accompany them is to recover so-called 'lost' memories, and put them into words.

Freud developed his 'talking-cure' to help patients to act out and work through traumatic experiences at a conscious level through dialogue with a therapist. 'Working through' aptly characterizes the role of the patient in psychoanalysis which continues today. The process consists of two stages: the first involves 'recognizing resistances', or gaining insight through remembering and recovering the past; the second, overcoming these resistances, engages with a process of *conscious* repetition (articulating the past) and thereby bringing about change in the psyche. Freud described the role of the psychoanalyst 'physician' as one who encourages his patient to 're-experience some portion of his forgotten life, but [...] see to it, on the other hand, that the patient retains some degree of aloofness, which will enable him, in spite of everything, to recognize that what appears to be reality is in fact only a reflection of a forgotten past.'<sup>19</sup>

According to Freud's model, psychoanalyst and patient work together towards recovery by bringing unconscious, repressed memories into conscious, willed—and therefore hopefully controllable—thought. This relationship incorporates the process of mourning, which Freud identified in his essay on 'Mourning and Melancholia'; Freud cites mourning as a way of engaging with trauma that disrupts the narcissistic cycle of the repetition compulsion and allows life to begin again by bringing a critical and reflective distance between the individual and their past.<sup>20</sup>

Freud's work was crucial to early studies of traumatic experience. However, it began to be seen as limited in its scope when his desire to pinpoint the root cause of

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<sup>19</sup> Freud, in Gay (ed.), 594-626 (602).

<sup>20</sup> See Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917), in Gay (ed.), 584-589.

traumatic experience led him into a deep exploration of the sexual lives of women.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, this contributed to the separation of psychoanalysis and trauma theory, due to criticism leveled at Freud from other theorists. This can be illustrated with reference to Carl Jung, a theorist whose similar studies in traumatic neuroses diverged from those of Freud once he felt that Freud was placing too great an emphasis upon the sexual aspects of fantasies.<sup>22</sup> As Donald Kalsched suggests:

For Jung, [...] the secondary ego-states embodied in complexes are not precipitated by sexual trauma alone—but by the full range of human tragedy and misfortune, each one uniquely personal. He was no less interested than Freud in finding a “universal” core complex behind traumatic neuroses. But his exploration of the “strangled affects” in dissociated states led him to *many* traumas and many different personal stories and fantasies (complexes) about these traumas.<sup>23</sup>

### Trauma Studies

Despite these critiques, the work of Freud may be attributed with drawing attention towards formerly taboo areas of human thought and behaviour. In particular, Freud highlighted the importance of paying attention to those who had been marginalized and abused by exposing the serious effects of trauma at a deep psychological level. His work continues to influence the field of cultural studies which

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<sup>21</sup> The recurrence of sexual trauma in hysterical patients led Freud to believe that the two were causally linked. He then put forward a theory which would deeply influence trauma theory and the field of psychoanalysis as a whole: at the bottom of every case of hysteria there are *one or more occurrences of premature sexual experience*, occurrences which belong to the earliest years of childhood, but which can be reproduced through the work of psycho-analysis in spite of the intervening decades. I believe this is an important finding, the discovery of a *caput Nili* [...] in neuropathology.

Freud, 'The Aetiology of Hysteria' (1896), in Gay (ed.), 96-111 (103).

<sup>22</sup> Carl Jung, like Freud, had seen that the effects of certain painful experiences were often exacerbated by distorted memories, which blurred the boundaries of fact and fiction. Jung also concurred with Freud's notion of 'compulsive repetition' and all its accompanying symptoms. Donald Kalsched writes that 'the idea that trauma was more than just "overloading the circuits" and was related to unconscious *meaning* was very important to Jung.' Kalsched notes that Jung also agreed with Freud that 'outer experience alone (usually) does not account for the profound effect in the psyche that it triggers. For this effect to be understood the fantasy component must be added.' thereby confirming a link between meaning, unconscious fantasy and unconscious anxiety in his explorations of trauma. Donald Kalsched, *The Inner World of Trauma: Archetypal Defenses of the Personal Spirit* (London: Routledge 1996), 71.

<sup>23</sup> Kalsched, 72.

emerged from his findings and which has become known as Trauma Studies. In particular his influence continues through Cathy Caruth in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and *Unclaimed Experience* (1996). Caruth's work has become seminal in contemporary trauma theory and draws upon Freudian methodology on psychic trauma to assist in an exploration of trauma, memory and identity.

The impact of trauma was first studied clinically, through the work of Freud and other early theorists. It focused predominantly on the causes of hysteria and other mental disorders. Consequently, it left several key areas of traumatic experience unexplored. For the purposes of this thesis the most significant of these may be loosely divided into two categories: collectively experienced trauma and non-western experiences of trauma. The development of Trauma Studies has given attention to the first of these aspects of trauma, as extensive studies into twentieth century war and the Holocaust have highlighted the long-term impact of collective trauma.

When veterans returning from the Great War complained of sleeplessness, loss of memory, uncontrollable behaviour, feeling mute, unresponsive, and emotionally frozen, it appeared that traumatic experiences were being experienced by a group of people simultaneously. These victims of what became known—perhaps misleadingly—as ‘shell-shock,’ renewed medical interest in trauma, which had waned following the impact of the work of Freud.<sup>24</sup> Initially it was thought there was a physiological cause to this suffering, and it was attributed to the concussive effects of exploding shells. However, as the symptoms appeared in noncombatant veterans, it became clear that the syndrome was of a psychological, rather than physical nature. Despite some initial reluctance of popular opinion to acknowledge this widespread suffering, medical

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<sup>24</sup> See Herman, 18-20, and Leys, 15.

opinion began to argue that combat neurosis was indeed a genuine psychiatric condition which required attention and treatment. This re-evaluation of the nature of trauma slowly gained momentum through the work of individuals like Abram Kardiner, Roy Grinker and John Spiegel during and following the Second World War and continued until the Vietnam War. It was this latter conflict which Leys and Herman both claim finally led to the inclusion of ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’ in the American Psychiatric Association Manual of 1980.<sup>25</sup> This official status has led to a surge of activity within the field, especially in research into the Holocaust, which has become predominant in understanding of collective trauma.

The sheer scale of suffering experienced during the Holocaust has secured a privileged academic engagement in the nature and consequences of this collective trauma. Its influence is such that it has been cited as ‘a “cosmopolitan memory” and a transnational moral source for many non-Jews, at least in the West’<sup>26</sup>; ‘the civilizational foundations of a new official European memory’,<sup>27</sup> marking a turning point in modern culture and history. For some critics, the Holocaust is a ‘unique’ trauma, unparalleled in its gravity and enormity. In their study *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), the literary critic Shoshana Felman and the psychoanalyst Dori Laub argue that the Holocaust represents

the watershed of our times [...] a history which is essentially *not over*, a history whose repercussions are not simply omnipresent (whether consciously or not) in all our cultural activities, but whose traumatic consequences are still actively *evolving* [...] in today’s political, historical, cultural and artistic scene.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Herman 27-28, and Leys, 5.

<sup>26</sup> A. Dirk Moses, ‘The Holocaust and Genocide’, in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. by Dan Stone (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 533 - 555 (533).

<sup>27</sup> D. Levy and N. Sznajder quoted in Moses, in Stone (ed.), 533 - 555 (533).

<sup>28</sup> Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub M.D., *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (London: Routledge, 1992), xiv.



Felman and Laub claim that the Holocaust is both unspeakable and impossible to articulate: 'a history that can no longer be accounted for, and formulated, in its own terms.'<sup>29</sup> By implication, those who engage with the 'impossible confessions' of Holocaust testimony suffer a 'crisis of witnessing.' To exemplify such a crisis, Felman describes a university course she put together on testimony at Yale, which involved showing class of students a videotape of autobiographical accounts of Holocaust survivors. She describes the impact of the viewing as 'such an encounter with the real that the class, all of a sudden, [found] itself entirely at a loss, uprooted and disorientated, and profoundly shaken in its anchoring world views and in its commonly held life-perspectives.'<sup>30</sup> Following the class, Felman describes how she felt the students had experienced a crisis of witnessing, 'something akin to *a loss of language*,' followed by a desire to talk about what they had seen, with a simultaneous feeling 'that language was somehow incommensurate with it.'<sup>31</sup>

The approach adopted by Felman and Laub is similar to that of Caruth, whose influential study, *Unclaimed Experience*, appears to endorse the notion of a 'crisis of witnessing.'<sup>32</sup> *Unclaimed Experience* presents the claim that traumatic experiences are registered literally, in a way which cannot be represented or known fully but which is expressed through repetition. However, despite alleging its inadequacy, Felman, Laub, and Caruth all appear to agree that language is central to the way in which trauma is experienced, recognized and understood. Caruth writes, 'the history of a trauma, in its inherent belatedness, can only take place through the listening of another.'<sup>32</sup> Citing it as a tension between 'knowing and not-knowing,' Caruth suggests that trauma is

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<sup>29</sup> Felman and Laub, xviii.

<sup>30</sup> Felman and Laub, xvi.

<sup>31</sup> Felman, 'Education and Crisis, Or the Vicissitudes of Teaching,' in Felman and Laub, 1-56 (50).

<sup>32</sup> Caruth, *Trauma*, 11.

a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality of truth that is not otherwise available [...]. [it is] the truth in its delayed appearance and its belated address, [and] cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language.<sup>33</sup>

In this way the crisis of witnessing has implications for literature and for the possibilities of representing trauma, which it brings into question. Writing about the testimonies of Holocaust survivors, Lawrence Langer describes what he sees as the failure of vocabulary to do justice to experiences of horror: '[a]vailable vocabulary educes a unified view of the self, which invites us to adapt the Holocaust experience to ideas of heroism *during* the event and a process of *recovery* afterward that are inconsistent with the realities of the disaster.'<sup>34</sup> However, as Susannah Radstone notes, '[i]f the entire field of representation was contaminated by [the Holocaust] whose incommensurability precluded adequate representation, then art was the only—albeit the *apparently impossible—hope*.'<sup>35</sup>

Privileging the Holocaust over other collective traumas has obfuscated the importance of postcolonial trauma. However, there is another sense in which the Holocaust may be seen as a 'limit event,' providing the paradigm of modern, incommensurable suffering with which contemporary traumas may be, if not directly compared, then studied. Miller and Tougaw suggest that, 'the Holocaust has produced a discourse—a set of terms and debates about the nature of trauma, testimony, witness, and community—that has affected other domains of meditation on the forms the representation of extreme human suffering seems to engender and require.'<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 171.

<sup>35</sup> Susannah Radstone, 'Working with Memory: an Introduction,' in *Memory and Methodology*, ed. by Susannah Radstone (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 1-25 (6).

<sup>36</sup> Miller and Tougaw, 4.

There has been some limited attempt to consider the Holocaust in relation to other collective traumas, most prolifically through the work of historian Dominick LaCapra. LaCapra's work—published in three key texts *Representing the Holocaust* (1994), *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (1998), and *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), as well as a number of essays—develops psychoanalytic theory, in order to understand the collective trauma of the Holocaust. LaCapra claims that the Holocaust represents a huge shift in the way trauma is understood, because of its collective nature and widespread repercussions. LaCapra seeks to initiate conversation between the Holocaust and other contexts of collective trauma, such as Apartheid in South Africa and slavery in the United States. For example, in *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, he considers how the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa may enhance understanding of the collective ritual processes of mourning losses. He suggests that this attempt at 'trauma recovery' may contribute to discussions of memorialization and historiography, which have thus far been dominated by analysis of the Holocaust.<sup>37</sup> LaCapra suggests that both the Holocaust and Apartheid (amongst other collective traumas) should be considered foundational to society, as 'trauma[s] that paradoxically [become] the basis for collective or personal identity, or both.'<sup>38</sup> Such traumas may become 'myths of origin,' which shape the way that a group, or a nation perceives itself.<sup>39</sup> LaCapra's work highlights the value in addressing the impact of collective trauma upon national identity. However, despite his interest in these other contexts, his investigation of them is constrained by his primary concern with the centrality of the Holocaust to critical studies, as 'a complex phenomenon at the intersection of history and memory with which we are still trying to grapple.'<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 43-44.

<sup>38</sup> LaCapra, *Writing History*, 81.

<sup>39</sup> LaCapra, *Writing History*, 81.

<sup>40</sup> LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (London: Cornell, 1998), 2.

There are several reasons why interest in the traumatic nature of the Holocaust may be problematic for bringing Postcolonial Studies and Trauma Studies into closer conjunction. Firstly, claims that the Holocaust represents a ‘master signifier’ of cultural memory (or as Huyssen writes, ‘the ultimate cipher of unspeakability or unrepresentability’<sup>41</sup>) have led to the emergence of Holocaust studies—a separate field of theoretical investigation with its own specific preoccupations, its own axes of study and its own agenda. This has successfully established the Holocaust as the most significant event of the twentieth century. However, this distinction is problematic for its elevation of the Holocaust above other traumatic experiences. It threatens to discourage comparison between the Holocaust and other traumas. Whilst the ‘uniqueness’ of the Holocaust has been persuasively argued by, amongst others Elie Wiesel,<sup>42</sup> it confirms the inequality felt by those living outside the West, and threatens to perpetuate a cultural and political ignorance of traumatic events taking place outside Europe and America.

Evidence of the negative effects of privileging the Holocaust over other traumas may be seen in the failure to sufficiently address other kinds of genocide, such as the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Whilst the genocide in Rwanda has failed to attract the same levels of political or cultural attention as the Holocaust (although its profile is growing), it represents a horror of cataclysmic terror and murder, comparable only with the Holocaust in its brutal de-humanization and even more catastrophic in the swiftness

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<sup>41</sup> Andreas Huyssen, ‘Trauma and Memory: A New Imaginary of Temporality’ in Bennett and Kennedy (eds.), 16-29 (17).

<sup>42</sup> For an example, see Robert Franciosi, Brian Shaffer and Elie Wiesel, ‘An Interview with Elie Wiesel,’ in *Contemporary Literature*, 28:3 (1987). 287-300 (295). The separation between studies of the Holocaust and those of other contexts of trauma is evident in theoretical and critical texts on trauma. It is exemplified in Suzette Henke’s study of scriptotherapy, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women’s Life-Writing* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1998). This text reinforces the distinction between the Holocaust and other contexts of trauma by refusing to examine Holocaust narratives but claiming that ‘these poignant testimonies constitute a field unto themselves and require a particular historical purview that should be investigated within a broader political, religious and philosophical context.’ Suzette Henke, *Shattered Subjects* (Hampshire, Macmillan Press, 1998), xvi. For an example of critics seeking to redress this imbalance, see the work of Sam Durrant, who aims to draw together disparate schools of Holocaust studies and postcolonialism for their mutual benefit. Sam Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 3.

of its execution. Philip Gourevitch describes the killing of eight hundred thousand Rwandans in just one hundred days:

Although the killing was low-tech—performed largely by machete—it was carried out at dazzling speed: of an original population of about seven and a half million, at least eight million were killed in just a hundred days. Rwandans often speak of a million deaths, and they may be right. The dead of Rwanda accumulated at nearly three times the rate of Jewish dead during the Holocaust. It was the most efficient mass killing since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>43</sup>

In this passage, which forms part of the introduction to his journalistic account of the Rwandan genocide entitled *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families* (2000), Gourevitch uses the Holocaust to underline the gravity of the Rwandan genocide. It is a relationship which his text subsequently reinforces through a number of quotes from Holocaust survivor Primo Levi. These include Levi's suggestions that, '[i]t happened, therefore it can happen again: this is the core of what we have to say. It can happen, and it can happen everywhere.'<sup>44</sup> Invoking Levi in this way establishes the Rwandan genocide within the context of a post-Holocaust era; it also highlights the inefficacy of promises of 'never again' to prevent the later atrocity, thus suggesting an element of western culpability which is also reinforced throughout the narrative. Texts like *We Wish to Inform You* use the instance of the Holocaust to explore other contexts of collective trauma. Miller and Tougaw support this approach, when they argue that

[i]f [...] the Holocaust in our time stands not only *for* memory but for what is owed *to* memory, then that lesson should lead us to a more intense awareness of what implicates us in the lives of others. It is far easier, even seductive, to memorialize past injustice, to weep over human crimes of another era, than to take responsibility for what's before our eyes.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2000), 3.

<sup>44</sup> Gourevitch, 275.

<sup>45</sup> Miller and Tougaw 5.

Secondly, interest in the Holocaust can also be seen to support certain political aspirations. In the United States, the Holocaust and its consequences have developed special resonance. Its prominence here is the partly due to a significant Jewish population, which continues to lobby for the remembrance of this event as a specifically Jewish tragedy.<sup>46</sup> In fact, there are a number of Jewish voices who criticize what they see as tendencies to ‘submerge the specific Jewish tragedy in the general sea of suffering caused by the many atrocities caused by the Nazi regime,’ as part of a ‘worldwide phenomenon connected with dangers of anti-Semitism’.<sup>47</sup> A. Dirk Moses suggests that the Holocaust ‘has assumed totemic status for much of diasporic Jewry’.<sup>48</sup> As such, it is regularly evoked as a contributive factor to the establishment of a Jewish nation in Israel. Ongoing representations of the Holocaust as the most extreme trauma ever experienced, the ultimate cipher of suffering and violence, and the deepest injustice of the twentieth century intensify retrospective feelings of guilt and collective responsibility regarding this event. This, in turn, encourages widespread endorsement of (or simply quiet acquiescence in) the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and the need for a Jewish nation to exist, despite the reality that for many Palestinians this policy amounts to a radical and even violent policy of apartheid and displacement. Kalí Tal argues that the Holocaust has been conflated with ideas about Jewish identity and the establishment of a Jewish nation to a problematic level:

“Holocaust” is a signifier for, among other things, the Nazi genocidal campaign against the Jews; the reign of evil upon the face of the earth; and the rationale for the existence of the

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<sup>46</sup> A. Dirk Moses describes how, at the opening of the United States Holocaust Museum in 1979, President Carter provoked criticisms when he described the Holocaust as an event during which ‘eleven million innocent victims were exterminated’. Yehuda Bauer, Elie Wiesel and others protested that this gave too much attention to the non-Jews who were involved and, in so doing, served to ‘de-Judaize’ it. Their campaign, he writes, ‘ensured that the permanent exhibition made only passing reference to ‘other [non-Jewish] victims’’. Moses in Stone (ed.), 533-555 (533).

<sup>47</sup> Israeli historian Yehuda Bauer quoted in Moses, in Stone (ed.), 533-555 (533).

<sup>48</sup> Moses, in Stone (ed.), 533-555 (533).

State of Israel. Drawn from religious terminology and spelled with a capital “H,” the term Holocaust is set apart from descriptions of other man-made evils, such as slavery, genocide, and oppression. A proper noun, its uniqueness is emphasized every time it is named.<sup>49</sup>

Tal suggests that the Holocaust has led to other kinds of traumatic experiences being perceived as less legitimate or less worthy of study and attention. Tal’s text *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (1996) calls for Trauma Studies to evolve beyond the confines of its preoccupation with Holocaust experience. Tal sets the Holocaust alongside the impact of the Vietnam War upon American veterans and sexual abuse in women and children. In her text, Tal aims to

force readers to question the “sacred” nature of the Holocaust as subject-matter, to encourage them to be critical of the recent tendency to elevate the American veteran of the Vietnam War to the status of “hero,” and to acknowledge the existence of an ongoing campaign of sexual violence and oppression waged by many men against women and children of the United States.<sup>50</sup>

The controversial nature of Tal’s approach is enabled—in part at least—by her status as a Jewish woman from a multiracial background, who was sexually abused as a child. This identification with different kinds of traumatic experience authorizes Tal to demand a comparative approach to trauma which few other critics have attempted. Her argument speaks from the perspective of the trauma victim, whom she encourages to speak up, and demand that their experiences might be addressed. However, the omissions of Tal’s own text brings us to another dominant feature of recent Trauma Studies: the overwhelming focus upon western experiences over non-western ones. Consequently, whilst she challenges the privileged status of the Holocaust, she does not examine other instances of genocide, or give attention to other contexts of trauma, such as the postcolonial.

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<sup>49</sup> Kalí Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7.

<sup>50</sup> Tal, 4.

A failure to pay sufficient attention to non-western traumas is evident in the insufficient attention which has been paid to the traumas of forced migration or dispossession experienced by Palestinians. This is one kind of postcolonial trauma which this thesis seeks to explore and, in so doing, help to begin to rectify this imbalance. The continuing tensions between Israelis and Palestinians can be seen to highlight the kind of conflict which emerges when the will to resolve one instance of trauma is used to justify other instances of traumatic suffering. It is interesting to bear this fact in mind when considering Caruth's suggestion that, '[i]n a catastrophic age [...] trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures'.<sup>51</sup> Paradoxically, this conceptualization of trauma is not sufficiently borne out in Caruth's own work, which reflects the tendency I have noted within both contemporary western culture and Trauma Studies to overlook, or ignore, certain victims of trauma and their suffering. This selectivity is exemplified in Caruth's analysis of *Gerusalemme Liberata*, which she outlines in *Unclaimed Experience*.

Caruth's interest in this story reflects Freud's use of Tancred's experience to highlight the enigma of the compulsion to repeat. Caruth enlarges the allegorical value of this classical myth, claiming that Tasso's story 'can be read [...] as a larger parable, both of the unarticulated implications of trauma theory in Freud's writings and, beyond that, of the crucial link between literature and theory'<sup>52</sup>. In Caruth's analysis of *Gerusalemme Liberata*, Tancred is depicted as the epitome of what it means to be traumatized:

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<sup>51</sup> Caruth, *Trauma*, 11.

<sup>52</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 3.



the wound of the mind [...] is not, like a wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that, like Tancred's first infliction of a mortal wound on the disguised Clorinda in the duel, is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor. Just as Tancred does not hear the voice of Clorinda until the second wounding, so trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on'.<sup>53</sup>

Caruth's interpretation is problematic for the way it cites Tancred as the trauma victim, instead of Clorinda, who is clearly the only truly innocent victim in this incident. Whilst Freud ignored Clorinda in order to focus on the compulsion to repeat he saw exemplified in Tancred, Caruth's focus on Tancred is less easy to justify. This point has been well-argued by Ruth Leys in her critique of Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience*. Leys criticizes Caruth for suggesting, like Freud, that this incident is central to the definition of traumatic experience without acknowledging the problems provoked by such a formulation. Leys writes that, 'Tancred is a murderer, albeit an involuntary one, and Clorinda is his victim twice over. Caruth knows and admits this. [...] Yet she is determined to identify Tancred as a victim of trauma, even though that identification causes problems of yet another kind.'<sup>54</sup>

Caruth's interest in Clorinda as a witness to trauma (rather than its victim) is problematic. Firstly, as Leys has noted, it blurs the boundaries not only between victims and witnesses, but also those between victims and perpetrators (as Tancred somehow acquires victim status through his murder of Clorinda). Leys suggests that, according to

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<sup>53</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 34.

<sup>54</sup> Leys, 295. For Leys' full argument see Leys, 292-297.

Caruth's logic, Nazi perpetrators could be re-formulated as trauma victims who suffer for their crimes, and the cries of Jews could be seen as testimony to this trauma—a problematic formulation to say the least.<sup>55</sup> However, what I am particularly interested in is the way both Freud and Caruth appear to select Tancred as an exemplary trauma victim and neglect Clorinda. This tendency to privilege certain kinds of traumatic experience which is evident here has, I suggest, become inherent to the way trauma has been studied, from its beginnings in Charcot's studies in hysteria to more recent interest in the trauma of the Holocaust.<sup>56</sup> This view is supported by those who have explored the historical development of this field, including Herman, who writes that the history of trauma is one of 'episodic amnesia.'<sup>57</sup> Leys also notes that, 'the history of trauma itself is marked by an alternation between episodes of forgetting and remembering'<sup>58</sup>. Thus, as the figure who is repeatedly ignored, Clorinda becomes symbolic of the different kinds of 'forgetting' which can be seen to characterize Trauma Studies.<sup>59</sup> Unfortunately, Trauma Studies' failure to examine non-western and postcolonial contexts of trauma means it has become guilty of the same kinds of omissions and "forgetting" that its own theory argues is detrimental to the processes of recovery and healing. Andreas Huyssen notes this discrepancy when he suggests that

written large is the command to remember, and forgetting is chastised as somehow unethical, politically incorrect, or worse. 'Never again' is the sublime command of this

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<sup>55</sup> Leys, 297.

<sup>56</sup> Amy Novak provides an interesting reading of this incident as an illustration of the problems involved in attempting to use trauma theory in readings of the colonized Other. She writes that,

In Caruth's analysis, Tancred is both the traumatized subject and the witness to an enigmatic otherness. Although Caruth's formulation draws attention to and attempts to listen to the voice of the Other, it is Tancred who remains "psychoanalytic theory itself." But Tancred does not experience the trauma; Clorinda does. And the voice that cries out from the wound is not a universal voice, nor is it a generic female voice; it is the female voice of black Africa.

Novak later notes that this textual encounter 'stages the traumatic relationship between the Western knowing consciousness and the silent, unknowable African Other and demonstrates the difficulty of representing that Other within such theories.' Amy Novak, 'Who Speaks? Who Listens?: The Problem of Address in Two Nigerian Trauma Novels,' in *Studies in the Novel* 40: 1&2 (2008), 31-51 (32).

<sup>57</sup> Herman, 7.

<sup>58</sup> Leys, 15.

<sup>59</sup> As Herman suggests, [t]he study of psychological trauma must constantly contend with this tendency to discredit the victim or render her invisible.' Herman, 8.

early 21st-century, and the guarantee against repetition is held to be remembrance. At the same time, unspeakable repetitions occur all the time—in reality and on TV. Remember Bosnia. Remember Rwanda. What good was memory here? And how many other places are there in the world whose ingrained violence doesn't even appear on our screens and can thus be neither remembered nor forgotten. Thus we should not look to all this memory work as a prop to our conscience. It does have its insidious, compensatory side. The universalized 'never again' command and with it the instrumentalization of memory for political purposes have become a veil covering ongoing atrocities in our present world. The Holocaust is a screen memory. We have to face the hard question: to what extent are the public memory rituals of our culture at the same time strategies of forgetting?<sup>60</sup>

Fittingly, the tendency towards a selective memory of the traumatic is also evident in some responses to the terrorist attacks of 11th September 2001, which have stimulated further interest—and new directions—in studies of trauma. In *Trauma Culture* (2005), the New York resident and literary critic E. Ann Kaplan compares her personal response to this event with the wider responses she observed in the local community and the media. She claims that all appeared to show the catastrophe pushing established notions of individual and collective identity to their limits. For example, she notes that suddenly a sense of unity and commonality—'a newly engaged patriotism'—was present in public places, such as the subway and street, written on posters in slogans such as 'United We Stand: God Bless America' and 'We Are Not Broken,' which appeared all over New York.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, '[i]t gradually became clear that national ideology was

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<sup>60</sup> Andreas Huyssen, 'Trauma and Memory,' in Bennett and Kennedy (eds.), 16-29 (18-19). This position is supported by LaCapra, who agrees that an overemphasis on the Holocaust has the potential to distract interest from other traumas:

This often happens: that you look at an earlier trauma as a way of not looking too closely at contemporary traumas, or it could be to avoid or mitigate other past traumas that are just coming to a fully articulate voice in the present. [...] In Israel, the problem of Israeli/Palestinian relations can be displaced by a focus on the Holocaust. And in the United States, contemporary problems relating to the heritage of slavery and the treatment of American Indians can also be obscured by a focus on the Holocaust. [...] why are we commemorating the Holocaust [with a Holocaust Museum in Washington], rather than something that points more dubiously to our involvement in dubious processes? This is a very good question.

LaCapra, *Writing History*, 171-2.

<sup>61</sup> E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 9.

hard at work shaping how the traumatic event was to be perceived.<sup>62</sup> This project influenced official media representations and ultimately proved to be a source of disillusionment for Kaplan, as she realized that the perspectives adopted by the media assumed a commonality which did not correspond to reality. For example, she observed local expressions of loss and grief in the streets between those of different genders, races, and religions, which she saw contrasting with the homogenizing response of the United States ('male leaders on television [who] presented a stiff, rigid, controlling and increasingly vengeful response—a response I only gradually understood as actually about humiliation.'<sup>63</sup>). She began to recognize the way in which this response served to marginalize certain groups, such as Arabs living in New York and elsewhere: 'The media aided the attempt to present a united American front. But this proved to be a fiction—a construction of a consensus in a Eurocentric and largely masculine form'<sup>64</sup>. Six months after 11th September 2001, Kaplan noted the shift in her personal attitudes towards that period:

I [...] now understood [...] that we really had not been “together,” as my notes from the time assumed. Many Arab and Muslim individuals have been (and continue to be) arrested or interrogated. There is an entire spectrum of responses to the attacks, a diversity of interpretations. It has become its own phenomenon, with circles spreading out like those from a stone thrown into a pond. I sometimes no longer know what “my” response really is.<sup>65</sup>

Kaplan's experiences of 11th September 2001 and its aftermath show how traumatic experiences challenge prevalent conceptions of subjectivity and identity. In particular, she suggests that trauma experienced by a group or collective can challenge

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<sup>62</sup> Kaplan, 13.

<sup>63</sup> Kaplan, 13.

<sup>64</sup> Kaplan, 13.

<sup>65</sup> Kaplan, 17.

the way that society views itself, provoking a distrust of certain media forms such as the television and newspapers, and a compulsion to make personal records rather than rely upon public, 'official' forms of history. In the case of 11th September 2001, Kaplan highlights how the media failed to encapsulate all the different subject positions, particularly 'forgetting' to address the perspectives of those who did not fit with the specific idea of national identity being projected at that time. This failure to attend to minority groups (in this case Arabs and Muslims) and their trauma ultimately exacerbated Kaplan's (and others') existing anxieties because it reflected a deep-rooted tension between the personal and political, individual and collective spheres that the trauma had exposed. Kaplan suggests that the fiction of a unified response separated different people rather than bringing them together and that this contributed to an identity crisis within the nation and an ongoing struggle to address the consequences of this event in an adequate or meaningful way. Her text argues that, 'catastrophic events (like 11th September 2001) remind us of the urgency for a focus on transnational conflict with a view to developing understanding amongst people'.<sup>66</sup> It supports the argument of this thesis, that Trauma Studies needs to evolve into an area of study which incorporates non-western individuals and their experiences of trauma.

### Postcolonialism and Trauma

Having noted the European and American bias within contemporary responses to traumatic experience, I will now argue for the importance of trauma to postcolonialism and Postcolonial Studies. By the end of the nineteenth century, the British Empire alone covered one quarter of the world's land surface, and held sway over roughly a quarter of the world's population (between 400 and 500 million people). At its height, the 'pink' of

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<sup>66</sup> Kaplan, 23.

the British Empire dominated the globe, including parts of Africa, the Caribbean, Canada, the Mediterranean, Australasia and the 'Far East.' Other European countries, including Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain and Portugal governed much of the rest. In 1989, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin noted that '[m]ore than three-quarters of the people living in the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism.'<sup>67</sup> It is difficult to establish how many people have suffered or been killed as a result of (de-)colonization; during the Partition of India and Pakistan alone, it is estimated that perhaps even a million people were killed and around 75,000 women were abducted and raped.<sup>68</sup> Whilst some nations experienced relatively harmonious periods of colonization, benefiting enormously from western influence and power, and culminating in largely peaceful transitions to independence, many nations were disrupted and divided, leaving people marginalized and dispossessed, separated, thrown into conflict or exile.

Sociological and interdisciplinary studies into the legacy of colonialism indicate the centrality of trauma to many postcolonial cultures. Two recent academic studies are particularly notable for their emphasis upon the importance of addressing trauma in postcolonial contexts. The first, Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy's edited anthology *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time* (2003), begins by questioning whether the Holocaust has become paradigmatic of Trauma Studies, and how psychoanalysis, which has proved so enlightening in relation to the Holocaust, might help elsewhere, 'particularly where survivors are non-European or have never been

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<sup>67</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* (London: Routledge, 1989), 1.

<sup>68</sup> According to Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 3.

subject to clinical analysis'.<sup>69</sup> This anthology incorporates multiple disciplines (including anthropology, art theory, history, and literature) to argue that: '[Trauma Studies] must move beyond its focus on Euro-American events and experiences, towards a study of memory that takes as its starting point the multicultural and diasporic nature of contemporary culture.'<sup>70</sup> They suggest that this transition is essential for Trauma Studies to 'transform from a mono-cultural discipline into a mode of enquiry that can inform the study of memory within a changing global context.'<sup>71</sup> Conversely, they suggest that postcolonialism needs to look towards Trauma Studies, in order to gain greater insight into the possibilities for remembrance, by claiming that 'the work that has begun to be done on the cultural experience and the representation of memory and trauma promises to inform the study of culture in the postcolonial future in a much broader sense than was previously understood.'<sup>72</sup> In particular, this study calls for further examination of various different 'languages of trauma'—by which they mean both the way trauma is represented in art and culture, and its representation in bodily and vernacular discourses—which incorporates the perspectives and sensibilities which have been informed by Postcolonial Studies.<sup>73</sup> It is these processes in which I hope to participate.

In *The Colonial Present* (2005), Derek Gregory argues for the centrality of colonialism to the present age. He suggests that the roots of the terrorist attacks on 11th September 2001 can be found in 'amnesiac' histories in Palestine, Iraq, and Afghanistan

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<sup>69</sup> Bennett and Kennedy, 4. Concern over the export of western discourse on trauma is shared by Patrick J. Bracken and Celia Petty. Their 1998 text *Rethinking the Trauma of War* highlights areas of current discourse which may need to be revised in view of non-western contexts of trauma such as Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Yugoslavia. They call for more work to be done in this area. Patrick J. Bracken and Celia Petty, *Rethinking the Trauma of War* (London: Free Association Books, 1998).

<sup>70</sup> Bennett and Kennedy, 5.

<sup>71</sup> Bennett and Kennedy, 4-5.

<sup>72</sup> Bennett and Kennedy, 4.

<sup>73</sup> Bennett and Kennedy, 5.

of ‘colonial experiences and the informal quasi-imperial system that succeeded them.’<sup>74</sup>

In addition to highlighting some of the recurring symptoms of colonialism in these contexts, Gregory’s text suggests that colonialism might itself—to a certain extent, at least—represent a recurring history, which, once quashed, returns in a different form. He writes: ‘For what else is the war on terror other than the violent return of the colonial past, with its split geographies of “us” and “them,” “civilization” and “barbarism,” “Good” and “Evil”?’<sup>75</sup> In response to this concern, Gregory cites postcolonialism as an act of remembering past crimes, as it ‘revisits the colonial past in order to recover the dead weight of colonialism: to retrieve its shapes, like the chalk outlines at a crime scene, and to recall the living bodies they so imperfectly summon to presence.’<sup>76</sup> His study suggests that the kind of memory-work explored in Postcolonial Studies may assist in engagements with the past which break this cycle, as postcolonialism is ‘an act of opposition [...] [which] reveals the continuing impositions and exactions of colonialism in order to subvert them: to examine them, disavow them, and dispel them.’<sup>77</sup>

Literary engagement with the traumatic legacy, or ‘past crimes,’ of colonialism is evident in the work of many writers who have become central figures in postcolonial literature, including Frantz Fanon, Tsitsi Dangarembga, and Chinua Achebe. Each of these writers negotiates the possibilities for writing to engage with communal suffering and explore experiences of trauma, such as physical dislocation and racism in the postcolonial context, which have not been sufficiently explored in mainstream western Trauma Studies. For example, the title of Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988) is based upon a comment in Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (first

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<sup>74</sup> Gregory, 10.

<sup>75</sup> Gregory, 11.

<sup>76</sup> Gregory, 9.

<sup>77</sup> Gregory, 9.



published in 1961), which describes the condition of the colonial subject. This semi-autobiographical text explores the notion that colonialism may exact an emotional or mental toll on its subjects in, for example, bad dreams, eating disorders and emotional breakdown. In this coming-of age narrative, this is explored through the female protagonist Tambudzai (Tambu) who, following the sudden death of her brother, attempts to get an education against the wishes of her father whilst simultaneously watching her cousin Nyassa struggle to re-assimilate in Zimbabwe following years living in England. The struggle to form or maintain an identity during colonization (under what Fanon called ‘the crushing objecthood’ of the white man’s gaze<sup>78</sup>) is also evident in Chinua Achebe’s 1959 novel *Things Fall Apart*. This narrative recounts the fame and tragic fall of renowned warrior and wrestler Okonkwo alongside the passing of the traditional Igbo culture when colonialists arrive in this region of Nigeria.

Texts like *Nervous Conditions* and *Things Fall Apart* have contributed to the development of the discipline which has become known as Postcolonial Studies. Postcolonial Studies identifies as one of its primary concerns rectifying imbalances which means that certain non-western nations are subordinate to the West. This includes a conceptual reorientation towards the perspectives of knowledges which have developed outside the West as well as exposing and contesting dominant Western ways of seeing things. Young suggests that

a lot of people don’t like the term ‘postcolonial’: [...] [because] it disturbs the order of the world. It threatens privilege and power. It refuses to acknowledge the superiority of western cultures. Its radical agenda is to demand equality and well-being for all human beings of this earth.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 109.

<sup>79</sup> Young, 7.

Postcolonial Studies re-examines the ways in which culture, literature and historical discourse have participated in disempowering individuals and communities subjugated by colonialism. Postcolonialism seeks to attend to the voice of the marginalized 'other,' and in so doing, redress the balance of power between the West and non-West. It explores how, in turn, these oppressed subjects begin to 'write back' or respond to both their current situation and the way they have been represented in dominant cultural discourse.

For the purposes of this thesis I shall use the non-hyphenated term 'postcolonialism,' according to the definition given by John McLeod, to refer to 'disparate forms of *representations, reading practices* and *values* [which] can circulate *across* the barrier between colonial rule and national independence. Postcolonialism is not contained by the tidy categories of historical periods or dates, although it remains firmly bound up with historical experiences.'<sup>80</sup> My use of this term also reflects the way in which I hope this thesis might build upon the work begun in Sam Durrant's *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning* (2004). Durrant uses this term to mark a certain kind of cultural project in which writers

bear witness to the various histories of racial oppression that underwrite local, national and international privilege and continue to inform, if not determine, our cultural and psychological existence in the hope that their literary witnessing will bring into being a truly *postcolonial* form of community.<sup>81</sup>

In some ways the term postcolonial is problematic, seeming to homogenize a collection of (trans)historical, geographically disparate and socially diverse locations into a single context, passing over the various complexities of particular periods, geographies and cultures. However, I believe this term accurately draws together all the narratives in this

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<sup>80</sup> John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 5.

<sup>81</sup> Durrant, 2.

thesis, and is useful because it enables a clear and close examination of the long-term effects of colonialism and its symptomatic aftermath.

Where literary study of postcolonialism has begun to explore trauma, the critique has been promising but limited in certain respects. In *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning*, Durrant provides an in-depth analysis of the work of three postcolonial novelists (J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison). Durrant explores how these writers bear witness to complex and painful colonial histories, and argues that their work is underpinned by a series of negotiations with the haunting legacies of colonialism. This includes Coetzee's attempts to bear witness through remembering the way colonialism silenced those it subjugated (as well as those it implicated in its crimes); Harris' desire to re-establish the foundations of community in a shared sense of loss and collective responsibility; and Morrison's refusal to allow closure on African American histories of racial oppression. Durrant's work is particularly interesting for its emphasis upon the way postcolonialism might be engaged in a process of remembrance and mourning, and its suggestion that this project cannot be fulfilled in a single literary text, but rather comes to dominate writers' bodies of work to the point that it can be seen as a characteristic of postcolonial narrative. This is largely due to the traumatic nature of colonial histories of oppression (here slavery, Apartheid, and the colonization of the New World)—histories which Durrant shows are 'impossible' to access directly, and which threaten to overwhelm the narratives in which they are (scarcely) contained. Durrant's concluding suggestion that, 'community is the impossible destination of postcolonial narrative'<sup>82</sup> encapsulates the relentless nature of the project these writers undertake; it affirms the necessity for 'some kind of

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<sup>82</sup> Durrant, 111.

tomorrow'<sup>83</sup> to be found within postcolonial contexts, without underplaying the way in which traumatic victims become alienated and isolated from each other. This echoes Herman's claim that '[t]raumatized people feel utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life. Thereafter, a sense of alienation, of disconnection, pervades every human relationship, from the most intimate familial bonds to the most abstract affiliations of community and religion.'<sup>84</sup>

Durrant initiates a conjunction of postcolonialism and trauma, but there is need for further investigation, not least for more expansive consideration of the role that might be played by different kinds of postcolonial narrative in mourning and commemorating the traumatic past. Durrant's focus in *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning* is confined to three writers of fiction, two of whom have been absorbed into the western canon of literature and might therefore not be considered exemplars of the traditional emphasis upon marginality within 'classical' notions of postcolonialism. This thesis will help to explore the attempt to construct or reconstruct community in the aftermath of traumatic colonial encounters, by exploring how different kinds of narratives (both fictional and nonfictional) and different kinds of narrators (including 'mainstream,' marginal, individual and collective) negotiate postcolonial trauma. I hope that this comparative approach will help me to consider how postcolonial trauma narratives may help to provide alternative conceptions of trauma, so that the field of Trauma Studies may be revitalized and fulfill its promise of cross-cultural engagement.

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<sup>83</sup> Durrant takes this remark from Toni Morrison's fugitive slave Paul D. in *Beloved* to describe the possibility of a just future towards which postcolonial narrative aspires, structured as it is 'by a tension between the oppressive memory of the past and the liberatory promise of the future.' Durrant, 1.

<sup>84</sup> Herman, 52.

Joe Cleary's study, *Literature, Partition and the Nation State* (2002) offers another literary examination of postcolonial trauma. In this text, Cleary examines the social and cultural legacies of partition in the twentieth century. With particular focus on Ireland and Palestine, this text considers the relationship between literature and what Cleary describes as 'the trauma of partition'.<sup>85</sup> Cleary's text highlights the imperative to examine the traumatic colonial legacy in those regions without failing to consider the wider context of twentieth-century history in which they belong. In so doing, Cleary shows the value of exploring nation- and state-building processes through narrative. His comparative study of different regions and different contexts of trauma affirms the value of future studies of a similar kind. However, the thematic focus of this text on partition means that it does not explore other kinds of postcolonial trauma and is largely confined to two geographic locations. In contrast, this thesis will explore different kinds of trauma (such as dislocation, or forced migration, and genocide) in a wider variety of postcolonial contexts across the world (including Southern Africa, Rwanda, Palestine, the Indian subcontinent, and Cambodia). Furthermore, in contrast to my study, whilst he briefly refers to different kinds of literature, Cleary focuses predominantly on the novel form. This thesis will incorporate a variety of narrative forms, including autobiography, testimonio, the novel, and film. The resultant focus will, I hope, facilitate a more inclusive study of the nature and impact of postcolonial trauma and the way it is narrated.

### Research Methods

From the set of questions, or dilemmas, which I have explored in relation to Trauma Studies and Postcolonial Studies, I will now describe how I am going to bring together these two scholarly disciplines. This thesis will focus upon cultural

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<sup>85</sup> Joe Cleary, *Literature, Partition and the Nation State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2.

representations of past and present postcolonial traumas through literature and film.

There are several advantages of this approach. Firstly, as I have outlined, Trauma Studies suggest that the desire to articulate, testify to, or expose traumatic experiences is an inevitable and an intrinsic part of the difficult process of recovery. Secondly, such cultural representation has also been central to postcolonialism for the way it provides oppressed subjects with possibilities for self-expression and agency. In this way, the focus of this thesis unites the emphasis in both Postcolonial Studies and Trauma Studies upon narrative. Furthermore, whilst the ability of cultural representation to assist in some kind of recovery following trauma cannot be fully determined, this approach allows me to pursue a personal interest in the possibilities for catharsis for individuals and societies played by literature and film in the representation of trauma in the postcolonial context.<sup>86</sup>

This thesis will examine four key genres in which different kinds of traumatic experience are represented. The first two chapters will focus on two nonfictional forms of life-writing: autobiography and the testimonio; chapters three and four will explore fictional modes: the novel and film. This approach contrasts with Durrant's focus on the work of specific authors. It also contrasts Cleary's engagement with a specific kind of trauma. It will help to show how different narrative forms may be used to explore postcolonial trauma. This thesis will highlight the importance of fictional and nonfictional genres of narration in individual and collective negotiations with the past. It will also explore the extent to which attempts to represent postcolonial trauma push conceived generic conventions to their limits.

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<sup>86</sup> Certain critics agree that such texts help to facilitate a process of recovery from trauma. Miller and Tougaw claim that 'writing that bears witness to the extreme of solitary individuals can sometimes begin to repair the tears in the collective social fabric' Miller and Tougaw, 3. Similarly, Herman claims that '[r]emembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of social order and for the healing of individual victims.' Herman, 1.

One of the most obvious restrictions of this thesis is the use of texts and films which are all in English (either as their original language or in translation). This is partly due to my own lack of linguistic proficiency in Kinyarwanda, Arabic or Khmer; however, it does assist in the process of selecting texts for study, and enables a closer comparison of texts from different regions, and cultural contexts. I have also chosen to restrict the generic focus of this thesis to four forms of cultural representation. This decision was influenced by a desire for this thesis to engage with different genres and texts in sufficient depth; however, other kinds of narrative—poetry, theatre, television, and the comic book, for example—could all have been included. Their absence from this thesis suggests possible future directions for this area of study.

### Structure of the Thesis

The narratives I have chosen to study in the following chapters describe various experiences of trauma resulting from colonialism. These include genocide, apartheid, dislocation, partition, and forced migration. They also include racial, cultural, or national discrimination, and other more subtle, underlying traumas of colonialism or postcolonialism. Each narrative recounts a crisis of identity which resonates with the way in which trauma has been understood by Freud and other psychoanalytic thinkers. However, in other ways, they may challenge the way in which trauma has conventionally been understood, and expose the inadequacy of its current emphasis upon western epistemological frameworks. Furthermore, whilst each narrative explores

the effects of colonialism in some way, my focus on the postcolonial subject-matter of these narratives—rather than their authors’ identities—legitimizes the inclusion of a broad range of postcolonial experiences and contexts. Just as Durrant discusses the work of J.M. Coetzee, so I am going to discuss Alexandra Fuller, a white Rhodesian, born in England, who adopts the position of a postcolonial African citizen whilst living in Southern Africa in the 1970s. Whilst Fuller is not a direct victim of colonialism, (rather, she is a member of the white elite,) she feels its consequences, and must negotiate her relationship with the nation along with other postcolonial citizens. I shall also be using texts by Palestinian writers. Despite Cleary’s study, Palestinian culture has not received the same level of attention within Postcolonial Studies as other postcolonial cultures, nor have Palestinian experiences been sufficiently explored in Trauma Studies.<sup>87</sup> I will seek to rectify these imbalances, through an examination of two different experiences of forced exile and dispossession, as represented by Mourid Barghouti and Yahya Yakhlif. The inclusion of work on Rwanda and Cambodia shows that my study is not confined to the history of British colonialism. However, that is not to say it is not constrained in other ways. The choice of texts in the following chapters is informed largely by my own

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<sup>87</sup> Although not an actual British colony, Palestine was designated a British Mandate Territory by the League of Nations after the First World War. However, prior to this, Palestine had already been colonized as part of the Ottoman Empire. When it collapsed, Arabs in Palestine believed they were to be granted self-determination. With the Balfour Declaration of 1917, however, all such hopes were crushed. In this resolution, Britain pledged to support and assist Jews in acquiring a homeland in Palestine. The legality of this declaration has been heavily contested, particularly given that, when it was issued, Britain was trying to gather further support for its war effort; some critics claim that this declaration was merely an attempt to gain Jewish support. However, Britain pursued its promise to help establish a Jewish homeland in territory which at the time contained at least 500,000 inhabitants, the majority of which were Arab-speaking Muslims. Despite the fact that Britain had promised to safeguard the civil and religious rights of all the inhabitants of Palestine, in the 1920s, 100,000 Jews subsequently immigrated to Palestine, purchasing land upon which Palestinians worked, building communities and systematically marginalizing Palestinian people. As Palestinian tolerance wore thin, Britain was forced to intervene on several occasions of conflict including, most notably, the Great Uprising in 1937. Ultimately, Britain decided to limit the number of Jewish immigrants to Palestine, a decision which led to illegal immigration efforts during World War Two. Following the war, and despite the exceeding numbers of Jewish refugees and the pressure of world opinion (including the U.S.), Britain refused to lift the ban on immigration and admit 100,000 displaced persons to Palestine. This provoked violence from Jewish underground forces, culminating in 1946, when the Irgun blew up the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, the headquarters of the British administration, killing 92 people. It was at this point that the British announced the termination of their Mandate and intention to withdraw by May 1948. On 29th November 1947, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution calling for the establishment of a Jewish State in Israel, requiring the inhabitants of Israel to take such steps as were necessary on their part for the implementation of that resolution. This recognition by the United Nations of the right of the Jewish people to establish their State was irrevocable. 14th May, 1948, marked the formal establishment of the State of Israel. In the Declaration, the Holocaust was cited as part of the imperative for the re-settlement of the homeland.



personal interest, but also by a desire to retain a sense of coherency throughout the thesis. For this reason, the texts included in chapters 1 and 3 are both concerned with dislocation, forced exile or dispossession in the postcolonial context. Chapters two and four are similarly connected in their shared focus on the subject of postcolonial genocide and extreme violence.

Each chapter will follow the same structure, beginning with a brief outline of the generic focus of the chapter, followed by in-depth analysis of three texts which adhere—ostensibly at least—to the formal conventions of the genre in question. Following this, I will use textual analysis to discuss the opportunities afforded by that particular genre to those who wish to represent postcolonial trauma alongside any problems which it may cause. I begin in chapter 1 with autobiography, a literary genre which has been frequently been employed by those seeking to represent personal experiences, both of postcolonialism, and of trauma. Gillian Whitlock argues that, ‘autobiography is fundamental to the struggle for recognition among individuals and groups, to the constant creation of what it means to be human and the rights that fall from that, and to the ongoing negotiation of imaginary boundaries between ourselves and others.’<sup>88</sup> This chapter will consider the relevance of such a comment to autobiographies which represent traumatic experiences of postcolonial dislocation, or forced exile. The texts I shall use to explore this issue are: Sudha Koul’s *The Tiger Ladies* (2002), which recounts a childhood in post-Partition Kashmir; Alexandra Fuller’s *Don’t Let’s Go to the Dogs Tonight* (2002), which explores life in Zimbabwe pre- and post-independence; and Mourid Barghouti’s *I Saw Ramallah* (2004), which recounts the poet’s journey back to Palestine following several decades spent in exile.

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<sup>88</sup> Gillian Whitlock, *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 10.

In chapter 2, I continue my discussion of life-writing with an examination of the testimonio. Where autobiography can be seen to draw together public and private aspects of identity, the testimonio tends to place a greater emphasis on the public sphere; it is more likely to be engaged politically and focus on the collective aspects of identity. Where the previous chapter focused on individuals who possess some form of cultural capital, in this chapter I am concerned with narrators who struggle for cultural authority. The aspiration to elicit an urgent response from the reader to experiences of extreme trauma means that these texts tend to place a greater emphasis upon the content of the narrative, rather than its literary nature. In light of this, I shall explore the precarious relationship between life-writing and truth in this chapter. This includes an examination of the scandals which are caused when a testimony is discovered to be a 'fake,' or is criticized for failing to remain completely truthful. I begin with Haing Ngor's account of the Cambodian genocide, *Survival in the Killing Fields* (1987), where I consider the extent to which the need for a paratext, which mediates postcolonial trauma to a western audience, undermines the agency of the victim. This line of discussion is developed in my examination of Immaculée Ilibagiza's *Left to Tell* (2006), which recounts the survivor's experiences of the Rwandan genocide which included hiding in a bathroom for 91 days with seven other women. Lastly, I examine *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (2007), by Ishmael Beah. I reflect upon the controversy which has come to surround this text, following allegations of exaggeration or fabrication in the narrative, and consider to what extent this 'scandal' may endanger the intrinsic value of Beah's reported experience.

In chapter 3 I begin to look at fictional modes of representation. This chapter explores the advantages and disadvantages of postcolonial trauma narratives which employ the form and conventions of the novel. I consider the ways in which the novel

form facilitates innovative ways of representing traumatic experience. This includes an examination of the claim that trauma renders language both impossible and essential. In my textual analysis, I consider the argument outlined by Anne Whitehead in *Trauma Fiction* (2004) that novels dealing with traumatic experience do so by replicating its symptoms, through the use of a fragmented narrative voice, repetition and intertextuality.<sup>89</sup> As in Chapter 1, the three texts in this chapter all explore traumatic experiences of dislocation, or forced exile. They are: Bapsi Sidhwa's Partition novel *Cracking India* (1991); Yahya Yakhliif's *The Lake Beyond the Wind* (2003); and Lisa Fugard's examination of the legacy of Apartheid in South Africa, *Skinner's Drift* (2006).

Finally, in chapter 4, I continue my examination of fictional modes by looking at film. In the last fifty years, this mode has become highly developed as a means for mediating trauma, largely because of the popularity of Holocaust feature films. I begin by exploring the specificity of this medium, and the central challenges facing those wishing to use this medium to represent historical trauma. I will then examine the mediation of postcolonial trauma through three films, each of which represents a different response to these challenges. These are: the multiple Academy Award-winning account of the Cambodian genocide, *The Killing Fields* (1984, dir. Roland Joffe, featuring Haing Ngor), *Sometimes in April* (2005, dir. Raoul Peck), and *Hotel Rwanda* (2004, dir. Terry George). The latter two films offer different—somewhat contrasting—attempts to address the Rwandan genocide of 1994. *Hotel Rwanda* has been by far the most commercially successful film made about Rwanda to date; it has received huge publicity, attracting large audiences. *Sometimes in April*, whilst attracting smaller audiences, has been more critically acclaimed and is widely considered to be a more

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<sup>89</sup> Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 81-88.

authentic illustration of the complexities of this genocide. Given the importance of the relationship between an author and his or her text which is evident in the other three chapters, I will be interested in the impact of a collective authorship which is intrinsic to the film-making process. I will also be keen to note the way in which this mode engenders different audience expectations.

What follows, then, is an attempt to draw together Trauma Studies and Postcolonial Studies, through an examination of the treatment of trauma in postcolonial culture. I hope to show that literature and film represent some of the emerging possibilities being forged in the representation of cultural traumas which have, in the past, failed to receive sufficient attention. As such, I argue that they are central to the way in which postcolonial trauma is mediated and understood.

## 1. Autobiography

Use of the first person—the “I,” autobiography’s dominant key—compounds our sense of being in full command of our knowledge of our selves and stories; it not only conveniently bridges the gap between who we once were and who we are today, but it tends as well to make our sense of self in any present moment seem more unified and organized than it possibly could be.<sup>1</sup>

My eyes do not leave the window. And images of time past and ended do not leave my eyes.’<sup>2</sup>

### Introducing Autobiography

Autobiography has been defined as the literary form in which the identity of the protagonist, narrator, and author are the same. An influential definition for the term was produced by Philippe Lejeune in 1982:

a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality.<sup>3</sup>

Lejeune’s ‘autobiographical pact’ provides a helpful way to begin to understand a genre which has been the subject of debate, especially for the difficulty of distinguishing between autobiography and other kinds of literary texts. Lejeune’s ‘autobiographical pact’ offers such a distinction. Its emphasis upon truth, or an intended fidelity to history and memory, remains central to definitions of the mode, shaping in particular the way in which autobiographical writing is received. This is shown in Gillian Whitlock’s recently published account of new modes of autobiography *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in*

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<sup>1</sup> Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (London: Cornell University Press, 1999), ix.

<sup>2</sup> Mourid Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah*, trans. Ahdaf Soueif (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004), 24. Further references to *I Saw Ramallah* are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>3</sup> Philippe Lejeune, ‘The Autobiographical Contract,’ in *French Literary Theory Today: A Reader*, ed. by Tzvetan Todorov, trans. R. Carter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 192-222 (193).

*Transit*, which explores developments in the genre (including the weblog, and comic book) through life narratives from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran. Whitlock notes that,

[Lejeune's] pact grasps the gestures of sincerity, authenticity, and trust that we might deconstruct as language effects, but not dismiss as characteristics of life narrative that shape our expectations and engagements with it, and that produce its political effectiveness and rhetorical power.<sup>4</sup>

However, for many critics, Lejeune's definition fails to establish definitive boundaries between autobiography and other literary genres such as fiction and biography.<sup>5</sup>

Autobiography is founded on the premise that it is possible to write truthfully about one's own life. Some critics claim that this premise is untenable—that the notion of autobiography is, in itself, a fiction. Others argue conversely that all writing is autobiographical. Candace Lang's observation that, '[a]utobiography is indeed everywhere one cares to find it'<sup>6</sup> encapsulates this issue; for it highlights the problems incurred if a writer is always judged to be implicated—to a certain extent—in their work.<sup>7</sup>

These issues can be further understood in light of the origins of the genre. When the term 'autobiography' first began to be used in the eighteenth century, it had no stable meaning. However, it quickly gained popularity as a self-referential narrative, which emphasized the central relationship between the author and the subject of the text.<sup>8</sup> It was employed by writers like Wordsworth and Coleridge, who welcomed the

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<sup>4</sup> Whitlock, *Soft Weapons*, 12.

<sup>5</sup> See Paul de Man's essay, 'Autobiography as De-facement' (1979), in *Modern Language Notes*, 94: 5, 919-930. See also Leigh Gilmore's *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (London: Cornell University Press, 2001), which discusses the challenges posed by the mode, particularly for those seeking to tell stories of trauma. These issues will also be addressed in Chapter Two.

<sup>6</sup> Candace Lang, 'Autobiography in the Aftermath of Romanticism' (1982), in *Diacritics*, 12: 4, 2-16 (6).

<sup>7</sup> In fact, as this thesis will demonstrate, the complex relationship between the author figure and their text recurs in different modes of cultural representation as a marker of subjectivity and authority.

<sup>8</sup> Critics debate the earliest uses of the term in English. It is generally thought that it was first translated from the Greek *autos* "self," *bios* "life," *graphie* "writing," by the poet Robert Southey in 1809. However, the concept had already been employed in 1797 by in a review of D'Israeli's *Miscellanies*, by William Taylor of Norwich at the end of the eighteenth century. Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourse: Criticism, Theory, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 12. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson also suggest that the term had been used prior to this in the preface to a collection of poems by Ann Yearsley, an eighteenth-century English working class writer. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 2.

opportunity to add their 'signature' to their own writing, thus mitigating the dangers of anonymity that threatened their claim to authority over their work.<sup>9</sup> The mode became synonymous with the historically important lives of 'great men,' and texts such as Saint Augustine's *Confessions* (397 C.E.), Michel de Montaigne's *Essays* (1580), John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* (1666) and Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (1770). It is seminal narratives like these that have helped to form the dominant tradition, or canon, of autobiography. They celebrate man's achievements and explore the state of his soul, often through a form of spiritual inquiry.<sup>10</sup> They draw together public and private aspects of identity in a self-referential narrative, which explores the human condition through an individual 'representative' life. However, despite this ostensibly broad focus, Smith and Watson claim that, '*autobiography* is a term for a particular practice of life writing that emerged in the Enlightenment and has become canonical in the West.'<sup>11</sup> They link autobiography to the construction of the Enlightenment subject, and the influence of philosophers like Descartes. Descartes' writings in *Discourse on the Method* situate the self as a site of privileged clarity and rationality, capable of sustained self-reflection and objectivity. As Smith and Watson write,

philosophers identified Enlightenment rationality with the intellectual standpoint of objectivity and understood the goal of man's intellectual labor as comprehending the totality of a problem. This claim to objectivity and universal knowledge enabled the postulation of a rational or objective subject able to transcend the perspectival sight of humanist writers and define his knowledge as outside that which he surveys. [sic]<sup>12</sup>

This way of understanding the mode helps to explain the idea that individuals may possess a coherent selfhood, which can be narrated. The consolidation of the genre

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<sup>9</sup> As discussed in Mary Jean Corbett, *Representing Femininity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 11. It is interesting to note this early link between autobiography and the literary 'text' as a commodity. These writers' attempts to protect their 'genius' has, in turn, influenced the culture of autobiographical production so that not everyone has the 'right' to speak, or be heard.

<sup>10</sup> Although the 'confessional' mode is now generally distinguished from autobiography as a whole, the two forms have been closely associated ever since Augustine's *Confessions* began to be cited as an exemplary autobiographical text.

<sup>11</sup> Smith and Watson, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Smith and Watson, 92.

during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Europe supports this construction of the autobiographer, and has been instrumental in the development of autobiographical criticism.<sup>13</sup>

It has been noted that the idea of a unified, unique selfhood has led to the marginalization of those who do not fit into the traditional idea of the conventional autobiographical subject—in other words, those who are not male, western, and middle class.<sup>14</sup> To a certain extent, a group of literary critics working on autobiography in the 1960s and 1970s—including James Olney, Lejeune and Karl Weintraub—endorsed this view. In a seminal essay entitled *Conditions and Limits of Autobiography* (1980), the French critic Georges Gusdorf argues that autobiography has temporal and spatial constraints.<sup>15</sup> He suggests that the mode is specific to the West and has served a role in the processes of colonization:

it would seem that autobiography is not to be found outside of our cultural area; one would say that it expresses a concern peculiar to Western man, a concern that has been of good use in his systematic conquest of the universe and that he has communicated to men of other

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<sup>13</sup> As Candace Lang noted in 1982,

much of American criticism, like traditional French criticism, continues to reflect the same constellation of values and beliefs that informed European Romanticism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These, insofar as they concern the self, as well as its relation to language and society, may be briefly outlined as follows:

1. Each individual possesses a unified, unique, ineffable self.
2. The authentic self, being pre-cultural, is in constant danger of alienation through commerce with the other. [...].
3. There is an originary, universal human nature [...] Lang, 2-16 (4).

A similar point has been raised more recently by autobiography critic Linda Anderson. Anderson notes the influence of Romantic thought upon a group of critics (including James Olney, Karl Weintraub, and Gusdorf Georges) working in the 1960s and 1970s to produce a series of critical principles for the genre. In their criticism, she writes

autobiography gets drawn seamlessly into supporting the beliefs and values of an essentialist or Romantic notion of selfhood. According to this view, generated at the end of the eighteenth century but still powerfully present in the middle of the twentieth, each individual possesses a unified, unique selfhood which is also the expression of a universal human nature.

Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 2001), 4-5.

<sup>14</sup> See Julia Swindells (ed.), *The Uses of Autobiography* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1995), Nancy K. Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts*, (London: Routledge, 1991), and Laura Marcus, *Auto/Biographical Discourses*.

<sup>15</sup> He writes that: 'it has not always existed nor does it exist everywhere.' Georges Gusdorf 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography' (1979), trans. James Olney, in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. by James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 28-48 (29-30). Later in this essay he writes that, '[t]he concern, which seems so natural to us, to turn back on one's own past, to recollect in order to narrate it, is not at all universal. It asserts itself only in recent centuries and only on a small part of the map of the world.' (29)



cultures; but those men will thereby have been annexed by a sort of intellectual colonizing to a mentality that was not their own. When Gandhi tells his own story, he is using Western means to defend the East. [...] The old world is in the process of dying in the very interior of that consciousness that questions itself about its destiny, converted willy-nilly to the new life style that whites have brought from beyond the seas.<sup>16</sup>

Gusdorf gives two reasons to explain why the genre is unsuitable for non-western subjects. Firstly, he claims that non-European societies do not recognize self and personality in the same way as ('we') Europeans.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, he argues that non-European autobiographers use the genre only as a form of defence, in order to assert 'their world' within a Western context, rather than for authentic self-representation.<sup>18</sup> According to this pronouncement, postcolonial autobiography becomes entangled in a simplistic binary between western and non-western contexts, such that non-western forms of autobiography are derivative of, rather than equal to, an 'original.'

However, critics have increasingly questioned the idea of a 'sovereign self' and the elitist, Eurocentric views it supports.<sup>19</sup> Some have argued that autobiography is a valuable mode for use by oppressed individuals and groups, as it may help them gain agency, and express various marginalized experiences. In *Auto/Biographical Discourses* (1994), Laura Marcus shows how, even as the mode was becoming associated with 'great figures' in the nineteenth century, autobiography was growing in popularity for

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<sup>16</sup> Gusdorf in Olney (ed.), 28-48 (29).

<sup>17</sup> He claims: 'It is obvious that autobiography is not possible in a cultural landscape where consciousness of self does not, properly speaking, exist' (30), and shortly afterwards suggests that: 'the wisdom of India considers personality an evil illusion and seeks salvation in depersonalization'. Gusdorf in Olney (ed.), 28-48 (30).

<sup>18</sup> Gusdorf in Olney (ed.), 28-48 (30).

<sup>19</sup> One of the most significant challenges to the traditional notion of autobiography has come from increasing skepticism towards Enlightenment thought, for example, as the proposal of ongoing progression towards ultimate reason has been challenged by the terrifying industrial slaughter of the Holocaust. Enlightenment values have also been widely challenged for their implicit support European ideologies of control and domination associated with Imperialism, and their marginalization of non-western identities. Anthony Elliott notes that,

[f]rom Foucault to Lacan to Baudrillard, the Enlightenment notion of universal reason is dissected as an ethnocentric construct that serves to sustain social relations of power and domination; universal reason, it is suggested, is a notion that delegitimizes and denigrates 'other' modes of thinking, feeling and caring within interpersonal relationships and social relations.

Anthony Elliott, *Concepts of Self* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 10.

those *without* social or intellectual privilege, who sought legitimacy or cultural authority.<sup>20</sup> At the time, critics sought to separate these texts from the ‘serious’ works of writers with greater reputation and status. They attempted to transfer existing social distinctions into literature, and deemed the mode suitable only for significant figures with something of historical importance to say. Marcus argues that the autobiographical genre has subsequently become emblematic of the ways in which exclusive literary canons appeared to marginalize so-called ‘minority’ groups. However, she also outlines how minority groups have appropriated the form, subverting its original ‘official’ focus to assist in the formation of their cultures and identities. Marcus argues that: ‘Autobiography is now a key element in new understandings of cultural identity and coalition politics.’<sup>21</sup>

It is in its concern with identity formation and re-formation that the mode intersects with traumatic experience and postcolonialism. As they seek to gain agency and renounce oppression, postcolonial writers can frequently be seen to challenge ‘official’ forms of culture, ‘writing back’ to conventional—usually western—understandings of selfhood, national identity, and the ways in which these are narrated.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, autobiographical narratives have become increasingly employed by those wishing to tell of personal experiences of trauma. These narratives often focus

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<sup>20</sup> This subject is explored by Laura Marcus, who highlights the concurrent development of self-referential writing by women and other subjects alongside the ‘mainstream’ discourses of nineteenth-century writers like Wordsworth and De Quincey. Marcus, 30-37.

<sup>21</sup> Marcus, 293.

<sup>22</sup> It could be argued that autobiography is a controversial term to use to describe postcolonial life narratives. Its relationship to Enlightenment thought means that the term may always be associated with a specific set of ideas about authority, truth, subjectivity, and—perhaps most importantly—who has the right to represent themselves. This is the view taken by some, as Smith and Watson describe: ‘a growing number of postmodern and postcolonial theorists contend that the term autobiography is inadequate to describe the extensive historical range and the diverse genres and practices of life narratives and life narrators in the West and elsewhere around the globe’, Smith and Watson, 4. However, the term is also frequently used to refer to all kinds of self-referential writing; in particular, popular literary culture has yet to fully replace autobiography with the term ‘life narrative’ or, more generally, ‘life-writing.’ In this thesis, I wish to acknowledge *both* the form’s corollary with the Enlightenment and its legacy, *and* its broader interpretation as a marker of the ‘autobiographical pact.’ I believe that this dual understanding of the autobiographical mode is essential in order to recognize how, and why, it is used to explore postcolonial trauma. Thus, autobiography can be seen to encapsulate certain aspects of the memoir form—such as the memoir of childhood—despite the latter’s greater emphasis upon the public dimensions to individual experience.

on the impact of trauma upon identity and selfhood. The process of writing autobiographically becomes a way of working through the past, in order to rebuild a coherent identity. The emergence of these 'new' kinds of autobiographical subjects is shaping the genre's evolution. Whitlock argues that, 'autobiography is fundamental to the struggle for recognition among individuals and groups, to the constant creation of what it means to be human and the rights that fall from that, and to the ongoing negotiation of imaginary boundaries between ourselves and others.'<sup>23</sup> She describes autobiography as a form of protest—against suffering, and silencing—across different cultures, and covering vastly different experiences, because '[i]t can personalize and humanize categories of people whose experiences are frequently unseen and unheard.'<sup>24</sup> However, she also suggests that it is a 'soft weapon,' which can easily be appropriated by dominant discourses to be used as propaganda to manipulate public opinion and emotion.<sup>25</sup> I shall consider this aspect of life-writing in greater depth when I examine the testimonio in chapter 2.

I now turn to an examination of three autobiographical narratives, each of which explores an experience of dislocation or exile in a postcolonial context. In my study of each text, I will begin by exploring the nature of the trauma in question. I will consider the way in which each writer uses the autobiographical mode to explore a crisis of identity caused by trauma, and their subsequent attempts to reconstruct a coherent sense of selfhood. I will suggest that, for each of these writers, autobiography represents an attempt to draw the attentions of a wide audience to the traumas that they have experienced in a postcolonial context. Then, using my examination of these texts, I will

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<sup>23</sup> Whitlock, *Soft Weapons*, 10.

<sup>24</sup> Whitlock, *Soft Weapons*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Whitlock, *Soft Weapons*, 3.

explore the advantages and disadvantages of the autobiographical mode as a means to represent traumatic experience.

### I. Sudha Koul, *The Tiger Ladies: A Memoir to Kashmir*

Sudha Koul's *The Tiger Ladies* has been hailed 'a wonderfully evocative and lyrical work about a way of life that is now almost as remote as the lost island of Atlantis',<sup>26</sup> and, 'at once a history, memory and lesson.'<sup>27</sup> These comments highlight the way in which this text functions as a form of cultural inscription: it mourns Kashmir, a nation and its ancient people that Koul believes to be under threat. This text forms part of a growing sub-genre of life-writing—including well-known narratives like Edward Said's *Out Of Place* (1999)—which seeks to represent peoples whose ways of life are in crisis. Despite its public dimension, however, *The Tiger Ladies* is a deeply personal narrative. It focuses predominantly upon the idyllic childhood Koul spent living in Kashmir, and the traumatic crisis of identity she experienced upon leaving the region. Koul's departure is ostensibly voluntary; she first leaves Kashmir for a job with the Indian civil service, and later marries a fellow Kashmiri who lives in the United States. However, it is prompted by intensifying violence between the different religious groups living in the region, which is a legacy from the Partition of 1947, and which leads her to believe that there is no viable future for her there. Koul writes that her people (the Kashmiri *pandits*), 'are in an upheaval, some running to safety, some digging in their heels, some still trying to figure out if things have really gone beyond the unimaginable'<sup>28</sup> and describes feeling part of 'an endangered species, destined for a scattering from our homeland and eventual obliteration from the face of the earth' (140).

<sup>26</sup> Scotia, W. MacCraw, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, quoted in Sudha Koul, *The Tiger Ladies: A Memoir of Kashmir* (London: Hodder Headline, 2002), inlay.

<sup>27</sup> Indira Ganesan, quoted in Koul, inlay.

<sup>28</sup> Sudha Koul, *The Tiger Ladies: A Memoir of Kashmir* (London: Hodder Headline, 2002), 146. Further references to *The Tiger Ladies* are given after quotations in the text.

Her own departure is a response to this threat, and yet it also represents a painful disconnection with the land of her birth, her family, and her people. Following her departure, she struggles to maintain a sense of her own identity. She writes, '[m]y hold on Kashmir is slipping, the very ground on which I stood and from where I looked at everything is sliding away from under my feet. I have nothing in its place I can call my own' (197). Koul is forced to adapt in order to assimilate into new cultures, yet she feels isolated and alienated, particularly in the U.S., which she describes as an 'anonymous and rootless world' (176). She describes how she and her husband find themselves dispossessed both from their origins, and from their adopted homeland:

When we arrived here we understood what it meant to lose your caste when you crossed the ocean. You lost your place in world order. You could not carry your kinship, your ancestry, and your place in society with you. It made no sense in another place, particularly here in the United States where people move vertically and horizontally in the flash of an eye.

(176)

Koul describes how she and her husband listen to South Asian radio stations on the weekends, 'playing songs we sang as teenagers on a mountain camp, we seek out our special groceries, we watch movies that even we find outrageous, all this just out of longing' (180). As she relates her homesickness and sense of alienation in the U.S., Koul adopts an intimate, almost confessional, tone. She utilizes the familiarity enabled by the autobiographical mode, and shares her innermost feelings with the reader. Inviting them to 'enter' her life and confidence in this way, Koul helps readers to understand the deep loss she feels in exile. She powerfully communicates the impact of her dislocation, and the way it has shattered her sense of self, her security, and her personal values.

Koul's experiences following her departure from Kashmir resonate with the position of the migrant which has occupied postcolonial thinkers like Salman Rushdie

and Edward Said. Both writers recognize the way in which their exiled state has left them with a complex sense of (be-)longing to a real, imagined, or ‘disappearing’ homeland. Said describes exile as ‘the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place’<sup>29</sup> and suggests that, ‘the achievements of any exile are permanently undermined by his or her sense of loss.’<sup>30</sup> Koul’s text encapsulates a similar sense of physical and emotional alienation. Although she has lived in the U.S. for several decades, she is unable to relinquish the past: ‘Try as I might, I have not been able to cut the connection and find anything else that satisfies my spirit and body as well as my own water and my own soil. My mind is muddy and full of turmoil’ (214). Despite the time that has passed since her departure, separation from Kashmir has had ongoing repercussions in her life, suggesting that it is an experience she has not overcome. Her inability to fully assimilate into life outside Kashmir means that she is caught in a state of ‘in-between’: an ongoing limbo between the past and future. It is from this position that she writes her autobiography. As such, the narrative itself can be seen to represent an attempt to draw together the various aspects of her identity into a coherent whole.

In addition, through a complex interweaving of personal and public spheres, Koul uses her account of her own departure from Kashmir to represent the ‘loss’ of Kashmir, a region and a people she believes have been catastrophically altered following Partition. This text exemplifies the possibilities for autobiography to represent trauma (in this case, the ‘loss’ of Kashmir), which has been experienced by a group of people. This is made most explicit in the subtitle, *A Memoir to Kashmir*, and is reinforced throughout the narrative in two primary ways. Firstly, as Koul aligns her own identity with that of the shattering trauma of Partition. Secondly, in her construction of a shared Kashmiri identity, which incorporates a collective consciousness and which

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<sup>29</sup> Edward Said, ‘The Mind of Winter: Reflections on a Life in Exile’ (1984), *Harper’s Magazine*, 269, 49-55 (49).

<sup>30</sup> Said, (1984) 49-55 (49).

overcomes religious, cultural and temporal divisions to connect all those living in the area.

Sudha Koul was born in 1947, 'a year of tumult' (12), into a remote Himalayan community in Kashmir. Early in the text, she uses the coincidence of these dates to cement the link between her own life-story and the history of divided India. Her identification with Kashmir is intrinsically bound to Partition, an event which she claims is central to her identity even though its initial effects were felt before her birth and during her infancy. She describes how, as violence approaches their community, her family, along with other Hindu families, is forced to flee their home. Her mother is eight months pregnant and the whole extended family take refuge at a Muslim neighbour's house. Koul describes the terror of this situation: 'the raiders attack the power station and we are surrounded by an awful silence. I am in my mother's belly, and she is also hiding in the dark, waiting for deliverance with the rest of my family' (27). The trauma of 'the raid' and her family's temporary displacement sends her mother into premature labour, and Koul is born a few weeks earlier than expected. There is momentary anxiety, as horoscopes suggest that Koul may have been born at an hour considered unlucky for her family. However, all fears are allayed, and Koul's arrival becomes absorbed into her family's memories of the period. She writes that, '[t]he joy of a safe delivery after a dark and frightening time provides anecdotes for years afterward.' (31).

Through this allegorical alignment of her own identity with the division of India, Koul establishes her physical, emotional, and spiritual connection to the shattering events of Partition. This connection is reminiscent of a similar trope employed by Salman Rushdie in *Midnight's Children*. In this novel, the protagonist Saleem Sinai is born at the exact moment of India's Independence; subsequently his life parallels

changes in the country after Partition. Here, as in Rushdie's text, the link serves an allegorical purpose, symbolically weaving trauma and its effects into the protagonist's identity. Koul emphasizes her relationship with the separation of India and Pakistan. Her antenatal trauma represents the 'birthing' trauma of the two nations. This is reinforced through the use of the striking image of India as a physical body, severed by its former colonizers:

India has just been sliced in two, and both parts are quivering like newly slaughtered flesh.

Parts of the country are being apportioned as if at a sacrificial ritual, presided over by the high priests of our national dismemberment, the departing British government. (26)

Koul reinforces this connection by describing her link to 'Mother Kashmir' (142) as an 'umbilical cord attachment' (168). She describes the Partition as if she were present at the time, even though she was only born *after* her family's temporary displacement was over. We see this identification in her use of the present tense and first person plural pronoun, for example: 'As we wait for the outcome of the attack, we can hardly breathe because the hordes have left behind sickening acts of cruelty' (27). Such descriptions give the text a sense of immediacy, and the reader is encouraged to view events of the past as if they were happening in the present. In addition, from her exiled position, Koul treats the Partition and her family's displacement as a precursor for her own departure years later. Her own departure can thus be seen as a repetition of an earlier rupture within the region.

However, where *Midnight's Children* employs the connection as a symbolic motif to enable a magical realist exploration of postcolonial India, here the text is autobiographical. This means that the incident must also be seen as an actual, physical wound which Koul absorbed through her mother's body, and which led to her premature birth. The effects of this trauma on Koul's identity—and the text itself—can be seen in her descriptions of recurring dreams, which draw her back to the shattering impact of the



nation's division. These dreams indicate Koul's ongoing negotiation of the event, and show her fears for her homeland and the deterioration of its culture. They correlate with psychological theories about the experience of 'hyperarousal' which often follows a traumatic experience so that '[t]rauma arrests the course of normal development by its repetitive intrusion into the survivor's life.'<sup>31</sup> At a formal level, references to dreams and memories enhance the interiority and intimacy of the narrative. This is integral to the emphasis upon individuality that is a component of the autobiographical mode.

Establishing herself as the symbolic counterpart for the newly divided India enables Koul to claim authority over the story of Kashmir she seeks to represent. It is a powerful connection, encapsulating the way in which these events have deeply impacted her life. Its long-term impact is evident in America many years after her departure, when Koul writes, 'we [Kashmiris] are on neutral ground, on the no-man's-land of another country, we carry on as if nothing has happened. We cling to periods of sanity with fierceness because we know that all too soon it will be followed by worse insanity' (205). Koul underlines her ability to represent the region through her own autobiography by constructing a common heritage, which she claims used to unite all Kashmiri people together, before the region's recent violence:

Our language and culture has bound us Kashmiris so strongly together that all other people, regardless of religion, are strangers to us. If someone does not understand our language, our stories, our songs, and our food, they are foreigners to us. This rule of the valley applies to our royal family as well. Our rulers are from a different culture and do not speak our language. (28)

Koul suggests that the geographical position of Kashmir separates it from other parts of India. She portrays her Kashmiri childhood as a utopian idyll, where Hindus and Muslims coexist peacefully, united by their common Himalayan heritage. The physical

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<sup>31</sup> Herman, 37.

landscape imbues a certain way of thinking, which includes suspicion of outsiders, and a close community: 'The ocean is completely outside our reckoning. In the valley we can see our limits from our homes and we can always tell where we are and where we are going' (98). Koul emphasizes the national pride the Kashmiri people share:

We have always been here, we are born here, we grow up, study, get married, and die here. In our minds the best place in the world is Mother Kashmir, which is what we call home. Everyone knows everyone because we have the same mother. We do not want to be anywhere else. (117)

Eastern traditions break down conventional western boundaries between individuals, and link members of the same family, community, and even nation, into a form of collective consciousness. She even suggests that this has led to the development of new religious forms which envelop different faiths, for example: 'Sufism [which] is a combination of the esoteric elements of Hinduism and Islam, and gives highest priority to what-is-not-of-this-world' (33). The unity Koul describes is such that, even in the darkest days of Partition, Hindu families are able to take shelter in Muslim homes (27). All of this has been destroyed by post-Partition conflict in the region; Koul describes how increasing violence means that, 'an us and a them was evolving and growing, and the rift between us Kashmiris, the Hindus and the Muslims, was widening like a chasm in an earthquake' (139).

However, Koul's authorial claim to represent Kashmiri people is problematic. She is a member of the *pandit* community of Brahmin Hindus, which have been living in Kashmir for centuries, prior to the arrival of Islam. Traditionally a scholarly people, they are remarkable for their high estimation of women. They worship Durga, the mother-goddess, who is often depicted sitting astride a magnificent tiger (an image which provides Koul's title). Women are considered powerful, wise, and important guardians of Kashmiri customs. Koul epitomizes the value *pandits* place on women.

She is wealthy and educated, with both a Bachelor's and a Master's degree, and she was the first woman from the state of Jammu and Kashmir to be selected as an officer of the Indian Administrative Service. Koul's specifically *pandit* perspective is evident in the way she depicts herself as a strong, privileged woman throughout the narrative.

However, *pandits* are a minority within the primarily Muslim region, representing less than three percent of the population. Consequently, whilst her education, privilege, and strong sense of collective identity empower her to write autobiographically, she cannot be seen as a representative figure.

Koul's claim that *The Tiger Ladies* is a 'memoir of Kashmir' is made further problematic by the way her specifically *pandit* perspective shapes the narrative, reinforced at a formal level within the language and structure of the text, as well as its title. The narrative begins with a stock incantation to Hindu gods, '*Om! Shri Ganeshaye Namah!*' which literally means, 'Ganesh, I pray to you.' It is divided into three sections, each of which refers to the matriarchal line of *pandit* spirituality. The first section, 'grandmothers,' loosely represents the past, describing Kashmiri traditions, folklore, and Koul's early childhood years. 'Mothers', the middle section, narrates the majority of Koul's childhood, and, correspondingly, Kashmir's post-independence 'teenage years'. Finally, 'Daughters' begins as Koul leaves Kashmir for her first job as a college lecturer in New Delhi. This final section focuses on Koul's departure from Kashmir, and the beginning of her life in exile. Whilst ostensibly distinct, the three sections are interrelated, with interwoven stories and themes. This reveals the way in which past, present, and future intertwine within *pandit* culture. The family acts as a locus for these links, with generations united in their spiritual identity and struggles to survive in Kashmir. However, as emblems of *pandit* culture, these features distinguish

her from the majority of Kashmiris and conflict with the narrative's attempt to speak on their behalf.

Koul's representative status is further undermined by her nostalgic depiction of a utopian childhood. Koul spends much of the narrative describing the rituals and insights of her beloved Kashmir. She writes of the shawl peddler, or *wallah*, whose home visits draw the women of the household together in anticipation of weddings, puberty, or the winter; she recounts myths of unhappy brides, the family's attempts to ward off the evil eye and Tiger Ladies—Durga, Ragnya, Sharika, Bhawani, the various names for the goddess 'She Who Fears Nothing' (19). All this is written from her suburban study in the United States, where she has lived for several decades. Here, she tries to 're-create' what she knows of her homeland, which she describes as 'the dreamtime of some bygone native peoples' (187). Real connections to Kashmir now come from a computer monitor screen as she searches the internet for news updates from the region. What she reads of Kashmir's slippery slide into hell contrasts with her own idea of the region. However, despite the news of violence and destruction, Koul's mind remains fixed on the heavenly place she believes Kashmir once was.

In this text, Koul can be seen to explore a personal trauma which is contingent upon an idea of selfhood she connects with a shared, collective identity of Kashmiris. She does this in order to speak out on behalf of the people of Kashmir, and show how this beautiful region has been destroyed. However, her claim to representative status is problematic, because much of the textual content of her autobiography—along with its structure and style—focus on a specific aspect of Hindu tradition and culture. In this way, the emphasis upon Koul's individual experience, which is a central component of autobiography, conflicts with the political and historical aspirations of the narrative.

This is underlined by the fact that the text was written in English, a choice that suggests that Koul aspires to attract a western audience and which reinforces the pedagogic aspects of the text. At the same time, Koul's choice of English could be seen to reflect her ongoing struggle to 're-create' her traumatized Kashmiri identity, as she tries to capture the past and reconcile it with her new life in the U.S. With its emphasis upon interiority and individual self-representation, autobiography proves an effective genre for Koul's account of personal trauma and her departure, which leads her to feel alienated and alone. Whilst the narrative is more successful as an exploration of individual experience of traumatic dislocation than it is of collective trauma, it nevertheless encapsulates the trauma experienced by those in exile from their homeland. It highlights the way in which certain postcolonial communities are connected, so that individual traumas should not be viewed in isolation, without taking into account their relationship with the community at large.

## II. Mourid Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah*

The second text in this study explores similar themes of exile and dislocation. Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah* was first published in 1997, to wide acclaim across the Arab world. It won the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature, and was later translated into English by celebrated Egyptian author Ahdaf Soueif, with a Foreword by Edward Said. Written as a true account of the prominent poet Mourid Barghouti's journey back to Palestine in 1996, following 30 years of exile, Said described it as 'one of the finest existential accounts of Palestinian displacement that we now have' (vii). In this text, Barghouti exposes the pain of separation from Palestine, and the ensuing struggle to maintain a sense of national identity in exile. *I Saw Ramallah* represents an uncomfortable return to Palestine; it describes Barghouti's physical journey to the homeland, and his return to the scenes and memories of trauma, but it also highlights

the fact that, for so many other Palestinians, the homeland is still forbidden territory. As such, it engages with Middle Eastern politics even as it describes intensely private, personal experiences. As Edward Said suggests: 'Every Palestinian today is [...] in the most unusual position of knowing that there was once a Palestine and yet seeing that place with a new name, people, and identity that deny Palestine altogether. A 'return' to Palestine is therefore an unusual, not to say urgently fraught, occurrence' (viii).

Barghouti's initial trauma can be located in the moment when he was forced to become an exile from Palestine, as Israel captured Ramallah during the Six-Day War of 1967. At the time, the writer was completing his university degree examinations in Egypt. Living in Cairo, and later in Budapest, Barghouti describes the various consequences of his physical dislocation, including a sense of spiritual, intellectual and emotional estrangement. Thus, what begins in a single moment, '[a]t noon that Monday I was struck by displacement' (4) becomes a long-term affliction, '[i]n 1967 I started walking. From dawn yesterday until dawn today I have not stopped walking' (36). Barghouti even compares his exile with illness or even death, and suggests that, '[i]n exile the lump in the throat never ends: it is always resumed. In exile, we do not get rid of terror: it transforms into a fear of terror' (150).

Barghouti claims that one of the most significant effects of this forced exile has been the invasion of politics into every aspect of his life, making it difficult to separate personal, spiritual, or religious acts from the public sphere. This is reflected in the structure and style of the narrative, which sees personal moments charged with a wider significance. It is perhaps best exemplified in the first passage. This describes Barghouti's arrival at the border between Jordan and Palestine. the Allenby bridge:

It is very hot on the bridge. A drop of sweat slides from my forehead down to the frame of my spectacles, then the lens. A mist envelops what I see, what I expect, what I remember.

The view here shimmers with scenes that span a lifetime; a lifetime spent trying to get here.

Here I am, crossing the Jordan River. [...] Behind me the world, ahead of me my world. (1)

In this passage, Barghouti creates a powerful image of his own return to Palestine. He implies that, as his own vision is impaired by the drop of sweat on the lens of his glasses, so his perspective on his return is corroded by images of the past and memories that highlight the political significance of the moment. The Jordan River comes to encapsulate the oppression of those who have suffered under the Israeli regime. Over the years it has become, he notices, 'a river without water. Almost without water. Nature had colluded with Israel in stealing its water. It used to have a voice, now it was a silent river, a river like a parked car' (5).

For Barghouti, the trauma of exile cannot be simply confined to the pain of physical separation from Palestine. This is because, according to official documents, the land of Palestine no longer exists. Barghouti mourns that Israeli appropriation of Palestine has successfully taken his homeland and its signifiers: 'It is the place that is ours and that they have made theirs. The settlements are their book, their first form. They are our absence' (29-30). This renders Barghouti and other displaced Palestinians estranged, dislocated figures. They are set in direct, diametrical opposition to the new inhabitants, whose 'authenticity' in belonging to the nation constantly underlines Palestinian dislocation and state of exile. For many, Palestine has been reduced to an idea, abstraction, or memory. Barghouti notes that Palestine has become a signifier, a 'golden map hanging on a golden chain adorning the throats of women in exile' (23) and that, '[t]he long Occupation has succeeded in changing us from children of Palestine to children of the idea of Palestine' (62). For Barghouti, oppression of Palestinians has destroyed individual agency:

Occupation prevents you from managing your affairs in your own way. It interferes in every aspect of life and of death; it interferes with longing and anger and desire and walking in the street. It interferes with going anywhere and coming back, with going to market, the emergency hospital, the beach, the bedroom, or a distant capital. (48)

Barghouti uses the autobiographical mode to resist this silencing and this loss of agency. His narrative asserts Palestinian belonging in the homeland, through descriptions of checkpoints, present-day Ramallah, and the traditions of country folk living in rural villages like his birthplace, Deir Ghassaneh. Such passages are filled with small details, encompassing the physical and mundane aspects of everyday life. These details are often told with an economy of expression, which endorses the claim to factual status of this autobiographical narrative. The juxtaposition of poetic elegance with a sharp intellectual acuity produces politically charged observations, exemplified when Barghouti shows how Jerusalem's symbolic status has overtaken its practical, everyday reality:

The Jerusalem of religions, the Jerusalem of politics, the Jerusalem of conflict is the Jerusalem of the world. But the world does not care for our Jerusalem, the Jerusalem of the people. The Jerusalem of houses and cobbled streets and spice markets [...]. This is the city of our senses, our bodies and our childhood. The Jerusalem that we walk in without noticing its 'sacredness,' because we are in it, because it is us. (142-3)

Barghouti allows the sense of disruption and fragmentation he has experienced by forced dislocation to pervade the formal aspects of his narrative. This is shown in a stylistic tension between the fragmented and contradictory experiences he describes and the style and language he employs to convey them. The text itself is luminous, lucid and elegiac; it addresses the writer's visceral sense of loss, the everyday potency of his placelessness and his deep love for Palestine with the language of passion, and poetry. It also comments on the unemotional, practical everyday details of dislocation. This tension is shown when Barghouti notes that through the eyes of the Israeli soldier he



encounters on his arrival, he is little more than a logistic, a name in a book, an unwanted reminder of an old regime: 'His gun is my personal history. It is the history of my estrangement. His gun took from us the land of the poem and left us with the poem of the land. In his hand he holds earth, and in our hands we hold a mirage' (13). Thus, the text is filled with incongruencies; for whilst Barghouti is describing a joyous moment of reunion and return, he is also trying to communicate loss, fragmentation and homelessness; a spiritual and emotional displacement couched in physical absence. This means that he is incapable of setting down roots anywhere. Instead, he is frozen in a moment, caught in-between past and present realities. This experience epitomizes the very consequences of trauma as an abnormal form of memory as understood by trauma theorists including Herman, who writes that: 'Long after the danger is past, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present. They cannot resume the normal course of their lives, for the trauma repeatedly interrupts.'<sup>32</sup>

Barghouti's depiction of a traumatized identity connects in important ways with his use of the autobiographical genre. Barghouti resists the idea of selfhood as a coherent, fixed entity but rather explores the way in which it is constructed and influenced by lived circumstances. He sees his own identity as being dramatically re-shaped by the moment of his displacement in 1967.<sup>33</sup> The nomadic existence he has been forced to live since this time has enhanced his understanding of human connection and the relationship between individuals and the places to which they belong. This is shown when he returns to his hometown, Dier Ghassanah. Here, he is faced with the existence he may possibly have had if he had remained in Palestine instead of travelling

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<sup>32</sup> Herman, 37.

<sup>33</sup> The fragmentary impact of this moment is symbolized in his immediate response to hearing the news of war: Until this day I do not know why with my arm I drew a wide arc in the air and, aiming at the trunk of that palm tree, hurled the bottle of ink [that I was carrying] with all my strength so that in that midnight-blue collision it burst into fragments of glass that settled on the lawn. (2)

to Egypt for university. However, he feels alienated from the individuals he meets there, disconnected from their culture and detached from their knowledge and experiences. He is reminded that, despite the national identity which unites them, they are different in nearly every other respect; he asks: 'They lived their time here and I lived my time there. Can the two times be patched together?' (85) *I Saw Ramallah* represents one response to this question, as it draws together a national group's experiences of displacement into a coherent narrative, effectively 'patching together' different times through a single autobiographical thread.

Barghouti's return to Deir Ghassanah is one of a number of episodes that explore the role of narrative in the reconstruction of identity following traumatic dislocation. This exploration is shown in Barghouti's descriptions of his interactions with his former community; it is also evident at a metafictional level, within the narrative treatment. Instead of a single, authoritative figure who directs and controls the narrative, Barghouti experiments with different ways of narration. He refuses to tell events chronologically; instead he employs a stream of consciousness style which reflects the flow of memories and experiences and imitates the narrative's central journey motif. This style is illustrated in the following passage:

I try to sleep—I cannot sleep. I write a fragment here and a fragment there. Casual observations, summaries of a conversation. When I switch off the light and close my eyes the sounds of my life start rising in this quiet, dark room. Thoughts and questions and images from the life that is past and the life that awaits me, awaits us. (162-3).

At times, Barghouti refers to himself in the third person; elsewhere he inserts lines of poetry into the text. He refuses to claim authority over *either* his experiences *or* the process of self-representation, and his narrative is littered with rhetorical questions. Finally, he avoids closure of the narrative itself, which ends rather abruptly with a series

of questions Barghouti claims 'that the days have never answered: What derives the spirit of its colors?/ What is it other than the bullets of the invaders that have hit the body? [sic] (182) In this way, Barghouti deconstructs his own position as an author figure. He underlines his own subjectivity, showing the self-conscious way in which his memories are interpreted so that at times he becomes his own subject. This brings an intensity to the narrative, and the reader is forced to confront a central tension within the text: the struggle to construct a coherent identity alongside the realisation that none is available. This use of autobiography relates back to the way the mode has been understood as an historically situated practice of self-representation. Barghouti shows how autobiography is heavily contingent upon the circumstances of his lived experience not only for its content, but also for the ways in which selfhood and identity may be narrated.

In light of this emphasis upon the construction of selfhood, rather than identity as an ontological certainty, it is interesting to note that, like Koul, Barghouti draws upon an extended allegory to explore the traumatic nature of his displacement. Barghouti creates a metaphorical link between his older brother, Mounif, and Palestinian dispossession. He describes how Mounif was desperate to return home to Palestine, but died in tragic circumstances before he was given the opportunity. Barghouti depicts Mounif as an innocent victim of the Israeli occupation (35), and claims him as a casualty of war. As the eldest brother, Mounif was the guardian of the Barghouti family—its leader and future head. For Barghouti, Mounif's death is symbolic of the demise of Palestinian culture. Consequently, in the narrative, the loss of Mounif becomes connected with Palestine as an unobtainable object of desire.

At the same time, Barghouti underlines the loss of his brother as a deep personal trauma. In a particularly poignant passage, he recalls giving the news to their mother, whilst imploring her to survive the death of her eldest son: ‘I wanted my life to end there, at that moment. [...] I found myself saying, as I put her head on my chest and held on to her very tightly: “We want you to stay alive. Promise me that you will stay alive. Put on black clothes, mother”’ (166). Barghouti describes Mounif’s sudden death as ‘the great deafening collapse in the lives of the whole family’ (36); it is a loss which prevents Barghouti from ever feeling complete or content, and it haunts him on his journey back to Palestine. Upon visiting Deir Ghassanah, where they lived in as children, Barghouti notes that, ‘Mounif’s body fills the place. Not a ghost or memory. He himself with his height, his glasses, his fair face, and his smooth hair’ (81). As the second son, Barghouti feels as if he is both embodying and usurping his brother’s position; it is a personal betrayal, which haunts Barghouti on his own journey:

Here I step on a patch of earth that his feet will never reach. But the mirror in the waiting room reflected his face when I looked into it. The streets of Ramallah, when I walked in them, saw him walk, hurrying, leading with his chest. Since I handed my papers in to the Bridge Authorities, his face has been with me. This scene is his. It is Mounif’s scene. (36)

This ‘scene’ marks the moment when the fullness of Barghouti’s original trauma of departure is truly recognized. Barghouti spends 30 years away from Palestine, during which time he is unable to give voice to, or fully appreciate what has been lost. This period can be viewed as a form of belatedness. Upon his return, he experiences the overwhelming grief of the dispossessed: the realization that the Palestine of his youth no longer exists and that some Palestinians (like his brother) will never return home. Thus, throughout the text, Mounif’s premature death becomes a metaphor for Barghouti’s experience of exile; it represents the waste and futility of displacement, and Barghouti’s ongoing grief represents the invisible pain afflicting generations of Palestinians across the globe. This idea is underpinned by emphasis upon death as the ultimate mode of

displacement ('the stranger can never go back to what he was. Even if he returns. It is over. A person gets 'displacement' as he gets asthma, and there is no cure for either' (4)).

The use of Mounif's death as a metaphor for Palestinian dispossession enables Barghouti to explore both the collective and the personal aspects of his trauma. Indeed, Barghouti shows how his personal losses—of Mounif, and his home—and the collective trauma of dislocation are interrelated, as the continuation of Palestinian culture is dependent upon its future heirs. In addition, through his preoccupation with Mounif throughout the narrative, Barghouti replicates the process of displacement at a formal level. His own story becomes absorbed into the story of his brother, and the nation of Palestine; in this way, Barghouti explores the role of autobiography as a means to narrate both individual and collective loss.

Barghouti uses his own story as a means to connect Palestinian experience with 'ordinary' readers. However, as in Koul's narrative, this ambition is made difficult because Barghouti is not really an 'ordinary' Palestinian. Rather, he is an intellectual: a well-educated individual who comes from within the fabric of the Palestinian elite. His family is one of the most prominent and oldest clans in Palestine; they are well-known for their political activism. Indeed, Barghouti himself was deported from Egypt as a result of his political commentary on the Egyptian Broadcasting Corporation's Radio Filastin. Consequently, *I Saw Ramallah* should not be viewed as a conventional autobiography which avoids political issues. Rather it is a narrative that considers the possibilities offered by the literary mode to reach an audience with a political message through the mediation of an individual story, and give meaning to life in exile through a

re-examination of selfhood and national identity. The use of autobiography, with its particular focus on the formation of identity, is vital to this process. As Barghouti exposes the Palestinian condition, he shows how the narration of the self can function as a form of protest. This correlates with his views on poetry as a way of resisting oppression, which he outlined in a celebrated essay in *New Internationalist* in 2003:

Through poetic imagination I construct my own perception of lived experience, a new version of reality, different from the original. Language is a shared element between the world of the marketplace and that of poetry, the dissimilar language of poetry is our suggestion of a different language for this world. It is our attempt to restore to each word its specificity and resist the process of collective vulgarization and to establish new relations among words to create a fresh perception of things. [...] That is why the poetic imagination becomes an act of resistance *par excellence*. It is a declaration of mutiny onboard this world's ship whose course we are never allowed to direct.<sup>34</sup>

*I Saw Ramallah* exemplifies this search for 'a new version of reality, different from the original' at political and personal levels. It rejects the ongoing oppression and exile of Palestinian people. It expresses the hope that they will one day be unified, and restored to their homeland. Autobiography assists in this task. It enables Barghouti to draw upon his 'poetic imagination' in order to articulate the ongoing trauma of dispossession. At the same time, autobiography's claim to factual status emphasizes the truthfulness of his account. This helps Barghouti to restore faces and names to those who are displaced. Finally, Barghouti uses the autobiographical mode to expose the tension between personal and collective losses; whilst his narrative appears to focus primarily on the long-term impact of individual trauma, it suggests that the collective trauma of dispossession must also be addressed at a collective level.

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<sup>34</sup> Mourid Barghouti, 'Verbicide: Palestinian Poet Mourid Barghouti resists the political language of stupidity and hate - Essay' (2003), *New Internationalist*, *findarticles.com*, <[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi-m0JQP/is\\_359/ai\\_107489485pg\\_3?tag+artBody;coll](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi-m0JQP/is_359/ai_107489485pg_3?tag+artBody;coll)> 1-3 (2), [accessed 19th May 2008].

### III. Alexandra Fuller, *Don't Let's Go To The Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood*

Like *The Tiger Ladies* and *I Saw Ramallah*, the third autobiography in this chapter also explores an experience of exile or dislocation. Alexandra Fuller's *Don't Let's Go To The Dogs Tonight* recounts the writer's upbringing in war-torn Zimbabwe, Malawi and finally Zambia in the 1960s, 1970s and, 1980s. Central to this text is an exploration of Fuller's 'African' identity, which she feels has come under threat. Conceived in Africa, yet born in England in 1969, Fuller's family returned to (what was then) Rhodesia when she was two years old. In the text, colonial war forms the backdrop for Fuller's childhood. This means that, as a school girl, she was accustomed to carrying a shotgun to school, and fearing the 'terrorist-under-the-bed'.<sup>35</sup> Themes of fear and anxiety recur throughout the narrative, from the first passage, which is set in Rhodesia in 1975 during the nation's turbulent civil war:

Mum says, 'Don't come creeping into our room at night.'

They sleep with loaded guns beside them on the bedside rugs. She says, 'Don't startle us when we're sleeping.'

'Why not?'

'We might shoot you.'

'Oh.'

'By mistake.'

'Okay.' As it is, there seems a good enough chance of getting shot on purpose. 'Okay, I won't.' (1)

This passage establishes the text's central exploration of the relationship between personal and political conflict and the impact of anti-colonial unrest on the formation of identity. It shows the intrusion of political turbulence into the domestic sphere, as the bewildering and terrifying effects of war disrupt the security of the family unit. It also establishes Fuller as a child who is caught in the middle of a war she is not old enough to fully understand, yet in which she is a victim nevertheless because it problematizes

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<sup>35</sup> Alexandra Fuller, *Don't Let's Go To The Dogs Tonight*, (Oxford: Pan Macmillan, 2002), 4. Further references to *Don't Let's Go* are given after quotations in the text.

her identity, questioning the assumption that she and other white citizens 'belong' in Africa. What makes this autobiography particularly interesting is the way that, throughout the text, transitions from colonialism to Independence in Southern Africa are interwoven with personal family tragedy. This includes the deaths of several of Fuller's siblings in infancy and her mother's mental instability. The narration of these experiences highlights how Fuller's established views on the world have been shattered, and her identity threatened. They also complicate the writer's ongoing struggle to understand her relationship with the oppressive colonial regime. Fuller uses the autobiographical mode to explore these various traumas. The emphasis upon interiority in this genre enables her to construct an identity for herself and separate her identity as a *postcolonial* citizen from the colonialism her parents have come to represent. The use of the autobiographical 'I' is central to this process, as it establishes an intimacy between the reader and the author and endorses the authenticity of her narrative.

This text follows a similar narrative thread to Koul's *The Tiger Ladies*, as it begins by identifying an important relationship between the protagonist/narrator and a particular nation or region. From the start, however, this identification appears confused. Fuller outlines her parents' heritage as long-term settlers in Africa. She describes their passion for Africa, and their idealistic belief that the land 'could hold their dreams in its secret valleys and gushing rivers and rocky hills' (46). She also recounts their patriotism towards Great Britain, a country they consider 'home' despite the fact that they have lived in Africa for the majority of their lives (8-9). Fuller's parents are remnants of the white minority ruling class in this part of Africa, who are slowly being edged out of the country. However, Fuller's own proud identification with Africa is at odds with this emphasis; in fact, much of the narrative is spent distancing herself from their attitudes, and defending her own identity as an African citizen. She describes how she was



conceived in the Victoria Falls Hotel with '[t]he plunging roar of the Zambezi in my ears at conception' (33). Although her family spent a few years in Derbyshire, England, during which time she was born, this fact is considered '[i]ncongruous, contradictory' (33)—a time of which she has no memory (133). It is treated as an inconvenience which does not prevent her from claiming birthright status in Africa. This is emphasized in the pronominal identification ('we') in following passage, which firmly establishes her as an African:

In Rhodesia, we are born and then the umbilical cord of each child is sewn straight from the mother onto the ground, where it takes root and grows. Pulling away from the ground causes death by suffocation, starvation. That's what the people of this land believe. Deprive us of the land and you are depriving us of air, water, food, and sex. [sic] (153-4).

Fuller claims that her African identity is the consequence of neither race, nor culture, nor tongue, but of some other, deeper connection. However, struggles to develop and maintain a sense of her own identity recur throughout the text, inflecting her descriptions of childhood, family life, school days and her eventual departure, first for university in Scotland, and later for the States when she marries. It is interesting to note that, like Koul and Barghouti, Fuller has spent the majority of her adult life away from her homeland. Consequently this narrative, like the other two, is imbued with a sense of nostalgia for a 'forgotten' or lost time. Like the other two, this text represents an act of reclamation, as Fuller seeks to affirm her past identity and consolidate a new one. This kind of exploration may be considered typical for an autobiography of childhood, which traditionally focuses upon an individual's early development, from which their adult identity is formed. However, the content and style of the narrative suggest that it also represents an attempt to recover a traumatic past which has left her scarred. This is most clear in the connections she makes between the collapse of her

'public' identity (which occurs during Independence) with a series of familial traumas which threaten her internal or 'private' sense of self.

When Fuller was ten years old, Rhodesia became a postcolonial nation and was renamed Zimbabwe. Where her family had previously been privileged citizens under colonial rule, they quickly become outsiders within the nation, alienated from its new identity. Resolute colonials, Fuller's mother claims that she had been 'prepared to die [...] to keep one country white-run' (23), whilst her parents' belief that the country is going 'to the dogs' following the end of white rule provides the title for the narrative. Soon after the end of the war, the farmland into which the Fullers have poured their emotional and physical energies is taken from them as part of the government's redistribution policies. With nowhere to move to and little money to sustain them, the family are forced to find work wherever they can, and subsequently struggle to farm arid landscapes in Malawi and Zambia.

Thus Fuller, like Koul and Barghouti, finds herself no longer 'at home' in the land where she feels that she belongs. However, unlike the other two, her relationship with the indigenous culture is less clear. She is not a 'native', who can claim her birthright in Africa despite political change. However, where Fuller does not fully belong in Africa according to conventional definitions, neither does she belong in the West. This means she is not able to fully assimilate into European cultures in a straightforward way. She is neither fully African, nor British (nor—following her marriage and subsequent move to the U.S.—American). Furthermore, she attempts, in her autobiography, to show that she is neither colonizer nor colonized. Instead, she occupies an in-between space between colonial Rhodesia and Independent Zimbabwe. Independence, which represents the rejection of the British presence in Zimbabwe,

exposes the fragility of her white identity. Straddling two different cultures and modes of knowledge, she acknowledges a sense of painful division within: 'My soul has no home. I am neither African nor English nor am I of the sea' (35).

Fuller's identity crisis is mirrored by struggles in the private, domestic realm. She and her older sister Vanessa are the only two surviving siblings of five children born to their parents. The first child, Adrian, dies in infancy from meningitis before Fuller is born; Olivia, the author's younger sister drowns tragically as a baby; and a third, Richard, dies in childbirth following a troubled pregnancy. These deaths destroy the security of the family unit, causing mental instability in Fuller's mother and recklessness in both parents, as they suffer from spiraling grief. Her parents drink until they can barely walk and then drive home late at night, dangerously ignoring war-time curfews (96). Each of these events has a profound impact upon Fuller. When she is about eight years old her mother tells her about the death of baby Adrian. She quickly realizes its significance: 'I understand, through the power of her emotion, her tears, the way she is dissolving like soap left too long in the bath, that this has been the greatest tragedy of our lives. It is my tragedy, too, even though I was not born when it happened (31). When Olivia drowns tragically, Fuller describes it as a wound, and a temporal division by which her life must now be measured. She writes that, '[m]y life is sliced in half' (95) and suggests, 'I will never know peace again, I know. I will never be comfortable or happy again in my life' (89).

In the chapter entitled 'Afterwards,' Fuller connects happiness prior to Olivia's death with her parents' optimism over the future of colonial Rhodesia, expressed in songs which proclaim, '[w]e'll keep them north of the Zambezi till that river's runnin' dry! And this great land will prosper, 'cos Rhodesians never die!' (96). In contrast,

following Olivia's death, Fuller expresses growing anxiety for their future in the region. When they decide to take a family holiday through war-torn Rhodesia, Fuller describes how the ravaged countryside they see outside the vehicle mirrors the pain they feel within it: 'We are driving through a dreamscape. The war has cast a ghastly magic, like the spell on Sleeping Beauty's castle. Everything is dormant or is holding its breath against triggering a land mine. Everything is waiting and watchful and suspicious' (101). In passages like these, Fuller uses trauma within the family to explore the collective trauma of war.

A similar connection is evident in the way Fuller establishes her mother, Nicola, as a symbol of the disintegration of colonial rule, and the traumatic losses—of land, ownership and power—which follow. The link between Fuller's mother and colonialism is developed through references to her struggles with motherhood:

Mum starts having problems with the pregnancy [her fifth, Richard]. She says her problems are caused by the stress of independence. Losing the war. Losing the farm. She has heart palpitations and she is carrying too much fluid in her womb. She has started to look yellow. Her red hair has turned black and then grey from all the medication she takes and all the stress she is under. She bleeds and cramps. And Dad says, 'Let this one go.' (173)

Fuller's mother is hospitalized in an attempt to save the baby. At the same time, hospitals in Rhodesia are overwhelmed with black Africans who would hitherto have been cared for in small rural clinics run by farmer's wives like Fuller's mother. From the maternity ward, Fuller describes her mother watching the endless lines they form in a hospital unable to care for them all: 'Mum sighs and turns onto her side and her face falls long and old and yellow into the government-issue sheets (left over from the days of Rhodesia, but beginning to thin and tear). She starts to cry again' (174). Later, after the baby dies, Fuller describes her mother 'living with the ghosts of her dead children. She begins to look ghostly herself. She is moving slowly, grief so heavy that it settles,

like smoke, into her hair and clothes and stings her eyes. [...] Her sentences and thoughts are interrupted by the cries of her dead babies' (217). Nicola's grief becomes emblematic of the loss of colonial Rhodesia. The descriptions of sorrow and madness Nicola experiences after her children die represents the unresolved grief over the other great losses: of the war, the family's farm, and their home in Rhodesia.

Fuller locates political and national turmoil within the family context through the use of an extended allegory. Her parents come to represent the slow demise and disappointments of colonial rule; she (and, to a lesser extent, her sister Vanessa) represent the present-day nation, which is caught in between past traumas and the future, and must struggle to define itself. This allegory vividly communicates the everyday reality of war upon individuals and families; it also helps Fuller to explore her own relationship with the colonial past. In seeking to distinguish between herself and the perpetrators of colonialism, she establishes herself as a casualty of war: a young girl who is caught in the violent upheavals taking place around her, and who falls victim to the psychological and emotional damage it causes.

To the extent that Fuller's parents (and particularly her mother) represent the remnants of a colonial regime, it is interesting to explore the way in which *Don't Let's Go To The Dogs Tonight* can be seen to counter the autobiographical narratives of early settlers, whose texts have become instrumental in the construction of a mythical imperial subject. In *The Intimate Empire*, Whitlock notes how narratives like Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa* establish the white settler subject as 'belonging' to Africa. Whitlock claims that autobiographical writing has frequently appropriated Kenya as both an exotic and fantastical space for the 'loss or discovery or an essential self in

nature'<sup>36</sup> and as capturing the essence of Africa. As such, texts like *Out of Africa* have participated in the representation of a mythical colonial experience, where white Europeans may find wholeness and rejuvenation in Africa. According to Whitlock, the Edenic landscape which is presented in *Out of Africa* reflects Blixen's 'fantasy of belonging' and helps to create an utopic vision of white presence in Africa.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, Fuller deconstructs Africa as a land of (self-)discovery and replaces it with an impression of the hardships and marginalization faced by Europeans living in an inhospitable, alien landscape. She undermines the notion of land 'ownership' and colonization, by describing how African place names were replaced by white settlers despite the fact that '[t]he land itself, of course, was careless of its name.' (25) She also reverses the power structures which characterize white imperialist narratives and instead describes various schoolyard debates over her own origin:

The blacks laugh at me when they see me stripped naked after swimming or tennis, when my shoulders and arms are angry sunburnt red.

'Argh! I smell roasting pork!' they shriek.

'Who fried the bacon?'

'Burning piggy!'

My God I am the *wrong* colour. The way I am burned by the sun, scorched by flinging sand, prickled by heat. The way my skin erupts in miniature volcanoes or protest in the presence of tsetse flies, mosquitoes, ticks. The way I stand out against the khaki bush like a large marshmallow to a gook with a gun. White. African. White-African.

'But what are you? I am asked over and over again.

'Where are you from *originally*?' (7-8)

Fuller's dystopic vision of life in Africa frames her use of the autobiographical mode. Consequently, structure, narration, and language of the narrative are all actively

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<sup>36</sup> Gillian Whitlock, *The Intimate Empire* (London: Cassell, 2000), 114.

<sup>37</sup> Whitlock, *Intimate Empire*, 115.

engaged with deconstructing the myth established in texts like *Out of Africa*.<sup>38</sup> For example, the narrative alternates between chronological storytelling (as is conventional to the autobiographical form) and an episodic, fragmented structure that shows the writer following the thread of memory back to significant events. This creates an impressionistic view of Fuller's formative years, so that reflective passages on Africa's geography, noises, and smell intersect with specific events, such as tobacco-sale day. It also means that the narrative pivots around certain key moments which encapsulate the text's central themes. This intensifies the plot, which appears to alternate ceaselessly between political turmoil and the trauma of infant deaths. It also allows for certain events (even long periods of time) to be forgotten. The employment of recurring memories helps establish the chaos and disruption in Fuller's childhood, and reinforces her depiction of a traumatized identity.

The sporadic structure is supported by a shifting, unreliable narrative voice. Fuller employs the autobiographical "I" throughout the text. This supports her claim to represent the past in an authentic way. However, she often uses her childhood nickname 'Bobo' to refer to her younger self. This creates a protagonist narrator who is in some ways distinct from the author figure. In the use of the name 'Bobo,' Fuller can be seen to disrupt the clarity of the 'autobiographical pact,' and assume some of the properties of the novelist. She establishes 'Bobo' as a separate character, whom she (as author) is able to view with a greater level of objectivity than autobiographical writing customarily allows. The use of a child narrator helps Fuller to consider her 'in-between'

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<sup>38</sup> This is a deliberate strategy which Fuller has acknowledged in interviews:

There is, in all my writing, a real desire to take readers where very few of them would go on their own. One way to do that is to not allow them the luxury of a tour guide, if you like. This cold bath of reality is to shake people into the realization that this is not going to be a romantic handholding; this is really what it feels like to be there. This is the shock of reality. The other thing I try to do is dispel the romantic myths of Africa, the *Out of Africa* motif, which really exists only in safari camps anymore. Very few people live that existence.

In interview with Dave Weich, 'Back to Africa with Alexandra Fuller,' *Powells.com* <<http://www.powells.com/authors/fuller.html>> [accessed 26 May 2008].

status. She considers the racist attitudes she inherited from the colonial culture that surrounded her as a child; she sets these against her own developing identity, including her conflicting feelings towards the anti-colonial struggle. The resultant narrative voices these tensions honestly without explanation or excuse. Occasionally, Fuller separates herself from this child voice in order to narrate the key events of history. These are told in italics. In this way, despite the fact that the text is strongly autobiographical, Fuller shifts between different narrative positions, and separates her past self from her present identity. The separation of the authorial 'I' from the protagonist 'I' betrays a rift deep within, implying that Fuller cannot easily return to events of the past as the person she is now, but must instead return to her 'prior' identity in order to recount them.

Finally, Fuller uses language to assert her multiple identifications with Africa. For example, at times she takes on the vernacular used by white people, creating compound words such as '*Ohmygod*' (202), '*fergodsake*' (9), '*Godthefather*' (55), '[t]hat's *enoughofthat*' (101) and '*everyone getoutandpush!*' (176) to convey emotion and character. Some of these indicate the sense of group identity found within white communities living in Africa at that time: during the war there are '*sanctionson*' (32) and '*fighting through thickanthin*' (146), after it, there is '*Piss and reconciliation*' (155) followed by '*freeanfair elections*' (147). The use of this language locates Fuller within the white groups living in Rhodesia during and after the transition to independence. However, elsewhere, she gives voice to animals and birds, interpreting the noises they make in human language to show her own affinity with the natural environment of Africa. For example, she writes that, '[t]he Cape turtle dove is heard crying, '*Kuk-KOORR-ru! Work hard-er. Work hard-er*' (180). Stylistically, her text also attempts to give voice to indigenous black Africans, who had been marginalized and oppressed under colonialism. Her use of language is designed to capture the sounds of African



languages, as in ‘I am kicking-legs bored’ (62) and African phrases such as ‘*faga moto!*’ (180). Elsewhere, it is constructed to appear as if she is consciously using English as a second language, with compound phrases such as ‘our tummies are full-of-nothing-aching-hungry’ (99). The employment of different tones and styles of language creates a tension between the different peoples being represented in the text, and reflects the complexities of her own identity, which has been shaped by these different groups. This also reflects Fuller’s desire to depict black Africans in an authentic way. Of these figures she has said, ‘I hope they exist as full-blown characters. I wanted to show how effectively silenced they are in this power struggle [between blacks and whites. T]he most effective way for me to ensure that they were not lost completely from the narrative was to allow a little of their music into my voice.’<sup>39</sup>

Setting her realist narrative against the mythic Africa of Blixen’s text establishes *Don’t Let’s Go to the Dogs Tonight* as a counter-discourse to the romance of the earlier text. However, despite her deconstruction of the Africa of safari camps and romantic wilderness, Fuller’s narrative can be seen to engage with a similar kind of project as Karen Blixen. She, too, asserts herself as ‘belonging’ to Africa. She, too, seeks to establish a viable position for those who move between European and African contexts. In interviews she has described her writing as ‘forging a new voice for Africa’,<sup>40</sup> which might reflect her specific upbringing: ‘I was not one of the old picnic-on-the-lawn empire builders but yet I was not a black African. I was an African born of a different culture and a different tongue, but an African nevertheless.’<sup>41</sup> In this way, Fuller’s text

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<sup>39</sup> Weich, ‘Back to Africa with Alexandra Fuller.’

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Larry Weissman, ‘A Conversation with Alexandra Fuller,’ *Bold Type*, <<http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0303/fuller/interview.html>> [accessed 3 March 2006].

<sup>41</sup> Weissman, ‘A Conversation with Alexandra Fuller.’

dismantles the myth of white Imperialists' 'right' to Africa, only to replace it with her own vision of Whites who 'belong' to the nation.

### Conclusion

In order to evaluate the role played by autobiography in the negotiation of postcolonial trauma, it is important to note that each of these writers could have chosen to represent their experiences differently. What prevented Koul from writing a history of Kashmir in novel form, using the same kind of allegorical link as Rushdie used in *Midnight's Children*, but without the inconsistencies evident in her autobiographical narrative? What were the advantages of an autobiographical narrative for Barghouti over, say, a series of poems recording and exploring his return? And why does the follow-up text to *Don't Let's Go To The Dogs Tonight* continue the autobiographical theme, as it recounts Fuller's journey back to Africa as an adult?<sup>42</sup> The choice these authors have made to write autobiographies suggests a recognizable value of the mode for representing postcolonial trauma in spite of—even, perhaps, *because* of—the ways in which their experiences challenge or work in opposition its conventions.

Firstly, employment of the autobiographical mode locates each of these narratives within the context of identity loss and re-formation. These texts powerfully communicate the struggle to live surrounded by violence, faced with dispossession and in isolation from family and community. The intimacy of each narrative assists in capturing the *felt* experience of a personal trauma and the struggle to re-establish a coherent sense of personal identity. This is not just evident at the levels of content and theme, but also in the ways in which the autobiographical mode itself is employed. This

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<sup>42</sup> In *Scribbling the Cat*, (London: Pan Macmillan, 2005), Fuller explores the Rhodesian war from an adult perspective. In this text, Fuller seeks further understanding of her involvement in the war, examining its long-term impact on her life and the lives of others. In writing again about her childhood (albeit from a different angle), Fuller reveals a fixation with Africa and her past which is likely to influence much of her work.

is exemplified through Fuller's use of a child narrator, which separates the author, narrator and protagonist figures; it is also evident in the emphasis upon interiority and self-disclosure in *I Saw Ramallah* and *The Tiger Ladies*.

Secondly, Koul, Barghouti and Fuller all utilize the literary components of the mode, such as characterization, structure, and style, in order to reconstruct the past (or at least their memories of it) in powerful ways. Literary tropes of exile recur throughout each narrative, typified in *I Saw Ramallah*, where the relationship between history and memory is destabilized by a self-conscious, haunting, stream of consciousness prose. Barghouti's meditations show the exilic mind returning again and again to an original moment of departure, which shapes and undermines linear and sequential memory. To the extent that the narrative itself is characterized by absences and elisions (particularly of closure), Barghouti can be seen to appropriate the experience of dislocation as an autobiographical trope. In this way, he uses autobiography to highlight the impact of trauma upon an individual. The unconscious aspects of traumatic experience as an abnormal form of memory which fragments the self and returns to haunt the survivor can be seen at a formal level within the style and structure of the text. This powerfully communicates his trauma to the reader.

Furthermore, the claim to factual status which is part of the autobiographical mode supports the authenticity of each of these narratives and increases their value. Barghouti, Fuller and Koul represent similar struggles faced by many living in exile from Palestine, Southern Africa and the Indian subcontinent. Although the generalities of these events have been recorded in history books, these narratives describe the personal experiences of real individuals whose personal experiences enhance our understanding of the traumatic nature of dispossession and forced exile. Thus such

narratives should be recognized as valuable contributions to historical discourse.

Furthermore, the combination of its claim to truthfulness and its literary component further increases the value of autobiography, as it makes the mode a particularly attractive option for writers like Barghouti, who wish to explore historical events using poetic language.

In addition, the current popularity of autobiography means that these writers may be more likely to gain an audience if they represent their experiences in this form. However, the process of re-creating scenes from the past—often of childhood in the homeland—from a displaced viewpoint may also become something of a poignant, myth-making enterprise. Fuller and Koul's contrasting narratives of childhood exemplify this point. Where Koul depicts an idyllic childhood that evokes in her a nostalgic longing, Fuller focuses on the infringement of the childhood domain by menacing external forces. These different emphases can be clearly linked to the way the past is filtered by the dislocations of time and space. Thus Koul's efforts to re-create a lost homeland show her attempting to counter the way western media presents Kashmir as a bloodbath of internal factions and needless violence. In contrast, Fuller locates herself at the crossroads of Zimbabwean history, allied neither to the colonial past, nor fully to the new nation, which, at the time she was writing this autobiography, was unravelling both politically and economically under the rule of Robert Mugabe. The tension between utopic and dystopic representations of the past which is present in both *The Tiger Ladies*, and *Don't Let's Go To The Dogs Tonight* captures the chaos of transitions from colonial rule to independence, and powerfully communicates these writers' ambivalence towards change. Whitlock suggests that this aspect of postcolonial experience is often replicated at a formal level within childhood autobiographies on the subject, which are regularly informed by a tension between utopian and dystopian modes of writing:

Memories of colonial childhoods draw on each of these modes and exist in tension between them. Through the child-self the autobiographer can access estranged styles of writing, that is to say a narrative which pursues a transformative rather than a realistic reference to the empirical environment.<sup>43</sup>

Whitlock argues that the use of a child's perspective enables writers to explore their feelings of ambivalence towards postcolonial subjectivity.<sup>44</sup> As a dystopian discourse, Fuller's voicing of the child-self is particularly striking for the meaning it gives to her present identity, and the way it reveals her retrospective understanding of the self.<sup>45</sup> In her case, as in Koul's, the attempt to reconcile present and past selves is challenged by the fragmentation of identity which has occurred during an experience of trauma. This further informs the tension between utopian and dystopian discourses within the narratives. In the light of the traumatic ruptures they experience, Koul's idyllic representation of Kashmir becomes a retrospective examination of a once whole, coherent identity, whilst Fuller's familial account explores the absence of the security, harmony and empowerment necessary for healthy psychic development.

This leads us to consider a further advantage of using autobiography to represent postcolonial trauma, which is the role it plays in facilitating some form of catharsis, or reconciliation for the writers concerned. Suzette Henke argues that, '[a]utobiography could so effectively mimic the scene of psychoanalysis that life-writing might provide a therapeutic alternative for victims of severe anxiety and, more seriously, of post-

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<sup>43</sup> Whitlock, *Intimate Empire*, 180.

<sup>44</sup> Whitlock, *Intimate Empire*, 180.

<sup>45</sup> Fuller has described how '[In this text] what I wanted to show people is that if you're a kid in war you have no idea what's going on. You try to make sense of it the best you can, but you can't really explain it; you don't have the vocabulary for it yet.' Weich 'Back to Africa with Alexandra Fuller.' Her narrative encapsulates Whitlock's theory that:

The eutopian idea of childhood represents it as a mythic, autonomous world, apart from history, which implies the knowledge of difference, desire and danger. And yet as autobiographical writing is used by those who have not been authoritative or dominant, the more likely it is that the narration of childhood will be dystopian and include the incursions of history and conflict rather than a pre-adolescent idyll.

Whitlock, *Intimate Empire*, 181.

traumatic stress disorder.’<sup>46</sup> These narratives show how this process may be enacted through autobiography, as an individual engages directly with the past, allowing it to ‘re-live’ itself, whilst remaining in some way detached from events by placing them within a text. In this way, these texts can be seen to engage with the process of ‘working through’ outlined by Freud.

Despite these advantages, the use of autobiography to represent postcolonial trauma is also problematic. Barghouti, Fuller and Koul all, in various ways, defy the focus on individualism which has come to characterize the autobiographical mode, particularly in the West. They do so in their dual focus on individual and collective experiences, in their attempts to represent minority groups as well as themselves, and in their interest in the interrelatedness of personal and political realms. They also formally interrogate the traditional model of the unified “I” of the autobiographical pact more specifically, using split, fragmented narrative voices and child narrators. In addition, each writer challenges the simple notion that personal articulations of the past may lead to reconciliation and healing. All three writers draw attention to a traumatic experience which they feel requires greater attention. They use autobiography to gain recognition for the sufferings of marginalized peoples as well as traumatized individuals. In so doing, they tie the individual and the group together. In Koul’s text, this means that her own recovery, which appears to begin in the process of narration itself, is incomplete and bittersweet because she remains disconnected from Kashmir and the Kashmiri people; Fuller begins to explore the collective ramifications of her experiences in her autobiography—in particular through her use of language to voice different groups’ experiences—and this focus is developed in her later work; Barghouti refuses to ‘move on’ from the past as part of his commitment to fight for Palestinian recognition. His pain

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<sup>46</sup> Suzette Henke, *Shattered Subjects* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1998), xii–xiii.

is his weapon—it spurs him on to further his political cause. However, this emphasis subverts the focus upon the individual which has conventionally been associated with autobiography, and disturbs the genre’s most vital component: the ‘autobiographical pact,’ between author, protagonist and narrator. This threatens the validity of the narratives in question, and weakens their claim to autobiographical status. It is also problematic, because each of these authors is relatively privileged. Whilst their social status’ have helped them to gain agency to speak out about their experiences using the autobiographical mode, none is truly representative of those they seek to typify.

These tensions are not simply part of the complexities involved in narrating trauma; they mark the challenges of speaking out against oppression, of resisting silencing, and of highlighting experiences of suffering which are frequently ignored because they implicate the West. For this reason, whilst the relationship between individual and collective in these texts is problematic for the process of writing autobiographically, it is central to representing experiences of postcolonialism. It is paradoxical that the postcolonial autobiographies in this chapter attempt to counter the ubiquity of individualism as a trope of western consciousness using a literary form which has conventionally celebrated the individual and his or her achievements. In their choice to do so, each shows an awareness of the relationship between autobiography as a form of self-representation and its value as a cultural commodity. After all, as I have already noted, this relationship has always influenced who has the ‘right’ to autobiographical representation, or who may gain the opportunity to speak for themselves. Each of these writers has obtained, through different means, a measure of cultural authority which helps them to gain a readership for their narratives. Furthermore, both Koul and Fuller ‘package’ their narratives for a western audience by writing in English. These writers use autobiography to engage readers with powerful

experiences, taking full advantage of the mode's current popularity in order to explore both their own pasts, and the histories of the nation-spaces to which they belong. The resultant narratives are beautifully complex, engaging discourses that explore selfhood, its deconstruction, and reformation. Whilst they do not resolve the recurring questions regarding the autobiographical mode, they show that it provides a valuable genre in which to explore traumatic experiences of postcolonial identity.



## 2. Testimonio

*'Testimonio' is not only a text. It is a project of social justice in which text is an instrument.<sup>1</sup>*

*A witness to unspeakable pain can offer the reality principle, the pinch that hurts but attests to a history beyond mad dreams. A witness, therefore, does not dismiss a victim's silence, but understands that silence has been a sanctuary as well as a prison. Testimony begins there and cautiously moves outward, as if someone is really listening.<sup>2</sup>*

### Introducing Testimonio

Testimonio (or testimonial narrative) is often considered to be a sub-branch of autobiography. This is because, like autobiography, testimonio is a nonfictional mode of representation which makes the claim that its content is factually verifiable; like autobiography, testimonio focuses on personal experience and employs first person narration; and, like autobiography, testimonios tend to be retrospective narratives which recount significant life experiences or events. The similarities between testimonio and autobiography—which sometimes leads to a conflation of the different terms<sup>3</sup>—can be seen in John Beverley's description of testimonio as 'a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet [...] form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually "life" or a significant life experience.'<sup>4</sup> However, there are a number of features which distinguish this form of writing from life-writing modes such as the memoir and autobiography.

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<sup>1</sup> Kimberly A. Nance, *Can Literature Promote Justice? Trauma Narrative and Social Action in Latin American Testimonio* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Doris Sommer, *Proceed With Caution: A Rhetoric of Particularism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 181.

<sup>3</sup> For example, when a testimonio is marketed as a memoir or as an autobiography, possibly to attract a wider readership.

<sup>4</sup> John Beverley, *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 30-1.

Firstly, as the term itself indicates, the testimonio mode is associated with the legal context of a courtroom. John Beverley writes that:

The Spanish word *testimonio* translates literally as “testimony,” as in the act of testifying of bearing witness in a legal or religious sense. [...] In testimonio, [...] it is the intentionality of the narrator that is paramount. The situation of narration in testimonio has to involve an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, implicated in the act of narration itself. The position of the reader of testimonio is akin to that of a jury member in a courtroom.<sup>5</sup>

The legal or pseudo-legal aspects of testimonio are central to the socially and politically charged nature of this narrative mode of witnessing. Consequently, testimonio tends to make stronger truth claims than autobiography; its claim to factual status is more recognizable and often more credible. In addition, insofar as it accurately narrates events, testimonio contributes to historical record. This is particularly important when testimonios narrate histories which might otherwise remain ‘hidden,’ for example, honour killings (which have become the subject for a number of testimonios in recent years<sup>6</sup>), and contexts of genocide, which are frequently concealed, or go undocumented.

Secondly, testimonio tends to be less concerned with literariness, or art, than autobiography.<sup>7</sup> This mode conventionally rejects the literary or academic aspirations, which are a component of autobiographical writing, in order to emphasize the content of the text and the narrator’s reliability as a victim or witness. A testimonio will therefore often be narrated in a simple, chronological way. Events may be reported dispassionately, placing a greater emphasis on detail and context than on the emotional

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<sup>5</sup> Beverley, 32.

<sup>6</sup> These include *Burned Alive*, by Souad (in collaboration with Marie-Thérèse Cuny), and Norma Khouri’s *Forbidden Love: A Harrowing True Story of Love and Revenge in Jordan*.

<sup>7</sup> See Beverley, 32.

responses or personal opinions of the narrator. This allows the reader to follow the narrator's experiences closely as if they, too, were present. It also helps to authenticate the narrator's claim to victim or survivor status. The emphasis upon sincerity and authorial intention (rather than literary aspects such as characterization, plot, style, and structure) also underpins testimonio's claim to credibility.

Furthermore, where autobiography traditionally focuses on the 'unique,' individuating subject and its self-expression, testimonio tends to be more concerned with the individual as a member of society (often a particular community, or ethnic group). Beverley identifies the primary focus of testimonial writing as being upon the collective aspects of identity, or 'an affirmation of the individual self in a collective mode.'<sup>8</sup> Individual experiences may therefore serve to reflect a wider context. Testimonio writers often seek to create a parallel between themselves and the group by emphasizing their 'ordinariness,' as unremarkable citizens who—along with many others—became caught up in an exceptional situation. This helps readers to respond with greater empathy. Smith and Watson write that: 'The testimonio unfolds through the fashioning of an *exemplary* protagonist whose narrative bears witness to *collective* suffering, politicized struggle, and *communal* survival. [my emphases]'<sup>9</sup> This shapes the role played by the autobiographical "I". Beverley suggests that, 'in testimonio the narrative "I" has the status of what linguists call a shifter—a linguistic function that can be assumed indiscriminately by anyone.'<sup>10</sup> Doris Sommer agrees; she claims that the connection between the individual and the group is central to the testimonio mode, and

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<sup>8</sup> Beverley, 35.

<sup>9</sup> Smith and Watson, 70-1.

<sup>10</sup> Beverley, 40. According to Beverley, testimonio resists—or functions in opposition to—what might be considered conventional narrative form: 'The narrator in testimonio [...] speaks for, or in the name of, a community or group, approximating in this way the symbolic function of the epic hero, without at the same time assuming the epic hero's hierarchical and patriarchal status. [...] Another way of putting this would be to define testimonio as a nonfictional, popular-democratic form of epic narrative.' Beverley, 33.

is a distinction between testimonio and autobiography: ‘Unlike the lonely moment of autobiographical writing, testimonies are public events. Autobiography strains to produce a personal and distinctive *style*, and testimonial strives to preserve or to renew an interpersonal *rhetoric*. That rhetoric suspends the interchangeable “I” of autobiography.’<sup>11</sup>

Fourthly, its emphasis upon bearing witness to collective experience means that testimonio is often political in aspiration. Slavery, oppression, genocidal experience, poverty, and persecution are common themes within testimonio; this more political focus implies that the mode might be more suited to mediate marginal experiences such as postcolonialism than autobiography, which is used to cover a wide range of subjects and has historically had an emphasis on a certain kind of autobiographical subject.<sup>12</sup> This distinction is supported by the consolidation of the genre in Latin America in the 1960s as part of movements for national liberation, and the most famous example of the form: Rigoberta Menchú’s *I, Rigoberta Menchú: an Indian Woman in Guatemala* (1984).<sup>13</sup> In this narrative, Rigoberta Menchú seeks to represent the suffering of the Quiche people, an indigenous group from northern Guatemala. Menchú’s narrative helped to raise the profile of the injustice done to the Quiche people, and in 1992 she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her activist work on their behalf. Whilst the testimonio has become associated with Latin American writing, its practice of resistance, its rejection of western hegemony, and its focus on marginal subject matter and forms suggests that this is a valuable mode for those seeking to represent

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<sup>11</sup> Sommer, 132-133.

<sup>12</sup> Even when an autobiography (such as *I Saw Ramallah*) explores political issues, these tend to be filtered through individual reflections and mediated by poetic language. The emphasis on simple, straightforward narration in testimonial narratives means that events appear to be recorded exactly as they happened.

<sup>13</sup> Whilst the form has long existed in variant forms, it coalesced as a new narrative genre in Latin America in the 1960s. Its importance to Latin American culture is such that Beverley argues ‘in recent years [testimonio] has become an important, perhaps the dominant, form of literary narrative in Latin America.’ Beverley, 45.

postcolonial trauma. Smith and Watson suggest that: ‘Testimonios inscribe a collective “I” that voices stories of repression and calls for resistance in ways that have influenced political struggle around the globe.’<sup>14</sup>

Another distinctive feature of testimonio is its frequent emphasis upon establishing a sense of complicity between the reader and narrator. Testimonios often seek to collapse the distance which separates writers from their readership in order to assist in a narrator’s demand for a response to group suffering or oppression. This is achieved through the employment of first person, present tense narration; in some testimonios a narrator may adopt a conversational style and address the reader directly.

The opening passage of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* exemplifies this technique:

My name is Rigoberta Menchú. I am twenty-three years old. This is my testimony. I didn’t learn it from a book and I didn’t learn it alone. I’d like to stress that it’s not only *my* life, it’s also the testimony of my people. It’s hard for me to remember everything that’s happened to me in my life since there have been many very bad times but, yes, moments of joy as well. The important thing is that what has happened to me has happened to many other people too: My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people.<sup>15</sup>

In this passage, Menchú uses a simple prose style to engage her readers’ sense of justice and ethics; she encourages them to identify with her and with her story, which she claims to be representative of ‘all poor Guatemalans.’ In testimonio, the testifying ‘voice’ speaks out from a position of exclusion—in fact, the very act of speaking out often represents a victory over the way oppression has silenced them in the past. The reader, in turn, is required to respond with sympathy, anger, or action; their identification with the narrator and his or her plight is central to the aspirations of the

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<sup>14</sup> Smith and Watson, 107.

<sup>15</sup> Rigoberta Menchú, with Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian woman in Guatemala*, trans. Ann Wright (London: Verso, 1984), 1.

mode. This is exemplified in the case of *Burned Alive*, by “Souad”<sup>16</sup> in collaboration with Marie-Thérèse Cuny. *Burned Alive* has been described as the ‘*first true* account ever published by a victim of an honor crime.[sic]’<sup>17</sup> In the text, Souad expresses a desire to promote an NGO, the Surgir Foundation which rescued her as an important motivating factor for the production of this narrative. She writes: ‘I was dying when Jacqueline [Thibault, her patron] arrived in that West Bank hospital. I owe her my life, and the work she pursues with Surgir requires a living witness to demonstrate to other people the reality of the honour crime.’<sup>18</sup> The implied reader is confirmed at the end of the book, with an appeal for donations to the organization both from Souad, and from Thibault, who describes her hope ‘to continue working to save other Souads.’<sup>19</sup> This exemplifies the way in which the political emphasis of the testimonio and its urgent call for a response mean that these narratives tend to attract a different kind of reader than autobiography, by targeting, for example, those who may be motivated to feel compassionate and act on behalf of oppressed peoples. This text also highlights the role testimonio may play in developing and maintaining the practice of international human rights and solidarity movements.

In her distinction between memoir and testimony, Gillian Whitlock offers an interesting way to set the texts in this chapter apart from the autobiographical narratives explored in chapter one. She writes that,

These two autobiographical forms of narrating a life in history—testimony and memoir—might be understood as diametrically opposed yet interdependent in the textual cultures of life narrative. The memoir is traditionally the prerogative of the literate elite; alternatively, the testimony is the means by which the disempowered experience enters the record,

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<sup>16</sup> Souad is a pseudonym taken by the author to protect her true identity.

<sup>17</sup> Whitlock, *Soft Weapons*, 123.

<sup>18</sup> Souad, 176.

<sup>19</sup> Souad, 185.

although not necessarily under conditions of their choosing. Both are preoccupied with placing the self in the records of public and official history. Quite different histories and experiences are brought into the public record by these genres.<sup>20</sup>

Where autobiography is a literary form of self-representation, testimonio may incorporate oral narratives. Consequently, testimonios are often collaborative projects. Their narrators are usually not writers; they may even be illiterate and require a professional writer or 'interlocutor' to help them present their stories in narrative form. The role of an interlocutor may involve tape-recording and then transcribing and collating an oral account; alternatively, it may require editing a written account into a suitable narrative form. Beverley writes that, 'the assumed lack of writing ability or skill on the part of the narrator of the testimonio [...] contributes to the 'truth effect' the form generates.'<sup>21</sup> This aspect of the mode leads Beverley to describe testimonio as an 'antiliterary' or 'extraliterary' form of discourse, because it comes into being at the margins of the historically given institution of literature.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the distinction Whitlock notes here between the 'literate elite' and those who are 'disempowered' reflects the way that testimonio is frequently used by individuals on the margins of cultural discourse. For social, political, racial, or other reasons, these individuals may have to struggle to gain cultural authority to represent themselves.<sup>23</sup> Even where an individual is literate, they may require some form of mediation in order to reach their desired audience. The need for some kind of mediation—for example, through transcribing, co-writing, or an interlocutor figure—is an important distinction between autobiography and testimonio.

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<sup>20</sup> Whitlock, *Soft Weapons*, 132.

<sup>21</sup> Beverley, 33.

<sup>22</sup> Beverley, 42.

<sup>23</sup> For example, as the texts in this chapter will demonstrate, individuals of relatively privileged social status within their own communities may have to struggle to represent themselves in the West, especially if they do not speak fluent English.

In the rest of this chapter I will be examining three testimonios, each of which recounts an experience of suffering during genocide or war in a postcolonial context. The three contexts explored in these narratives—Cambodia, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone—all have a legacy of colonial rule, which has contributed to the conflicts depicted. Each of these testimonios can be clearly seen to represent the sufferings of a group of people who have experienced much loss, and great trauma. That their intended audiences are western is evident in their use of the English language, despite the fact that none speak it as their first language. Indeed, two of the writers in this chapter (Haing Ngor and Immaculée Ilibagiza) produced their work with the help of co-writers (Roger Warner and Steve Erwin, respectively). Ishmael Beah wrote his narrative in English following his emigration to the United States whilst at Oberlin College. He received close assistance from a creative writing professor, David Chaon, who helped Beah craft his narrative into a suitable form and who can be seen to assist in the mediation of Beah's experience. Whilst each of these narrators have some level of authority over their work, there is an ambiguity over the roles played by these interlocutors who, in combination with editors, publishers and other 'supporters', have been instrumental in helping them obtain publication.

In this chapter I will draw upon Whitlock's reading of Gérard Genette's theory of "paratexts," in order to evaluate the importance of the liminal features that surround and cover narratives, assisting in their transition from narratives to 'become' commercial texts.<sup>24</sup> Genette identifies two aspects of a "paratext": the peritext, and the epitext.

These elements are described by Gillian Whitlock in the following way:

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<sup>24</sup> Genette writes that 'although we do not always know whether these productions [paratexts] are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to present it, in the usual sense of the verb but also in the strongest sense: to make present, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its "reception" and consumption in the form [...] of a book.' Gérard Genette, *Paratexts; Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1997), 1.



The first, “peritext,” includes everything between and on the covers, and reading the covers of life narrative is particularly important here. The second, “epitext,” are the elements outside of the bound volume: interviews, correspondence, reviews, commentaries, and so on. By introducing these thresholds into interpretation, we can track the textual cultures of autobiography, and these are a vital component of any enquiry into cross-cultural routes of contemporary life narrative. Textual critique needs to be immersed in a thoroughgoing sense of the material processes and ideological formations surrounding the production, transmission, and reception of autobiographical texts: these are the vital components of textual cultures.<sup>25</sup>

In my analysis of these texts, I pay specific attention to the way in which paratexts and epitexts affect the production of testimonial narratives. I will explore whether these features, which mediate testimonios to their implied readers, enhance or impede the attempts of these trauma victims to gain authority and agency to represent their experiences.

### I. Haing Ngor with Roger Warner: *Survival in the Killing Fields*

Before readers are able to become absorbed in the terrifying world of the Cambodian genocide as told by Haing Ngor they must peel away several layers of paratextual interpretation which surround this text. ‘The best book on Cambodia that has ever been published,’<sup>26</sup> claims one critic on the front cover; another—on the inside cover—announces that this is ‘a story so essential to our understanding that it deserves to be considered one of the most important autobiographies of our time.’<sup>27</sup> Ngor’s narrative, which testifies to five years living under the Khmer Rouge, receives overwhelming praise in each of the fifteen reviews quoted. From even a quick glimpse

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<sup>25</sup> Whitlock, *Soft Weapons*, 14.

<sup>26</sup> T.D. Allman, *Chicago Tribune*, quoted in Haing Ngor with Roger Warner, *Survival in the Killing Fields* (London: Constable & Robinson, 2003), front cover.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted from *Los Angeles Times*, in Ngor (inlay page).

at the 2003 edition, a reader cannot fail to recognize the historical and cultural value of this text, which was one of the first to recount life in Cambodia between 1975 and 1979 from a personal viewpoint.<sup>28</sup> On the cover, a male figure is pictured, surrounded by a sea of skulls and bones. He looks emaciated, he is dressed in rags and wears a haggard look of hardened horror. It is an image which has become synonymous with the Cambodian genocide or the ‘killing fields,’ where the Khmer Rouge murdered Cambodians who defied or did not fit in with their communist system of work camps.<sup>29</sup> However, it must be noted that this is not an image from the genocide itself; rather, it is an image of Haing Ngor playing a Cambodian holocaust survivor named Dith Pran, in a Hollywood feature film entitled *The Killing Fields* (1984). This film reconstructed the traumatic wartime experiences of Pran between 1975 to 1979, which had already been reported by journalist Sydney Schanberg in an article in *The New York Times Magazine* in 1980. This film was subsequently lauded as the most significant film on Cambodia ever to have been made and Ngor was awarded an Academy Award for his role.<sup>30</sup> The title of Ngor’s testimony, together with his image on the cover, can therefore be seen to refer not only to Ngor’s experiences in the Cambodian ‘killing fields,’ but also to Dith Pran. The title also refers to the film itself, which transformed Ngor’s life and helped him to gain the voice to speak of his experiences. Implicit in this latter link is a reference to the very process of testifying, or retelling experiences of trauma. In case the reader should miss this intertextual link, they are reminded at the bottom of the cover that this narrative is ‘By Academy Award winning Haing Ngor with Roger Warner.’

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<sup>28</sup> This text was first published in 1987 as *A Cambodian Odyssey* and was re-published in 2003 under its present title. Other more recent titles include *First they Killed My Father* by Loung Ung (2001) and Chanrithy Him’s *When Broken Glass Floats* (2001).

<sup>29</sup> Some have dubbed this regime as one of “autogenocide” to explain the Khmer Rouge attempt to kill or at least work to death the majority of the Cambodian population.

<sup>30</sup> In *The Killing Fields* Dith Pran is depicted as a hero who selflessly dedicates himself to his job as translator and assistant for American journalist Sydney Schanberg. Together, the two seek to report the impact of the Vietnam war on Cambodia until Cambodia itself collapses and all westerners are forced to leave. Separated from his family and Sydney, Pran is forced to work in a labour camp for the Khmer Rouge. Eventually he manages to escape, and reaches Thailand where he is reunited with Schanberg.

The wealth of paratextual references here should alert a reader to the various ways in which this testimony might be used and appropriated. For example, there is evidence that this text will function as, variously, a marketing tool for the film; an exercise in self-promotion for Ngor; an exploration of an individual's experience of genocide and his subsequent attempt to recover and assimilate into North American society; an account of the genocide itself; and a history of modern Cambodia. Perhaps most pertinent to this discussion is the question of the various ways in which this 'ordinary' victim of atrocity has been given agency to testify to his experiences in the first place, and how the paratexts evident here might mediate the text in question (helpfully or otherwise) to its intended audience. These layers of interpretation—the reviews, the link to *The Killing Fields*, Ngor's own image, and the mention of the U.S. journalist and historian Roger Warner—serve several aims. They convey the authenticity of the events recounted. They endorse Haing Ngor as a trustworthy narrator whose testimonio is worthy of a reader's attentions. They help to establish Ngor as a representative for all Cambodian survivors of this genocide. To a certain extent, Ngor appears to participate in this representation, as he explains in the text's dedication (which, in the 2003 edition, is the only part of the text to be written in Khmer, and translated into English below): 'I want to dedicate this book to the memories of my [family members], who have died in the most miserable, uncivilized, and inhuman ways under the Khmer communist regime. I have written this book for the world to better understand communism and other regimes in Cambodia.'<sup>31</sup> This dedication might serve to allay readers' concerns over the derivative nature of the project, as Ngor outlines his personal motive to educate others about Cambodia, and draw attention to its troubles. This demand for attention is

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<sup>31</sup> Haing Ngor with Roger Warner, *Survival in the Killing Fields* (London: Constable & Robinson, 2003), dedication. Further references to *Survival in the Killing Fields* are given after quotations in the text.

typical of the testimonio mode, as is Ngor's claim to speak on behalf of Cambodians who have not gained agency to speak for themselves.

The power of this testimonial narrative is founded upon an empathic relationship between the readers and Haing Ngor. This empathy is partially engendered through the paratextual elements of the narrative, and in particular, through the link between Ngor and Dith Pran, which I have suggested is established on the front cover. This link is developed within the text, particularly in the latter section, where Ngor describes his experiences of playing Pran in the film. Ngor suggests that the two identities were conflated by the public during the making of *The Killing Fields*, so that both he and Pran are received by the western media as representative Cambodian figures: 'To my surprise, much of the media's attention [on the *The Killing Fields*] focused on me. Through the movie I had become a sort of symbol for Cambodia and its suffering. Or rather Pran and I became a symbol together, because people were always confusing our names.' (489-90) This narrative builds upon the actions profiled in *The Killing Fields*, which depicted Pran as a heroic and courageous figure who selflessly dedicated himself to serving the ends of others.<sup>32</sup> To this end, readers engaging with *Survival in the Killing Fields* may expect it to narrate a similar story of courage and selfless determination. However, the narrative itself does not support this identification. Instead, Haing Ngor represents himself as a headstrong, self-serving individual whose survival was dearly bought at the cost of nearly all his family members. In contrast to the conventional victim/hero figure which is exemplified by Dith Pran, Ngor is rebellious, stubborn, and prone to angry outbursts. Even before the genocide he describes himself as being, whilst essentially decent, not particularly likeable. As a young child, he is

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<sup>32</sup> This link was cemented when the title of the text's early editions, *A Cambodian Odyssey* (1987), was replaced by its current title in 2003.

easily angered, frequently rebelling against the wishes of his parents, such that when violence enters Phnom Penh he is able to draw upon his childhood experiences of fighting in gangs. As an adult, he is charming, yet devious and immature. For example, he describes how when he is courting Huoy (his future spouse), he plays several tricks on her to test her devotion, even though he knows that she is loyal, whilst he is frequently unfaithful to her.

Throughout the narrative, Ngor emphasizes his own humanity, and dismisses any notion of heroism in his actions. This is important for a number of reasons. First, by emphasizing his 'ordinariness,' Ngor communicates to the reader the deeply traumatic nature of his experiences. He underlines how ill-equipped and unprepared he was to deal with the fall of Phnom Penh and the shock of the forced evacuation, which took him from his home with no belongings or provisions. He describes his shock at seeing others slaughtered and the fear he experienced when he was forced to steal food in order to survive. In addition, he describes his battles with dysentery, malnutrition, overwork and injuries. As he describes the harsh working conditions, the lack of food, the 'disappearances' of those who displeased the regime, and, most horrifically, his own experiences of torture,<sup>33</sup> it becomes evident that his own survival is miraculous, and unusual. Later, he lists recognizable signs of trauma, and suggests many Cambodians experienced similar symptoms:

It was clear that there was a massive mental health problem among Cambodian refugees [living in the U.S.]. I understood it because I had had my share of mental problems too. We had all been traumatized by our experiences. We had all lost parents or brothers or children. Many of us had horrible dreams, night after night. We felt isolated and depressed and

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<sup>33</sup> Ngor is tortured three times as the Khmer Rouge try to force him to confess that he is a military doctor (a career which they particularly despised) so that they can kill him.

unable to trust anyone. What made it worse was that we were in a culture totally unlike our own. (465)

Secondly, Ngor's narrative suggests that it was his lack of heroism, rather than any extraordinary acts of courage, which helped him to survive five years living under the Khmer Rouge. This is exemplified in the way he conceals his identity to avoid being recognized as a member of the educated classes of Cambodia, and a former military doctor. When the Khmer Rouge take over Phnom Penh in 1975, Dr. Ngor is in the middle of performing an operation. As the militia enter the hospital looking for doctors, Ngor quickly leaves the theatre and exits the hospital in civilian dress, abandoning a patient on the operating table with his body cavity still open. Later, when living in the work camp, Ngor hides his medical knowledge by burying his books in the ground, hiding his eyeglasses, and pretending to be an uneducated taxi driver. In these incidents, the emphasis upon humanity rather than heroism supports Ngor's claim to validity. As one reviewer has noted:

What really gives this account its credibility is Dr. Ngor's honesty; an honesty so painful that at times the reader cringes to think what it must cost him to express it. Like all holocaust survivors, he carries the guilt of the living. Dr. Ngor's sorrow shadows his own successes and permeates his memoir. A lesser man would have remembered such scenes to better personal advantage, at least in public. [...] He never excuses himself for having been unready to face the unfaceable. Perhaps a more perfect man would have behaved differently when confronted with critical choices of conscience—but that more perfect man probably would not have survived.<sup>34</sup>

However, whilst Ngor survives the threat of his own exposure, his attempts to do so lead indirectly to the deaths of several others, including a small child whom he watches being injected with a fatal dose of the wrong medicine, and his wife, who dies

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<sup>34</sup> Rod Nordland, 'Death Camps in Every Village,' *The New York Times*, 21st February 1988 <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=940DE0D61E30F932A15751C0A96E948260>> [accessed 17th September].

in childbirth due to malnutrition. In this way, Ngor emphasizes the real cost of his survival, which he believes came at the expense of his mental well-being, in addition to the loss of so many of his family and friends. Throughout the text, this cost is explored through an interesting parallel Ngor creates between himself and his wife, Huoy. Huoy is depicted as being an angelic, sweet woman. Her gentle nature and selflessness are frequently contrasted with Ngor's character. Huoy gives Ngor her own food although she is starving, and always prefers his needs to her own. When she dies, he blames himself, 'A doctor, specially trained in delivering children, unable to save his own wife during childbirth. [...] An echo rang accusingly, 'My fault! My fault! My fault!' (359). This is not his only regret; Ngor describes how Huoy had urged him more than once to consider to leave Cambodia prior to the fall of Phnom Penh. He feels deeply responsible for the fatal consequences of his decision to stay: 'If I had listened to her, and if I had shown more leadership, I could have saved my entire family. But I hadn't, and they died' (416). It is this guilt, finally, which provides the concluding thought to his narrative, which ends 'our lives did not turn out the way we planned. [Huoy's] life ended too soon. And I will never be forgiven by my memories' (502).

Ngor's remorse and self-condemnation at surviving his family is typical of 'survivor's guilt,' a sentiment which recurs throughout Holocaust testimonies. In these narratives, survivors frequently blame themselves for events over which they had no control or responsibility.<sup>35</sup> In this text, Ngor's guilt represents a response to an extended traumatic encounter—including his experiences of torture—which he is unable to deal

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<sup>35</sup> Lawrence Langer, a critic of Holocaust literature, writes that

One of the most discouraging features of [Holocaust testimonies] is the frequency with which witnesses blame themselves for consequences of which, as it seems to us, they are perfectly innocent. Repeatedly we hear survivors declare their guilt, for not having done enough, for having made mistaken choices, too soon or too late, as if the tidal wave of German hatred that was sweeping over them was *their* fault. This is perhaps the bitterest and most ironic legacy of the Holocaust: the spectacle of innocent victims assuming the guilt that their persecutors disowned both during and after the war.

Lawrence Langer, 'Foreword' in Joshua W. Greene and Shiva Kumar, *Witness* (London: Free Press, 2000), xi-xix. (xvii).

with directly. This belatedness is implied the first time he witnesses atrocity firsthand, when his friend, a Cambodian journalist named Sam Kwil, disappears:

I do not know how many miles I walked that day. My feet had taken control of my body.

My body had taken over my brain.

It was better to walk than think. Better to do almost anything than think. Poor Kwil. How

they had grabbed him and dragged him away. I had done nothing. Don't think about it, I

told myself. Just stay on the move [...]. If he is not dead now he will be soon. Stay

detached, I told myself. Save the emotions for later. Concentrate on staying alive and

finding the family. They took him and I did nothing. Nothing to do. Just keep walking [...].

Clubbing him with their rifles. [...] We are helpless, helpless, helpless. We cannot struggle

against them. We can only evade them and hope someone else dies in our place. Don't think

about it. Hide the emotions inside, and keep walking. To survive.'(109)

The disjointed nature of this passage effectively communicates Ngor's struggle to know how to deal with what he has seen. It also communicates something of his efforts to detach himself from his experiences, an instinct which is commonly associated with trauma. The dispassionate style evident here is emblematic of the text as a whole, which describes events in a simple, chronological way. Ngor does not make use of literary allusions or stylized language, and the absence of dramatic language or pretension within the narrative supports its claim to credibility; it endorses the notion that this account is a candid portrayal of his experiences and forcefully communicates his personal relationship with the genocide. It reminds the reader that this is not an extraordinary or special individual but one of many who were forced to live and work in inhuman conditions.

Interestingly, Ngor's rejection of heroism facilitates a dissection of the precarious boundary between victims and perpetrators. He does not attempt to justify his own



actions during the regime; indeed, he considers whether the root cause of the genocide was embedded within Cambodian culture, in particular the desire for revenge, which he calls *kum*: 'If I hit you with my fist and you wait five years and then shoot me in the back one dark night, that is *kum*. [...] It is the infection that grows in our national soul' (9-10). This punitive mentality suggests that anyone can become a killer if sufficiently provoked. It puts emphasis upon the dark side of human nature, recognition of which leaves Ngor with constant feelings of guilt and self-reproach: 'Deep, deep within me there was a dark and violent streak, the same as in most Cambodians. On this instinctive level, perhaps, the Khmer Rouge and I were not so different' (321). This is shown most clearly at the moment of Cambodia's liberation, when Ngor describes how easily victims were remade as murderers during a revenge killing:

Like flies to a meal, people emerged from the roadside and ran toward the prisoner. I ran toward him too. 'One time each!' his captors yelled to us. 'You must take turns! Please! Each person can hit him only once!' The crowd pressed in. Even the women took their turns hitting him with their fists.

'Stand aside,' I said. The crowd parted to give me room. I stepped in quickly and kicked high and hard between the prisoner's legs.' (389)

I have suggested that readers' sympathies with Ngor are engendered through the mediations of reviews, commentaries and paratexts, which endorse and supplement the text's central meaning. Whilst these do not necessarily cohere with the actual content of the narrative, on the whole the epitexts and paratexts which surround the text affirm its value, and commend Ngor to readers. However, at the end of the narrative, a 13-page epilogue by the Ngor's co-writer Roger Warner shows that the relationship between Ngor, and the paratexts which accompany it is not at all straightforward. In 1996, Ngor was found dead outside his Los Angeles apartment. He had received two bullet wounds, one to the right leg and a second to the chest. In editions published since Ngor's death,

Roger Warner has added this epilogue with the ostensible objective of taking ‘a chance to explain how this book came to be written and tell the story of Dr. Haing Ngor’s later life’ (503).<sup>36</sup> This latter remark refers primarily to Ngor’s murder, which Warner speculates may have been wrongly attributed to a gang of crack cocaine addicts seeking money for their next fix. As an alternative, Warner suggests that Ngor had become increasingly unpopular amongst Cambodians and that his death could easily have been the result of ‘*kum*. Delayed revenge by a fellow Cambodian for a failed romance, or a business deal gone sour’ (512). The implications of this suggestion serve to undermine much of the main narrative; they emphasize Ngor’s weaknesses and lead a reader to reassess Ngor’s reliability as a narrator. This is supported by Warner’s personal assessment of Ngor’s character, which he outlines here. Warner writes that upon meeting Ngor, he remembered his ‘powerful negative aura’ (503). He describes him as ‘the Cambodian, staring at us through the mesh of his mosquito net, his eyes like burning coals’ (503). Later, he claims that Ngor ‘never found peace in his later life’ but was ‘like his country: scarred, and incapable of fully healing.’ (505). Warner portrays a man who was inconsistent (‘he made and discarded many sets of friends’ (505)), constantly restless (‘lived as though he had attention deficit disorder’ 505)), cunning, and devious (505). Warner specifically emphasizes Ngor’s capricious way with women (‘He enjoyed the flirting and intrigue, but he left many women disappointed and their boyfriends or husbands furious’ (506)), and his difficult nature, which he claims was exacerbated by the fame he achieved for his role in *The Killing Fields*. He quotes friends who claim that Ngor was ‘impossible’ (505), and ‘tormented’ (506); he himself suggests that ‘[t]here are psychological terms like post-traumatic stress disorder and survivor’s guilt that apply to Haing Ngor, but they did not do justice to his complex

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<sup>36</sup> Warner claims that his intentions towards Ngor are entirely honorable: ‘After much reflection, I have decided that the best way to pay tribute to him is to be truthful about his later years. It is what he would have wanted.’ (505).

nature' (506). In his denigration of Ngor's character, Warner undermines Ngor's authority which is established throughout the text and is implied in many of the paratexts which surround and cover it. In this way, Warner violates his role as interlocutor and presents an assessment of Ngor's character which undermines the basic value of the text, as well as betraying the trust relationship he must presumably have had with Ngor when the text was initially constructed. This is distressing given that Ngor has been unable to respond to his claims.

That Ngor's narrative should be vulnerable to this kind of posthumous reinterpretation has important consequences for the value of his testimonio and for his own agency. As a victim of Warner's reassessment, Ngor becomes susceptible to a form of cultural imperialism: his narrative is absorbed into a greater project of 'truth-telling,' which ignores the inherent subjectivity of the testimonio mode and instead attempts to encapsulate the entire Cambodian context for Western readers. In this light, it is noteworthy that Warner acknowledges that he has been complicit in the manipulation of Ngor by the western media, who he feels have placed tremendous expectations on Ngor to communicate the specific story they wanted to tell. This is exemplified in a media expedition he describes in the early 1990s to Cambodia which was dubbed a 'Return to the Killing Fields.' To the frustration of journalists, Ngor did not behave as expected. Warner notes, retrospectively:

Gradually, it has [...] become clear that even western journalists like me who ought to know better came to this story with unconscious expectations. Somehow the presence of television cameras made us expect that Haing and [Dith] Pran would have cathartic encounters with the piles of skulls at mass grave sites, as if they were actors in a scripted docudrama and we journalists were there to record their tears, everybody playing their preassigned roles. Haing wasn't buying into that, but he was too evasive to tell anybody

whatever it was he was going through. He was too busy being his own difficult self to be a bridge between Western and Cambodian cultures. (507)

This final admission from Warner highlights the difficulties involved when victims of postcolonial trauma seek to represent their experiences with the help of western journalists or intellectuals who inevitably bring their own expectations or aspirations for the final narrative. This is a fundamental weakness of the testimonio mode and is exemplified by the fact that the authority behind *Survival in the Killing Fields* will remain an unresolved issue. Ngor has been unable to control the paratexts and epitexts which overwhelm his testimonio. Consequently it is tempting to suggest that Ngor has, in some ways, been marginalized from his own narrative.

## II. Immaculée Ilibagiza: *Left To Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust*

Immaculée Ilibagiza was only seventeen at the time of the Rwandan genocide. Taken in by a Hutu church pastor, she and seven other women were forced to hide in a small bathroom (approximately 3 feet x 5 feet) for 91 days. During this time, they were constantly under threat of exposure and betrayal, whilst struggling simultaneously with the physical and psychological pressures of their confinement. This included extreme hunger, lack of sanitation, restricted movement (having to take it in turns to sit down), enforced silence, and limited news from the outside world. *Left to Tell* focuses largely on this traumatic time, followed by the group's eventual escape to a refugee camp, and Ilibagiza's journey to the United States where she was living as this testimonio was constructed. The narrative represents an experience of extreme trauma, but also explores Ilibagiza's belief that she was 'saved' from the genocide in order to spread a very specific kind of message about peace and forgiveness. Consequently, alongside the revelations of the text's content, readers need to engage with the ways in which Ilibagiza—a bright but not exceptional member of the Rwandan middle class—has been

able to tell her own story, with particular reference to the self-help industry of the United States which endorses this narrative.

Like *Survival in the Killing Fields*, *Left to Tell* is told simply, in a conversational style without the employment of literary tropes or stylized language which characterize autobiography. Following a short introduction, it begins by describing Ilibagiza's life before the genocide, with particular emphasis on Rwanda as the utopian land of Ilibagiza's heritage and childhood memories. It opens in the following way: 'I was born in paradise. At least, that's how I felt about my homeland while I was growing up'<sup>37</sup> and continues with a description of Rwanda as 'so breathtakingly beautiful that it's impossible not to see the hand of God in her lush, rolling hills; mist-shrouded mountains; green valleys; and sparkling lakes.' (3) Ilibagiza depicts her own childhood as an idyllic and harmonious time, during which she knew little of Rwanda's already tumultuous history, and even less of the interethnic tension between Tutsis and Hutus:

As a young girl, all I knew of the world was the lovely landscape surrounding me, the kindness of my neighbours, and the deep love of my parents and brothers. In our home, racism and prejudice were completely unknown. I wasn't aware that people belonged to different tribes or races, and I didn't even hear the terms *Tutsi* and *Hutu* until I was in school. (3)

Ilibagiza's tendency to idealize her childhood experiences in the early chapters of *Left To Tell* resonates with the tension between utopian/dystopian depictions of childhood I explored in the previous chapter and, in particular, with Sudha Koul's depiction of childhood in *The Tiger Ladies*. Here, the tension serves a clear purpose: to contrast the genocide with the happy times Ilibagiza remembers of living with her family in rural Rwanda, before most of her family were killed. Ilibagiza suggests that her family were

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<sup>37</sup> Immaculée Ilibagiza, *Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust* (London: Hay House UK, 2006), 3. Further references to *Left to Tell* are given after quotations in the text.

peaceful, loving people, who regularly prayed and attended church together. She describes how her parents instilled in her Catholic values, so that '[e]veryone was welcome in our home, regardless of race, religion, or tribe. To my parents, being Hutu or Tutsi had nothing to do with the kind of person you were. If you were of good character and a kind human being, they greeted you with open arms.' (15) Such assertions emphasize the deeply unjust nature of the discrimination between Hutus and Tutsis, and locate Ilibagiza's family as primary victims to the hatred which provoked the killings.

This utopic depiction of Rwanda prior to the 1994 genocide is juxtaposed against the horror of its genocidal incarnation. Ilibagiza extends this by representing the genocide as a spiritual battle between good and bad forces. Early in the text she claims the ethnic tension between Tutsis and Hutus was an unfounded, absurd conflict propagated by those without Rwandan interests at heart. She underlines the absence of clear distinction between the different tribes, noting that although the Tutsi tribe had always been minority and often marginalized by other groups, the actual boundary between Tutsis and Hutus had become unclear due to intermarriage and language, history, religions, geographies and cultures shared by both tribes. Ilibagiza even describes how, towards the end of the genocide, she found herself held at gunpoint by RPF Tutsi soldiers who suspected she might be a Hutu spy. In this way, Ilibagiza glosses over the political and ethnic reasons for the conflict, focusing instead on the genocide as a spiritual battle between innocent people like her family and forces of evil.

This notion is developed when the conflict itself begins. Having established her family as a deeply spiritual unit, she goes on to describe how killers who arrived at the

pastor's house were 'dressed like devils' wearing 'demonic costumes,' chanting songs of genocide and performing 'a dance of death' (77). She describes their vindictive hatred towards her as an inhuman sentiment which provoked in her intense feelings of hurt and betrayal by those who were formerly schoolmates, friends, and neighbours. This is evident in her shock when a former friend shuns her: 'I staggered into the hall and leaned against the wall. How could my dearest friend turn against me? We'd loved each other like sisters once—how could she be so cruel now? How was it possible for a heart to harden so quickly?' (59). Such betrayals exacerbate her confusion, desperation and fear, intensify her struggle, and show that the collective betrayal and victimization of the genocide was enacted at a personal level within her immediate community.<sup>38</sup> This is exemplified in a pivotal moment within the narrative when local Hutu militia arrive at the pastor's home, seeking Immaculée:

I heard the killers call my name.

They were on the other side of the wall, and less than an inch of plaster and wood separated us. Their voices were cold, hard, and determined.

"She's here ... we know she's here somewhere. ... Find her—find Immaculée."

There were many voices, many killers. I could see them in my mind: my former friends and neighbours, who had always greeted me with love and kindness, moving through the house carrying spears and machetes calling my name.

"I have killed 399 cockroaches," said one of the killers. "Immaculée will make 400. It's a good number to kill." (xix)

As a result of the spiritual battle Ilibagiza perceives to be shaking Rwanda, she views her confinement as a psychological battle between 'positive' and 'negative' forces. She describes the onslaught of distressing thoughts which overwhelm her when

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<sup>38</sup> She writes '[i]t wasn't the soldiers who were chanting, nor was it the trained militiamen, who had been tormenting us for days. No, these were my neighbours, people I'd grown up with and gone to school with—some had even been to our house for dinner' (77).

she first enters the bathroom and is sure she will soon be killed. She is convinced that negative thoughts are sent from the devil to undermine her, explaining that ‘I knew the devil was tempting me—that he was leading me away from the light of God, from the freedom of His forgiveness.’(196) In order to maintain her psychological well-being, she describes how she took to praying constantly, meditating upon various Bible verses, and reflecting on her spiritual identity. She claims that this particular focus prevented her from suffering insurmountable mental anguish:

I was trapped alone with my thoughts, and the dark fears and doubts that had haunted me since my arrival became relentless—they wormed into my heart and undermined the foundation of my faith. When the killers were out of earshot, my thoughts drifted away from God. Yet whenever I prayed, I immediately felt His love around me, and anxiety eased. (84)

Interestingly, this construction of the genocide as a religious battle helps Ilibagiza to develop compassionate feelings for the perpetrators, whom she describes as children being used to commit evil acts: ‘Yes, they were barbaric creatures who would have to be punished severely for their actions, but they were still children. [...] Their minds had been infected with the evil that had spread across the country, but their *souls* weren’t evil’ (94). This vision of the conflict communicates its chaos and barbaric nature. It helps a reader to understand something of Ilibagiza’s fear and feelings of helplessness. However, it also shows Ilibagiza absolving her former friends and neighbours of their crimes; it allows her to displace her fear and anger from her fellow Rwandans and attribute responsibility onto a greater spiritual force instead. For example, she describes how her spiritual meditations in the bathroom helped her to reconcile her anger over genocidal atrocities so that when she is eventually freed, she does not harbour negative feelings towards those who killed her family. This, finally, is



the ‘message’ of *Left To Tell*. In the penultimate chapter, entitled ‘Forgiving the Living,’ Ilibagiza describes returning to her old village to visit the man who killed her family. She recognizes him instantly; he is a successful Hutu businessman whose children she used to play with. Her reaction is not the anger-fueled hatred which he anticipates; instead, she notices his wasted frame, his dirty clothes and his matted hair and is filled with compassion: ‘I wept at the sight of his suffering. Felicien had let the devil enter his heart, and the evil had ruined his life like a cancer in his soul. He was now the victim of his victims, destined to live in torment and regret. I felt overwhelming pity for the man’ (204). Ilibagiza tells the man that she forgives him because ‘[f]orgiveness is all I have to offer’ (204). Soon after this she writes that ‘God’s message extends beyond borders’ (209) and exhorts everyone to learn how to forgive.

Whilst Ilibagiza’s emphasis on forgiveness is admirable, it is also problematic. Firstly, it alienates readers who find her simplistic faith a barrier to empathy. As one reader stresses,

When she writes that God had a reason to keep her alive, I had to wonder if God also had a reason to let 800,000+ other Rwandans be slaughtered. If you lean any bit toward skepticism, you’ll ask that question throughout the book. If I were a person of faith in the midst of this horror, I would certainly, and humbly, ask God, “Why save me, and not them?”

The question of forgiveness is handled superficially as well. Whenever Immaculée starts to feel anger—justified anger—at what the killers have done to her nation, she instantly pulls back to forgiveness mode. I have to believe that this was not as easy as it seems in the book.<sup>39</sup>

Other readers agree that the focus on Ilibagiza’s spiritual identity produces a self-absorbed narrative, which justifies her own survival whilst ignoring the suffering of

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<sup>39</sup> J. Brown reviewing the book on *Amazon.com*, 15th July 2006 <[http://www.amazon.com/review/product/1401908969/ref=cm\\_cr\\_pr\\_hist\\_2?%5Fencoding=UTF8&filterBy=addTwoStar,>](http://www.amazon.com/review/product/1401908969/ref=cm_cr_pr_hist_2?%5Fencoding=UTF8&filterBy=addTwoStar,>) [accessed 17th September 2008].

others—even the other women who were in the bathroom with her.<sup>40</sup> Certainly, Ilibagiza's simplistic construction of the conflict as a spiritual battle does not allow for sufficient exploration of the historical or political context of the genocide; this weakens her aim to speak out '[i]n memory of holocaust victims everywhere' (dedication). However, perhaps more troubling is that, by injecting lessons in faith and spirituality into each of her experiences, Ilibagiza risks polarizing her readers between those who welcome the narrative's spiritual dimension, and those who find such an emphasis overly simplistic and therefore implausible.

Secondly, the polarization of good and evil which leads Ilibagiza to develop her attitude of forgiveness does not easily incorporate those who stood by whilst the genocide was happening. Indeed, her feeling towards these figures is far more ambivalent. Within the narrative itself this is explored primarily through her relationship with her Hutu boyfriend, John. Before the genocide, Ilibagiza describes their tentative courtship; she suggests that they discussed getting married at some point in the future. However, during the genocide John rejects Ilibagiza. Although he is not a perpetrator, John becomes guilty of causing her additional psychological harm. Her indictment of his actions indicates the depth of her feelings of betrayal—possibly even anger—towards those who have hurt her. Yet she couches their breakup within religious terms: 'God gave us all the gift of love to share and nurture in one another. It is a precious gift, one that John had squandered' (121). To a certain extent, Ilibagiza's criticism of John's actions is also extended to all those western powers who she believes allowed the genocide to take place. She describes how tribalism in Rwanda was aggravated by the German and Belgian colonialists, who transformed an existing social structure into a

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<sup>40</sup> For a diverse range of readers' opinions on this book, see *Amazon.com*. <[http://www.amazon.com/Left-Tell-Discovering-Rwandan-Holocaust/dp/1401908977/ref=pd\\_bbs\\_sr\\_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1220702522&sr=8-1](http://www.amazon.com/Left-Tell-Discovering-Rwandan-Holocaust/dp/1401908977/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1220702522&sr=8-1)> [Accessed 17th September 2008].

system of tribal discrimination; it was 'reckless blunders' like these, which she claims created a lingering resentment among Hutus that helped lay the groundwork for genocide (15). Later, she admits her anger at 'the rich countries' for not coming to Rwanda's aid (88) and implicates the world in both Rwanda's destruction and recovery, when she suggests that 'it will take the love of the entire world to heal my homeland. And that's as it should be, for what happened in Rwanda happened to us all—humanity was wounded by the genocide.' (210) However, whilst Ilibagiza's indictment of bystander complicity runs throughout the text, it is often overshadowed by the notion of the genocide as a spiritual battle which polarizes good and evil—a construction that does little to explore the complexity of the genocide or its causes. Consequently, just as the narrative seems to gloss over Ilibagiza's emotional response to the genocide, its spiritual emphasis does not allow for an adequate exploration of the more complicated aspects of the conflict and in particular, the role of the West.

Ilibagiza's apparent reluctance to address these more controversial aspects of the Rwandan genocide can be better understood in the light of the role played by the United States in her own recovery. She describes how she knew soon after the genocide that she would need to leave Rwanda to fully heal from her experiences. Later, when she marries an American, she relocates to the United States permanently. Physical departure marks the beginning of a journey from the past, and forms a special part of her recovery. The United States comes to represent hope and survival, a place where she is able to rebuild her life and nurture a family to replace those who have died. Furthermore, it is from her new life in the West that Ilibagiza finds a forum for her narrative to be heard and published. This is evident throughout the narrative, from her choice to write in English, to the plethora of reviews, and comments which accompany this text. In this way, *Left To Tell* is strikingly similar to *Survival in the Killing Fields*. Both texts recount

powerful stories of survival; both acknowledge the ongoing impact of trauma and use a first person narrative to communicate these stories to others. In addition, both testimonios are enabled by the support of individuals with cultural authority, whose endorsements condition readers' responses to the text in question. The effect of paratexts on *Left To Tell* is not always positive; here, as in Ngor's text, mediations can be seen to undermine the intrinsic value of the text, and threaten to appropriate Ilibagiza's experience for an alternative cause.

Endorsements of *Left to Tell* focus largely upon the spiritual aspects of the narrative and its promotion of 'self-help' concepts such as positive thinking and visualization. This is indicated in the text's subtitle: 'Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust.' This title is problematic because it establishes the narrative as an account of conversion, where the content of the text shows that Ilibagiza was a devoted Catholic throughout her life. It guides the reader's interpretation of the title 'Left to Tell,' so that the focus on Ilibagiza as a genocide survivor is subtly superseded by an emphasis upon her spiritual encounter in the bathroom. This stress is supported by the *Foreword* and critical reviews, which indicate a central relationship between Ilibagiza and prominent U.S. self-help advocates such as Dr. Wayne Dyer. In the *Foreword to Left To Tell*, Dr. Dyer endorses the text with a remarkable confidence. He writes: 'I've read thousands of books over the past 50 or so years. The book you hold in your hands is by far the most moving and poignantly significant of the vast library that comprises my lifetime of personal reading.' (*Foreword*, xi) Dyer's enthusiasm for the text contains an explicit affirmation of Ilibagiza's character, and of her authenticity as a writer and victim of the Rwandan genocide. This is shown in his description of many hours spent with her, learning of her story, meeting her family and championing her cause. Dyer describes Ilibagiza in glowing terms; he writes that, upon his first meeting with her 'I

knew in an absolute flash of insight that I was in the presence of a uniquely Divine woman. [...] I was captured. I sensed her exceptionally high energy' (xii).

Dyer's endorsement of Ilibagiza and her testimony is important because it draws many people to what would otherwise remain a little-known text. However, Dyer abuses his supportive role when he takes the opportunity to celebrate his own benevolence and underline his role in helping the text reach publication:

I told Reid [the publisher] that I would support this project in every way possible: Not only would I write the Foreword, but I'd also help bring Immaculée and her story to all my public appearances. In addition, I'd travel to Rwanda with her and her family and help her raise money to fulfill her mission of aiding the many orphaned children left behind when the killing finally stopped. (xiii)

A few lines later, Dyer uses the text to promote his own message of self-empowerment—and his latest book, which he mentions twice in this short passage. He continues by telling the reader exactly how the text will affect them, placing a particular emphasis upon its spiritual component: 'You will feel her fear, you will cry, and you will ask yourself the same questions that we as a people have been asking forever: *How could this happen? Where does such animosity come from? Why can't we just be like God, Who is the Source for all of us?* But you will also feel something else most profoundly: you will feel hope, a hope that inch by inch, we as a people are moving towards a new alignment—that is, we're moving towards living God-realized lives' (xiv).

Dyer's condescending and self-indulgent tone is not the only problem with this *Foreword*. In his emphasis upon the text as a spiritual guide, Dyer ignores the specificity of the Rwandan context and other fundamental questions which are raised by *Left To Tell*. He describes how he contacted Immaculée to offer his help to get her

testimony published, announcing ‘I feel compelled to help you get the message to the world’ (xiii). However, ‘the message’ he wishes to help her share does not address the Rwandan genocide itself. Instead, he offers an interpretation of the text which focuses solely upon its spiritual dimension, claiming to the reader that: ‘You’re about to embark on a journey that will undoubtedly change the way you view the power of faith—forever’ (xi). In this evasion, Dyer does Ilibagiza a great disservice. He manipulates the text and oversimplifies the complexities of her trauma. He re-moulds her into a saintly figure, whose act of forgiveness is inspirational, but not sufficiently instructive. He does not refer to her African identity, neither does he explore her ongoing negotiation of the past, despite the centrality of these issues to Ilibagiza’s testimonio. Dyer’s mediation of the text is similarly replicated in the selection of reviewers’ comments, which are included as peritexts. Each shows Ilibagiza’s story being taken up by a different spokesman or spokeswoman, each championing his or her own cause. The list includes, variously, a child survivor of the Holocaust, the First Lady of Rwanda (exhorting forgiveness), a motivational speaker, a journalist, a filmmaker and writers of books on forgiveness, women’s issues, and faith. Each declares the book a perfect example of the values they personally seek to uphold. However, whilst these perspectives cast an interesting light over the narrative, they limit its interpretation. This manipulation leads the reader to wonder who exactly controls the text: is it the victim, whose story is being shared, or the mediator, who authenticates and qualifies the narrative? What role did Dyer, (and Steve Erwin, the co-writer) play in the final edited version of Ilibagiza’s initial 150,000 word testimony into this significantly smaller text? What content might have been omitted to make way for the overwhelming focus on spiritual issues such as forgiveness and self-betterment? Furthermore, what role ought the reader play in responding to this testimony? Are we merely required to recognize the strength of

character and faith which helped Ilibagiza to survive, or should we engage more deeply with our own relationship to the events concerned?

Despite claiming to be an act of positive intentions, Dyer's endorsement of this text is ultimately detrimental to its representation of trauma, as it undermines Ilibagiza's claim to empowerment and agency. Dyer's presence hovering over the text weakens the role played by the author, who is the survivor, and whose authority should ultimately govern the text. Whilst appearing to create a bridge which connects a survivor with an audience, Dyer's mediation exploits the central figure of the narrative, and, in so doing, endangers the possibility—and the credibility—of Ilibagiza's self-representation. This is deeply problematic because it shows how the desire to gain agency and communicate experiences of postcolonial trauma may compel authors to sanction interferences which ultimately threaten the telling of their story.

### III. Ishmael Beah *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*

In the final text in this chapter, paratexts and mediators or interpellators again threaten authentic representation of postcolonial trauma. However, where *Survival in the Killing Fields* and *Left to Tell* are both co-written, Beah is named as the sole official author of *A Long Way Gone*. This status gives him an apparently enhanced authority over his experiences; it suggests that he is less vulnerable to appropriation or exploitation which I have argued shape both *Left to Tell* and *Survival in the Killing Fields*. However, as I shall demonstrate, in reality Beah's authority over his text is less certain. This is partly because of the considerable assistance Beah received from Daniel Chaon, his creative writing professor at Oberlin college whilst he was writing *A Long Way Gone*. It is also due to the long-term effects of his trauma. Engagement with this

narrative requires acknowledgment that Beah's authorial credibility may have been endangered by the very conditions of traumatic memory itself. Consequently, the debate which has emerged over this text is emblematic of the controversy which often accompanies testimonies which recount extreme experiences. Furthermore, this text highlights the way in which formerly oppressed figures may be used to validate aspects of western culture, as they are 'consumed' by those who do not have their interests at heart.

*A Long Way Gone* narrates the experiences of a teenage boy living in Sierra Leone, who becomes caught up in the nation's civil war. Following a siege upon his rural village, Ishmael Beah spends the best part of a year wandering the countryside with a group of other young boys, all of whom have fled the fighting and are hoping to be reunited with their families. Eventually they arrive at a village where Beah hopes to find his family, but instead he discovers that they have just been killed. Soon after this, he is pressured into becoming a soldier for the Sierra Leonean military forces. He is just 13 years old at the time. The narrative recounts his experiences as a child soldier, including descriptions of torture, sieges, and countless killings which Beah admits performing whilst high on a cocktail of drugs including cocaine, gunpowder and speed. Eventually, he is rescued by UNICEF and taken to a rehabilitation centre in Freetown. Here, he describes the process of 'repatriation'—during which he is released from his addictions, and encouraged to recover his prewar identity through storytelling and music. He eventually moves to live with his uncle's family just outside Freetown. However, further unrest in Sierra Leone causes him to escape the country so that he may avoid being forced into the army again. He manages to reach the United States thanks to Laura Simms, a benevolent UN worker who later becomes his surrogate mother. Now



that Beah is a graduate from Oberlin College with a degree in Politics, *A Long Way Gone* supports his aim to generate awareness of the plight of child soldiers. This aim is evident from the Beah's dedication of the text 'to all the children of Sierra Leone who were robbed of their childhoods'.<sup>41</sup>

This text has achieved a significant measure of commercial success. Published in early 2007, it immediately gained attention from Starbucks and the book was put on sale in over 6,500 coffee outlets across the United States (a notably larger distribution than America's biggest book chain, Barnes & Noble). Part of its new policy of promoting 'thought-provoking' literature, Starbucks promised to donate \$2 from each sale to support UNICEF programmes for children affected by armed conflict. On the day of the author's first in-store appearance, the text entered *The New York Times* bestseller list at number two. Now in its thirty-fifth printing, the text has sold over 600,000 copies—a number which continues to rise. Consequently, Ishmael has gained a profile as an advocate for the plight of child soldiers, with speaking opportunities on television and before the UN. He is on the children's rights committee of Human Rights Watch, and towards the end of 2007 UNICEF named him as their advocate for children affected by war. This text has received critical praise for its representation of the war. *A Long Way Gone* was nominated for a Quill Award in the Best Debut Author category for 2007 and *Time Magazine* named it one of the Top 10 Nonfiction Books of 2007, ranking it at number three.

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<sup>41</sup> Ishmael Beah, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), vii. Further references to *A Long Way Gone* are given after quotations in the text.

Published during the scandal over James Frey's fabricated memoir *A Million Little Pieces*,<sup>42</sup> Beah's narrative appeared to be a reliable, unmediated account of unbelievable horror and individual trauma. However, on 19th January 2008, *The Australian* newspaper began to raise questions over the credibility of Beah's account. In a 4,600 word article three journalists challenged several aspects of the text. Perhaps most notable was Beah's claim that he spent three years fighting in the army (he writes in the text that '[t]he first time that I was touched by war I was twelve. It was in January of 1993' (6)). Citing locals in Mattru Jong where Beah attended school (including a man who they claim was his former headmaster), Shelley Gare, Peter Wilson and David Nason argued that Beah continued to attend boarding school in Mattru Jong throughout 1993 and 1994, and was only forced to flee when rebel soldiers invaded and plundered the mine in Mattru Jong and destroyed his village in 1995. Consequently, their article contends that Beah could only have served as a soldier for a few months. He would not have been 13, but could perhaps even have been as old as 15 at the time.<sup>43</sup>

This accusation has sparked a series of defensive articles, emails and public letters from Beah's New York publisher Sarah Crichton, his surrogate mother Laura Simms, his creative writing professor at Oberlin David Chaon (who advised on the first draft), and Beah himself. All stand by the original account. In the text itself, Beah explicitly denies any lapses in his memory or elaborations in the way *A Long Way Gone* is narrated; rather, he claims to have a photographic memory that, 'enables me to remember details of the day-to-day moments of my life, indelibly' (51). In interviews

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<sup>42</sup> Frey's memoir was first published in 2003. In January 2007, an article was published on *The Smoking Gun* website which questioned the credibility of the narrative as an autobiography. 'A Million Little Lies: Exposing James Frey's Fiction Addiction,' 8th January 2008, [www.thesmokinggun.com](http://www.thesmokinggun.com/jamesfrey/0104061jamesfrey1.html) <<http://www.thesmokinggun.com/jamesfrey/0104061jamesfrey1.html>> [accessed 17th September 2008]. Beah's memoir was published a month later, in February 2007.

<sup>43</sup> Shelley Gare, with Peter Wilson and David Nason, 'Africa's War Child,' *The Australian*, 19th January 2008 <<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23074110-32682,00.html>> [Accessed 17th September 2008].

before the controversial claims, he has described how his incredible recall is enabled by the centrality of storytelling to Sierra Leonean culture.<sup>44</sup> Beah's claim to veracity over his account is such that *A Long Way Gone* does not even contain a disclaimer, a feature regularly employed by publishers to safeguard narratives which are reliant upon an author remembering events which took place many years previously. In his own defence, Beah has released a public letter, which states:

I was right about my family. I am right about my story. This is not something one gets wrong. *The Australian's* reporters have been calling my college professors, asking if I "embellished" my story. They published my adoptive mother's address, so she now receives ugly threats. They have used innuendo against me when there is no fact. Though apparently, they believe anything they are told—unless it comes from me or supports my account. Sad to say, my story is all true.<sup>45</sup>

Despite all this, *The Australian* continues to advance its challenge. By June 2008, the newspaper had published 13 articles questioning the credibility of Ishmael Beah's story. They now claim to have discovered further evidence which confirms their suspicions of Beah's account (including school records indicating Beah's attendance in Spring 1993); they also question several key incidents within the text. These include a fight in the UNICEF camp soon after Beah had arrived there, during which six boys were allegedly killed—an incident of which *The Australian* claims there is no record outside Beah's text. The newspaper also questions the plausibility of Beah's claim that he was shot three times in the foot during a battle but continued fighting regardless. Gare, Wilson and Nason suggest that these discrepancies represent significant flaws in Beah's narrative, but they claim that these should not detract from the intrinsic value of the text:

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<sup>44</sup> In interview with Andrew Denton, *Enough Rope with Andrew Denton*, 2nd July 2007. Transcript online at <<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/enoughrope/transcripts/s1968333.htm>> [accessed 17th September 2008].

<sup>45</sup> In a public letter, released by Farrar, Straus and Crichton, 22 January 2008. <[http://www.alongwaygone.com/Ishmael\\_Beah\\_statement.pdf](http://www.alongwaygone.com/Ishmael_Beah_statement.pdf)> [accessed 17th September 2008].

If confirmed, the revelations do not mean Beah's tale isn't truly terrible. They don't mean that he hasn't been through experiences that most of us in the developed world will never have to face even in our nightmares. [...] But this does raise questions about the way Ishmael Beah's book came about and how thoroughly his story was checked out.<sup>46</sup>

Gare, Wilson and Nason connect the issue of fact-checking and verification which they argue is central to life-writing (and testimonial narratives in particular) with the commercial aspects of the mode. Hidden within their criticisms is a suggestion that Beah's narrative may have been marketed in such a way as to capitalize on the current popularity of testimonial narratives. As Peter Wilson has claimed:

I'm sure he [Beah] went through a terrible ordeal, but the truth matters. It is plain to anyone who wants to look at this objectively that he did not experience what has been sold as the truth to hundreds of thousands of readers. The truth matters. It sounds naïve, but the shocking thing is: the publishers don't care about this. They've made millions of dollars.<sup>47</sup>

The controversy caused by *The Australian* has led to an ongoing feud. The accusations which continue to run back and forth between *The Australian* and Beah's publishers Farrar, Straus and Giroux claim ill-motives on the part of both sides, showing that claims to factual status in memoirs or testimonial narratives continue to invoke fierce responses. This controversy exposes a further fragility of testimonial narratives, as it shows how questions over truth may overtake more significant aspects of testimonial discourse. This means that a trauma victim seeking to represent his or her experiences may become embroiled a greater debate over genre, which has been raised within the publishing industry in recent years. In Beah's case, criticism of inaccuracies within the text threatens to divert readers' attentions away from the atrocities he

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<sup>46</sup> Gare, Wilson and Nason, 'Africa's War Child.'

<sup>47</sup> Gabriel Sherman, 'The Fog of Memoir: The feud over the truthfulness of Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone*,' *Slate*, 6th March 2008, <<http://www.slate.com/id/2185928/>> [accessed 17th September 2008].

describes, such as his first day on the battlefield, during which he witnessed a number of his friends killed.

The case of *A Long Way Gone* encapsulates two further issues: the terms in which truth is remembered following trauma, and the role played by interlocutors or mediators in assisting narrators in their quest for an audience. First, it is generally understood that the conditions of traumatic memory may trouble an individual's ability to recall events of the past with historical exactitude. Despite Beah's assertion that he has told the truth, it is plausible that his memory may have been seriously impaired by his experiences of extreme trauma and prolonged drug use. This possibility is supported by the structure of the narrative of *A Long Way Gone* itself. Where the first 100 pages are spent describing Beah's experiences up to and including the months he spent wandering the countryside, only 25 pages are dedicated to his time as a soldier. This section is narrated in fragments, with little dialogue and the use of few names or identifying details. It successfully communicates the drug-induced blur which Beah explains characterized his time in service. Yet the events it describes could as easily have taken place within three months as three years. Once Beah has been rescued, the narrative returns to its earlier slow pace, with detailed descriptions and impressively remembered dialogue. However, more than one critic has questioned the value of deconstructing this text on the basis of the possibility that Beah may have confused this length of time. As Beah's writing professor wrote in angry defence to one article:

There was never a good reason for [Beah] to "lie" about the facts. Is it more impressive that he was a child soldier for 2 years, or 2 months? Ultimately, what's the difference in the degree of suffering this kid endured? When he was writing this book, he didn't have any sense that it would become a bestseller, so what would be the point in inventing facts? And

if he was lying, why would he be so stupid as to mix up major dates? That doesn't make sense.<sup>48</sup>

Chaon's argument emphasizes the value of the 'emotional truth' of Beah's narrative.

This view is endorsed by those who see the significance of Beah's experiences to be the shattering impact of victimization and the degradation of his humanity, rather than the exact period he spent as a child soldier. Beah's adoptive mother, Laura Simms and his agent Ira Silverberg have also claimed that the positive impact of his testimony outweigh any possible ambiguities.<sup>49</sup>

Interestingly, this opinion is endorsed by a reader who places specific emphasis on Beah's Sierra Leonean heritage:

I wonder if Africans who have read the book (especially Sierra Leoneans) will feel as troubled by the question of dates as by others. Culturally, our relationship to time is different from western notions of time. This unique relationship to time affects the way we tell stories and the way we remember things. While Westerners are likely to refer to the year something happened and then the event, for us the focus is usually on the event itself. Time alone is not important. ... Events make time important. I am not saying that Ishmael or Africans for that matter do not understand or subscribe to established standards of time rather, that the focus for me is more so on what happened to Ishmael and how it happened.<sup>50</sup>

This view provides an interesting—albeit not entirely satisfactory—defence of the inaccuracies which may or may not exist in Beah's account. It suggests that, despite its emphasis upon empowering marginalized voices to speak up, testimonio may still be

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<sup>48</sup> Dan Chaon, in an email to Ben Peek dated 22nd January 2008, *Ben Peek (It's a blog)* <<http://benpeek.livejournal.com/633864.html>> [accessed 17th September 2008].

<sup>49</sup> Laura Simms has stated: 'If you were a kid in a war, would you have a calendar with you after you had lost everything and were running through the bush[?] This young man has literally changed the world and how human beings look at children in war, really changed the world.' Shelley Gare and Peter Wilson, 'Ishmael Beah Sierra Leone child soldier,' *The Australian*, 19th January 2008, <<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23075054-32682,00.html>> [accessed 5th September]; Ira Silverberg has suggested that, "Beautiful things have come from the success he has seen. He's changing policy now; he testified before (the US) Congress; fought for the rights of the 300,000 ...'" Quoted in Shelley Gare, with Peter Wilson and David Nason, 'Africa's War Child,' *The Australian*, 19th January 2008, <<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23074110-32682,00.html>> [accessed 17th September 2008]

<sup>50</sup> Nasratha, 'Claiming Ishmael Beah and Standing by Him,' *Sweet Sierra Leone*, 22nd January 2008 <<http://switalone.blogspot.com/2008/01/claiming-ishmeal-beah-and-standing-by.html>> [accessed 17th September 2008].

informed and governed by western codes of representation. However, this is problematic for those who wish to promote Beah's narrative as the first substantial account of war experiences from a child's perspective. This is because, in order for an account to contribute to historical record, it must be factually correct. Given Beah's claim that he is able to remember the past 'indelibly,' the discovery of a single inaccuracy in his testimony would jeopardize the authenticity of the entire narrative. This, in turn, might affect his entitlement to speak on behalf of the UNICEF and others.

The second issue concerns the ways in which the experiences of formerly oppressed or marginalized subjects may be appropriated, or drawn upon by the western (publishing) world for its own purposes. At the centre of the claims presented by *The Australian* lies a serious criticism of motive. Gare et. al. argue that the case of *A Long Way Gone* 'tells us a lot about story-telling and modern publishing, about the Western world's hunger for stories of terror and exploitation from the undeveloped world.'<sup>51</sup> In their suggestions that Beah's account is viewed suspiciously by members of his former community in Sierra Leone, Gare, Wilson and Nason cast doubt over to Beah's reasons for writing his narrative.<sup>52</sup> They imply that the story has been sensationalized—either by Beah, or by those who advised him in the writing process—to raise its profile. Neil Boothby, the director of a forced migration and health programme at Columbia university and an expert on children and war, links *A Long Way Gone* to a problem endemic to testimonial narrative in general:

I think what [Beah] has done is meet with UNICEF, journalists, and others, and he told stories, and people responded to certain stories enthusiastically, [...] That has encouraged

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<sup>51</sup> Gare, Wilson and Nason, 'Africa's War Child.'

<sup>52</sup> Peter Wilson claims that: 'Witnesses including the past and current principals of his school, the Catholic priest who was based in the town during the war, the acting chieftain of the district, and several of Beah's former schoolmates insisted the attack [on Mattru Jong] happened in 1995, not 1993. Beah's version was yesterday dismissed as "just impossible" by a senior Catholic priest who was involved in those events.' Peter Wilson, 'Beah's Credibility A Long Way Gone,' *The Australian*, 2nd February 2008, <<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23147571-601,00.html>> [accessed 17th September 2008].

him to come out with an account that has sensationalism, a bit of bravado, and some inaccuracies. To me, the key question is whether there's enough accuracy to make the story credible. [...] The system is set up to reward sensational stories. We all need to look at why does something have to be so horrific before we open our eyes and ears and hearts?<sup>53</sup>

At the centre of all these debates—which are unresolved at the time of writing—there is something of a remarkable silence from Beah himself. Besides asserting the veracity of his narrative in a public letter, Beah has not entered into the debate over *A Long Way Gone*. This has of course led to further speculations from *The Australian* writers that Beah is unable to answer their questions over the text's veracity. However, there are some evasions within the narrative itself, which suggest another strategy may be at work. For example, where Ngor and Ilibagiza both express political views in their testimonios, Beah refrains from any such comment. His testimonio does not explore the causes of war in Sierra Leone, neither does it evaluate the role of the West in the nation's turbulent past or possible future peace. Furthermore, Beah does not spend a great deal of time establishing a sense of his own personality in the narrative. Although we read of his enjoyment of rap and hip hop music, and whilst he hints towards the loneliness he felt during his months wandering the countryside, *A Long Way Gone* does not seek to provide a thorough record of Beah's personal feelings and responses to his experiences. Instead, the text focuses on the way in which he, like many others, was conditioned to become a killing machine, forced to torture and butcher others to stay alive. This focus contrasts with Ilibagiza's internalization of the spiritual battle she sees in Rwanda; it also differs from Ngor's exploration of his lack of heroism and his struggles to overcome the death of his wife. Beah's evasiveness is replicated in the tone of his narrative, which is calm and dispassionate. This enables him to make

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<sup>53</sup> Neil Boothby quoted in Graham Rayman, 'Boy Soldier of Fortune,' *The Village Voice*, 18th March 2008, <<http://www.villagevoice.com/news/0812,boy-soldier,381308,1.html/full>> [accessed 17th September 2008].



observations without casting judgement. For example, he describes how '[t]he idea of death didn't cross my mind at all and killing had become as easy as drinking water. My mind had not only snapped during the first killing, it had also stopped making remorseful records, or so it seemed' (122).

Where Beah does allude to the long-term impact of his trauma, this serves primarily to help him to shift from his present life in the United States back to the past. For example, early in the text Beah describes recurring dreams which continue to haunt him during his adolescence and college years in the United States, forcing him to return to painful memories. References to migraines, hallucinations and other trauma symptoms also highlight the role played by UNICEF in his recovery. He takes time to describe the process of rehabilitation, during which he was assisted by a collection of UNICEF workers including Esther, a big-hearted nurse. The narrative implies that his recovery, which continues throughout his time living on the UNICEF compound, is finally assured when he moves to the United States to live with Laura Simms, a benevolent UN 'storyteller' who specializes in helping child victims of war tell their own stories. The successful completion of his healing is strongly implied on the text's back cover, which shows Beah, grinning reassuringly from ear to ear. However, some readers have claimed that such an emphasis, combined with omissions within the text, (including Beah's refusal to address the specific politics of Sierra Leone) has led to the text being used by UNICEF to enforce western values—about aid work, about conflict in Africa, and the validation of western involvement in such crises. One reader encapsulates the issues at stake in the following statement, found on a 'blog' website:

I understand the need to draw attention to the international plight of children used as carriers, sex slaves, and soldiers but Sierra Leone badly needs Ishmael Beah to represent us too. In a country where so few of us ordinary citizens ever get an opportunity to "talk truth

to power” in the international community we need someone who has that opportunity to do so for sweet Sierra Leone. **The very nationalistic me feels incredibly territorial over Ishmael Beah. I want him for Sierra Leone.** I don’t want white people to take him as they have done so many other possible voices from the continent and beyond. By taking him I mean to remove him from the reality of his present day Salone society and turn him into a caricature of what they want him to represent.[sic]<sup>54</sup>

The suggestion that Beah’s narrative has been absorbed by a western publishing industry tradition as a representative account of the child soldier helps to explain why this text has caused so much controversy. For if Beah were merely representing his own experience, then inaccuracies within the account would possibly matter less—at least, the controversy surrounding the text would be different. As it is, the troubling reality of child exploitation to which Beah testifies—if true—demands attention. This implicitly endorses the work of agencies like UNICEF, whose activities amongst this group of oppressed individuals are prolific within this text. However, Ishmael Beah’s support of the work of UNICEF provokes concern from those who see him vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation. The silences and omissions in and around this text leave readers with a series of unanswered questions. Is Beah an authentic victim of long-term suffering as a child soldier, or is he simply an intelligent and articulate survivor of the Sierra Leonean war? Is he perhaps a willing vehicle for truth, seeking to raise awareness about the plight of child soldiers, or is he being manipulated and the power of his story exploited for commercial gain? Furthermore, are Beah’s own evasions symptomatic of traumatic memory, or are they evidence of the process of editing to which his testimony was subject by Chaon, his editor, and others? Continued silence from Beah suggests that, at least, on one level, the narrative has already done its work: it testifies to Beah’s

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<sup>54</sup> Vickie, ‘Claiming Ishmael Beah,’ *Sweet Sierra Leone*, <<http://www.sierravisions.org/portal/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=6,>> [accessed 17th September 2008].

own survival. As Beah writes in his acknowledgement, ‘I never thought that I would be alive to this day, much less that I would write a book.’ (227). However, insofar as Beah’s text functions as a collective narrative, it exposes the fragile position inhabited by victims of postcolonial trauma who seek to produce testimonios, even as they are attempting to speak out and have all the resources necessary to do so.

### Conclusion

There are obvious advantages of the testimonio as a mode to represent postcolonial trauma compared with autobiography. Firstly, the legal or pseudo-legal aspects of the genre reinforce the credibility of the events recounted. With their simple narration, chronological telling, and a lesser emphasis placed upon literary tropes and poetic language than the autobiographies in chapter one, these narratives are more credible as eyewitness accounts. They identify the narrator’s dual responsibility as both a survivor of and a witness to the atrocities of genocidal policy or war. They demonstrate the consequences of political or national conflict at a personal level by describing the impact of genocide or war upon an individual using the first person “I.” Consequently, where autobiography serves primarily to highlight an individual experience, these testimonios contribute to historical records of collective events. Samuel Totten and William S. Parsons argue that eyewitnesses are essential to the process of documenting and authenticating instances of extreme violence.<sup>55</sup> They support the claims of Richard Hovannisian, the Professor of History and director of the Near Eastern Centre at the University of California in Los Angeles. He argues that

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<sup>55</sup> Samuel Totten and William S. Parsons ‘Introduction,’ in *Century of Genocide: Eyewitness Accounts and Critical Views*, ed. by Samuel Totten, William S. Parsons and Israel. W. Charny, (London: Routledge, 2004) 1-13 (6).

‘[e]yewitness accounts of decisive events may be as valuable as official dispatches and reports. It is in such versions especially that the human element becomes manifest, affording insights not to be found in documents’.<sup>56</sup>

The emphasis upon truthfulness and authenticity is particularly important given the fact that the atrocities, which are narrated in each text, take place in a postcolonial context; each of these has been—to different extents—given insufficient attention both in western culture and in its critical studies. The American sociologist Helen Fein writes that ‘[a]lthough most contemporary genocides take place in the Third World, much of the theory about genocide is derived from a dominant or exclusive focus on the Holocaust, which occurred in a modern, western, Christian and post-Christian society.’<sup>57</sup> The absence of a framework within which victims can understand their experiences is vocalized by Ngor’s wife in *Survival in the Killing Fields*. Ngor notes: ‘It was her favourite complaint. “I have read a lot of history books, about Europe and Asia, but I never read about anything like this.”’ (350). However, as they describe specificities of these contexts of violence and oppression, texts like these begin to rectify this imbalance. They enhance understanding about postcolonial contexts of genocide and war, including its relationship to historical colonialism and the extent to which individual and collective recovery are dependent upon western assistance.

Furthermore, in contrast with autobiography’s literary focus, these texts enable oral narratives and alternative (often non-western) knowledges to enter the record, thus countering the way in which historical discourse has privileged certain groups of people

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<sup>56</sup> Richard Hovannisian, quoted in Totten and Parsons, ‘Introduction,’ in Totten, Parsons and Charny, 1- 13 (6).

<sup>57</sup> Helen Fein, quoted in A. Dirk Moses ‘The Holocaust and Genocide,’ in *The Historiography of the Holocaust* ed. by Dan Stone (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 533-555 (545).

over others. This resolves one of the problems involved in gaining credible evidence for such events, as outlined by Totten and Parsons, who attempt to explain the scarcity of firsthand accounts of genocide as follows:

survivors may not have been literate, and thus did not have the means to develop a written record; in the aftermath of the genocide the survivors may have had to struggle simply to survive, thus documenting their tragedy was not foremost on their minds; the survivors may not have had the financial means to take the time to record and collect testimony; the survivors may not have had a constituency that was interested in their plight, and thus no one collected or supported documentation of their tragedy; the survivors may have been (or continue to be) leery of people who question them about their plight; and some survivors may have continued to live under the very regime that perpetrated the genocide, which, in turn, prevented (through censorship, coercion, or threats of violence) the survivors or others from documenting the atrocities.<sup>58</sup>

From this list it is evident that the difficulties involved in gaining agency continue to impede the production of narratives which can attest to experiences of extreme violence. Consequently, securing a voice to testify in this way represents a significant victory against the silencing effects of oppression. Where each of these narrators was once uncertain if they would live beyond genocide or war, these testimonios celebrate survival; they also show marginalized, formerly oppressed individuals gaining unprecedented cultural authority even if it is mediated in some way by a ‘third voice.’ This counters autobiography’s historical focus upon celebrated figures, and suggests future directions for life-writing:

As, historically, a master narrative of Western hegemony in its celebration of the sovereign individual, traditional autobiography would seem inimical to people whose modes of expression were formerly oral and collective. Yet its reinterpretation in a range of [...] “out-law genres” –such as autoethnography, testimonio, and prison memoirs–has been an important means of asserting cultural agency for postcolonial subjects.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Totten, Parsons, ‘Introduction,’ in Totten, Parsons and Charny, 1- 13 (7).

<sup>59</sup> Smith and Watson, 45.

Its value as a specifically postcolonial form of representation has important implications for the way in which testimonios are constructed. This may help to resolve some of the questions about apparent contradictions or omissions within the text which I noted in relation to *A Long Way Gone*. It is exemplified in the controversy over *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. Following accusations which claimed that this text was filled with inaccuracies and could therefore not purport to be an autobiographical account,<sup>60</sup> Menchú has suggested that evasions and interpolations within the text were a way of making her story a collective account, rather than an autobiography.<sup>61</sup> Gilmore supports this notion; she argues that the emotional significance, or ‘larger symbolic truth’<sup>62</sup> of Menchú’s text is more significant than the unity of the protagonist, narrator and author figure in her narrative. Beverley suggests that this emphasis is specifically related to Menchú’s postcolonial identity. He writes that:

In the process of constructing her narrative and articulating herself as a political icon around its circulation, Menchú is becoming not-subaltern, in the sense that she is functioning as a subject of history. But the conditions of her becoming not-subaltern—her narrative choices, silences, “mythic inflation,” “reinvention” and so on—entail necessarily that there are versions of “what really happened” that she does not or cannot represent without relativizing the account of her own account.<sup>63</sup>

Sommer develops this argument by suggesting that secrets and evasions within Menchú’s narrative represent ‘textual resistance’: the writer’s desire to preserve her own

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<sup>60</sup> In 1999, seven years after Menchú was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, the anthropologist David Stoll argued that she had claimed as personal experiences events which did not happen to her. See David Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1999). Menchú responded that the significance of her work was being deliberately undermined by those with a specific political agenda against her and her people. Gilmore notes how Menchú’s defenders have responded to critics by suggesting that ‘accusations about her truthfulness are political in that they mean to discredit her and thereby her efforts to raise international concern for the indigenous Guatemalan Indians of whom she is one and whom she represents.’ Gilmore, 4.

<sup>61</sup> Rigoberta Menchú, interview by Juan Jesús Arnáez, ‘Those Who Attack Me Humiliate the Victims,’ *El País*, 24th January 1999. Quoted in Beverley, 81.

<sup>62</sup> Gilmore, 4.

<sup>63</sup> Beverley, 84-5.

freedom in the face of the western 'gaze' which seeks to know everything. Sommer suggests that Menchú's silence exposes the illusion of intimacy between the postcolonial voice and the reader. She writes: Rigoberta suggests [that it] is the degree of our own foreignness, our cultural difference that would make her secrets incomprehensible. We could never know them as she does, because we would inevitably force her secrets into our framework.'<sup>64</sup> By this formulation, secrecy and evasiveness become postcolonial strategies in empowerment and agency. They represent a narrator's claim to maintain authority and control over his or narrative. This defence resonates with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of the 'autobiographer's privilege,' as 'the process of 'trying my self out, as ephemeral teller, to you'.<sup>65</sup> According to Spivak, postcolonial testimonies exert mastery over the autobiographical form by withholding information, thus subverting the generic form and its emphasis on clear, verifiable truth and authority. For Spivak, the postcolonialist's 'truth' is found in asserting agency over the colonizer, in refusing to be denied voice as part of a larger struggle towards freedom.<sup>66</sup> This is exemplified in *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, as Sommer notes:

Reading [Menchú's] refusal as a textual strategy gives her credit for agency. It acknowledges the gesture as intentional rather than passive, not silence but flamboyant noncompliance. [...] Calling attention to an unknowable subtext is a profound lesson, because it is an imitable trope. The calculated result for sympathetic readers is, paradoxically, that Rigoberta excludes us from her circle of intimates. Any way we read her, we are either intellectually or ethically unfit for Rigoberta's secrets. Either way, it produces a particular kind of distance akin to respect. So simple a lesson and so fundamental: it is to acknowledge modestly that difference exists.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Sommer, 122.

<sup>65</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Three Women's Texts and Circumfession,' in *Postcolonialism and Autobiography: Michelle Cliffe, David Dabydeen and Opal Palmer Adisa*, ed. by Alfred Hornung and Ernstpeter Ruhe (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998), 7-22 (11).

<sup>66</sup> Spivak, 'Three Women's Texts and Circumfession' in Hornung and Ruhe (eds.), 7-22 (11).

<sup>67</sup> Sommer, 126-127.

This suggests a further advantage of the testimonial narrative, which may facilitate a form of resistance—a *textual* resistance—from those who have been victimized and oppressed so that they may assert their own identity.

However, despite these strengths of the mode, the political and ethical weighting of testimonio—in contrast with autobiography’s focus upon identity formation—is problematic for the representation of postcolonial trauma. This is partly because the relationship between trauma, truth, and history is inherently problematic. In particular, as a memory disorder, traumatic experience shapes what is remembered (and how); it compromises the accuracy of past recollections and thus threatens attempts to testify about the past. In addition, testimonio is founded on the basis of a cultural and experiential authority on the part of the writer; it is understandable then that discrepancies between the content of the text and reality be judged as serious—even scandalous—betrayals of the trust relationship between authors and readers.<sup>68</sup> This has become a significant aspect of Holocaust texts, where certain records have been disregarded or have provoked huge controversy because they are later found to be historically unreliable.<sup>69</sup> Controversies caused by ‘fake’ or fabricated testimonios are further fueled where the speaker or narrator seeks to represent a group or particular protest. This was most clearly illustrated in the controversy which emerged surrounding

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<sup>68</sup> This feature of testimonial writing has been highlighted by recent cases of ‘fake’ memoirs. Recently exposed ‘fakes’ include the bestselling narrative *A Million Little Pieces* (2003) by James Frey, which was heavily promoted by the Oprah Winfrey Book Club until 2007 when the writer was forced to admit that he had invented or exaggerated details in his account of drug addiction and recovery. Other examples include Laura Albert, who posed as the novelist J.T. LeRoy and claimed to be the addict son of a prostitute for a series of novels and articles published between 1999 and 2005 when the hoax was discovered. In 2008, Margaret B. Jones’ memoir *Love and Consequences* (now withdrawn from publication) was revealed as a complete fabrication soon after its publication. In this text the writer claimed to have grown up in a number of foster homes in the Greater Los Angeles area, and suggested that she had been exposed to drugs and prostitution from a young age. In each of these cases, the editors and publishing houses involved claim to have had no prior knowledge of inaccuracies within the text or of the false identities adopted by the authors concerned. However, the exposure of these fabrications has caused a re-evaluation of the validity and purpose of autobiographical texts, particularly those which testify to extreme experiences.

<sup>69</sup> One of the most significant examples of this involves Binjamin Wilkomirski’s *Fragments*, although this is also an issue Dori Laub M.D. addresses in relation to Holocaust testimonies in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony* (London: Routledge, 1992).



*I, Rigoberta Menchú* in 1999; it is also evident in the more recent criticisms of Souad's *Burned Alive*.<sup>70</sup> Both Menchú and Souad adopt a representative status in their accounts of personal trauma; these individuals claim to stand for a minority group of people who are suffering oppression, and use their own experiences to raise public awareness about collective experiences. However, the interrelatedness of the political and personal aspects of these identities mean that any claimed inaccuracies are judged seriously, as they threaten to undermine the validity and authenticity of the text.

A further disadvantage of testimonio is the role played by interlocutors or mediators in producing the narrative. Where autobiography focuses upon a single, self-representing individual,<sup>71</sup> it is clear that each of the testimonios in this chapter has been shaped and controlled by figures other than the narrator. Co-writers, publishers, agents and other interlocutors can all be seen to 'stand between' the narrator and the reader. These figures, in combination with paratextual mediations, provide alternative readings of these narratives, and guide readers' responses, sometimes unhelpfully. In certain cases, they both undermine the power of the narratives themselves, and denigrate the narrator in question. They cast doubt over his or her reliability, and raise questions about the way in which a text has been put together. For example, some reviewers of *A Long Way Gone* have been skeptical over whether all the experiences Beah's narrative recounts could possibly have happened to a single person, or whether Beah may have conflated the experiences of several different individuals into one representative

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<sup>70</sup> The Australian historian Thérèse Taylor has raised questions over the legitimacy of this story. Taylor highlights inconsistencies within the narrative, including imprecise geography and inaccurate descriptions of domestic customs for Palestinian women. She suggests that Souad may have been exploited by the Surgir Foundation for their own charitable and political purposes. Thérèse Taylor, 'Truth, History, and Honor Killing: A review of *Burned Alive*,' 2nd May 2005, *Anti-War.com* <<http://www.antiwar.com/orig/ttaylor.php?articleid=5801>> [accessed 17th September 2008].

<sup>71</sup> Although *I Saw Ramallah* is mediated—through translation—this was part of the Naguib Mafouz prize; consequently the relationship between Barghouti and Ahdaf Soueif, who translated the narrative, is quite different to the mediations I have explored in this chapter.

narrative.<sup>72</sup> This highlights a further problem which is inherent to the mode, as a testimonio's commercial success may be predicated upon its 'shock factor,' but it may risk accusations of sensationalism if the content is perceived to be unconvincing, or excessive.

Finally, the implied 'shelf-life' of a testimonio is potentially disadvantageous for those seeking to represent postcolonial trauma. Each of these narratives is designed for direct and immediate consumption; consequently, their long-term value may be limited. This is evident in the publication of *Left to Tell*, which coincided with renewed interest in the Rwandan genocide following its tenth anniversary; it is also indicated in *Survival in the Killing Fields*, which capitalized on American interest in southeast Asia following the Vietnam War. Finally, *A Long Way Gone* satisfies a current fascination with the figure of the child soldier. Once the exposure of this form of oppression is complete, interest in this so-called 'first' narrative of its kind may dissipate. Testimonios should therefore be viewed as commodities in motion with their own life histories: specific life cycles which influence the way they are distributed and how they operate within cultural and commercial marketplaces.

Whilst these vulnerabilities may be intrinsic to the very nature of the testimonio, it is worrying to note the way in which each of these narratives has ostensibly been appropriated by a western spokesperson or cause which is divergent from the apparent focus of the original narrative. For example, as Ilibagiza's text has become implicated in the self-help cause of Dr. Wayne Dyer, the specifically Rwandan aspects of her experience may have been given less attention. Similarly, in Beah's text the hovering

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<sup>72</sup> For an example, see B. Wolf, 'Entertaining and thought-provoking read, but is it true?' 1st January 2008, *Amazon.com* <[http://www.amazon.com/review/product/0374531269/ref=cm\\_cr\\_pr\\_helpful](http://www.amazon.com/review/product/0374531269/ref=cm_cr_pr_helpful)> [accessed 18th September 2008].

presence of UNICEF and the emphasis in epitexts upon *A Long Way Gone* as ‘the first narrative of a child soldier’ threaten to reduce this text to a sensationalist narrative which endorses western forms of aid. In Ngor’s narrative, Roger Warner’s return to the text after Ngor’s death shows how the story has been appropriated by the western media. Warner’s posthumous revelations represent a betrayal of the relationship between the narrator and an interlocutor, and disempower Ngor as the final authority over his text. Indeed, the mediation of a testimonio like Haing Ngor’s suggests that attempts to represent the postcolonial trauma can merely serve to reinforce an individual’s marginality within western culture. Consequently, each of these narrators can be seen to be subject to a form of cultural imperialism. Their claims to agency are met by a different kind of oppression, more subtle than their original experiences of trauma, but damaging nevertheless. In this way, their narratives develop Beverley’s suggestion that testimonio represents an attempt to ‘become not-subaltern’,<sup>73</sup> by exposing the challenges they face in this process.

In conclusion, it is evident that nonfictional modes of cultural representation facilitate valuable insight into contexts of postcolonial trauma. The correlation between the author, the narrator, and the protagonist, which Lejeune claimed was central to the ‘autobiographical pact’, has helped each text discussed so far to gain a sense of immediacy and urgency. This unity facilitates a sense of intimacy between the autobiographical figure and the reader, engendering trust and establishing the authenticity and genuineness of a text. In addition to these shared strengths, I have shown that both autobiography and testimonio have their own advantages. In an autobiography, the interiority of the narrator and the employment of certain literary

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<sup>73</sup> Beverley, 84.

tropes such as character development, structure, and style, increase the sense of urgency and vivid nature of the story being narrated. In contrast, testimonio rejects 'literariness' in favour of an emphasis upon sincerity and authorial intention. This can make the narrative seem more credible, because it takes on some of the properties of a legal testimony. It also draws the reader into an important relationship with the one testifying, as she or he is called to respond in some way. In this way, both autobiography and the testimonio are seen to be valuable modes for the mediation of postcolonial trauma. Whilst each mode has its own weaknesses, these different genres are alike in that, through them, individuals mediate personal experiences of trauma in compelling ways. It is fortunate then that we don't have to choose between autobiography and the testimonio; both modes offer useful ways for mediating different aspects of postcolonial trauma, and facilitate cultural engagement with the traumas of war, violence and dispossession in postcolonial contexts.

### 3. The Novel

[l]ike Freud, the postcolonial novelist is engaged in a work of disruption rather than recovery, a revelation of the act of forgetting rather than of that which has been forgotten. [...] The inability to recover the prehistory of the tribe as an integrated and integratable narrative guarantees the endlessness of the process of collective mourning.<sup>1</sup>

The first two chapters of this thesis have examined the ongoing impact of forms of trauma associated with colonization, decolonization, and postcolonialism through nonfictional modes of cultural representation. Having noted the advantages and disadvantages of these modes in the negotiation of postcolonial trauma, I turn now to examine two fictional genres: the novel and film. Both of these modes are frequently employed to explore trauma and experiences of postcolonialism. This may be because fictional narratives are freed from the arguably legalistic constraints of autobiographical writing. They do not need to tell personal stories, or adhere to the ‘autobiographical pact,’ and they are not expected to follow the conventions which I have suggested tend to characterize the structure, tone, and focus of autobiographical narratives. Furthermore, where autobiographies and testimonios are predicated by a focus upon the singular “I,” fictional narratives are not confined in this way. This suggests that they might have a greater capacity for exploring the shared experiences of a group, culture, or nation. This is particularly important following events like the Palestinian *nakba* and the Partition of India, where those who have firsthand experiences of a traumatic event are beginning to pass away, leaving second and third generation survivors with a traumatic legacy they may still seek to address. Finally, these modes do not need to

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<sup>1</sup> Durrant, 117.

fulfill the requirements of autobiographical writing for verifiable truth in order for their content to be valued. Indeed, they are generally accepted as art (and rewarded for their creativity and innovation), where autobiographies and testimonios are more likely to be associated with keeping historical record. Consequently, these fictional genres are able to consider how an idea or experience may most effectively be communicated. In light of these differences, we might conclude that fiction is better suited to represent postcolonial trauma than nonfiction. This is implied by Doris Lessing—a writer of both autobiographical and non-autobiographical narratives—who once claimed that, ‘fiction makes a better job of the truth than straightforward reminiscence.’<sup>2</sup>

The relative freedom of fictional narrative modes to engage creatively with the past is particularly important given the difficulties which I have highlighted in representing trauma, a condition which distorts memory and often appears to evade representation. In *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, Leigh Gilmore explores the pressures of autobiographical genres upon the process of telling stories of trauma and conflict. She argues that anxiety about autobiography’s commitment to truth-telling is detrimental to the representation of authentic experience. Autobiographical genres are too demanding—she suggests—too judging, and too restrictive; they place too much pressure upon writers, particularly when it comes to writing about trauma. This is because,

conventions about truth telling, salutary as they are, can be inimical to the ways in which some writers bring trauma stories into language. The portals are too narrow and the demands too restrictive. Moreover, the judgments they invite may be too similar to forms in which trauma was experienced. When the contest is over who can tell the truth, the risk of

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Michiko Kakutani, ‘Lessing Looks Back on Shadows and Parents,’ *The New York Times*, 5th August 2008. <[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/05/books/05kaku.html?\\_r=1&th&emc=th&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/05/books/05kaku.html?_r=1&th&emc=th&oref=slogin)> [accessed 18th September 2008].

being accused of lying (or malingering, or inflating, or whining) threatens the writer into continued silence. In this scenario, the autobiographical project may swerve away from the form of autobiography even as it embraces the project of self-representation.<sup>3</sup>

However, whilst it is free—at least in theory—to explore the past in imaginative ways, there are other potential dangers which face those who seek to represent postcolonial trauma in fiction. For example, the absence of an autobiographical connection may make accounts of postcolonial trauma seem less authentic, undermining the credibility of the narrative and weakening its inherent value, whilst at the same time bringing the producer's 'right' to explore the subject into question. Furthermore, this kind of representation risks diminishing the suffering of real victims, as it may misrepresent, sensationalize, exaggerate, or exploit the past. Any of these forms of manipulation may amount to historical revisionism, or represent the pursuit of pleasure from another's pain, a notion which has proved horrific, especially Holocaust survivors.<sup>4</sup> In addition to these challenges, the appropriation of painful experiences of (post)colonialism for a (predominantly) western readership may risk the kinds of cultural imperialism I noted in the previous chapter.

### Introducing the Novel

From this set of problems, or dilemmas which face those wishing to represent postcolonial trauma in fiction, I will now move to focus upon the specific properties of

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<sup>3</sup> Gilmore, 3.

<sup>4</sup> See Sue Vice's comparison of fiction and testimony in *Holocaust Fiction*. Sue Vice, *Holocaust Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2000), 5-6. Vice notes in particular the views of Elie Wiesel, who once stated that "'The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration' is a contradiction in terms," and Theodor Adorno, who notoriously claimed that 'After Auschwitz to write a poem is barbaric,' as it is to:

squeeze aesthetic pleasure out of artistic representation of the naked bodily pain of those who have been knocked down by rifle butts. [...] Through aesthetic principles or stylization [...] the unimaginable ordeal still appears as if it had some ulterior purpose. It is transfigured and stripped of some of its horror, and with this, injustice is already done to the victims.'

Both quoted in Vice, 5.

the novel. The literary aspects of this genre have frequently been invoked by those attempting to theorize trauma; this suggests that the mode assists in the articulation of such experiences. Caruth describes trauma as ‘the *story* of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available [*my emphasis*].’<sup>5</sup> She suggests that trauma needs to be conceptualized using ‘a language that is always somehow *literary*: a language that defies, even as it claims our understanding [*my emphasis*].’<sup>6</sup> The suitability of the novel form to represent traumatic experience is often attributed to its figurative nature and to the experimental textual strategies of modernism and postmodernism, which facilitate an exploration of the fragmentation and disruption caused by trauma. In his discussion of the work of trauma theorists like Caruth, Felman, and Laub, Petar Ramadanovic encapsulates the strengths of the mode as follows:

What makes literature into the privileged [...] site of trauma is the fact that literature as an art form can contain and present an aspect of experience which was not experienced or processed fully. Literature, in other words, because of its sensible and representational character, because of its figurative language, is a channel and a medium for a transmission of trauma which does not need to be apprehended in order to be present in a text or [...] in order to be witnessed.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the role played by the novel in exploring traumatic experience is evident in a recent surge of studies on the subject, including: Anne Whitehead’s *Trauma Novels*, Sue Vice’s *Holocaust Fiction*, Sam Durrant’s *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of*

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<sup>5</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 5. To support her argument, she considers why Freud chose explain aspects of traumatic experience including belatedness and the compulsion to repeat through reference to a fictional story, Tasso’s epic *Gerusalemme Liberata*:

It is the moving quality of this literary story, I would suggest—its striking juxtaposition of the unknowing, injurious repetition and the witness of the crying voice—that best represents Freud’s intuition of, and his passionate fascination with, traumatic experiences. If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the language of psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet.

Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Petar Ramadanovic, ‘Introduction: Trauma and Crisis’ (2001), *Postmodern Culture: An Electronic Journal of Interdisciplinary Criticism*, 11: 2, <<http://www3.iath.virginia.edu/pmc/text-only/issue.101/11.2introduction2.txt>> [accessed 18th September 2008].



*Mourning*, and a recent issue of *Studies in the Novel* entitled ‘Postcolonial Trauma Novels.’

At the same time, novels which address traumatic experience regularly polarize opinions, ranging from high praise to disgust. Claims that the mode is unsuitable for representing trauma have been largely addressed towards Holocaust novels, which Sue Vice describes as ‘scandalous; that is, they invariably provoke controversy by inspiring repulsion and acclaim in equal measure.’<sup>8</sup> One of the principle reasons for this relates to the nature of traumatic experience itself, which appears to overwhelm the individual and resist language and representation. As an experience which is not fully understood at the time, but only *belatedly*, trauma defies ordinary cognitive processes. It is not fully possessed by the traumatized individual; rather the individual is possessed by it. Its haunting quality disturbs linearity and pushes memory and history into crisis. As Caruth writes, ‘[t]he traumatized [...] carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess.’<sup>9</sup> The haunting, intangible nature of trauma means that the term ‘trauma fiction’ may seem paradoxical, invoking novelists’ attempts to narrate in prose what remains elusive to language and form. This represents both a seemingly impossible project, and—for some critics—an inappropriate usurpation of a privileged position only trauma victims themselves can inhabit. Vice suggests the novel is frequently criticized as being ‘too self-assured and unambiguous properly to represent the Holocaust’<sup>10</sup>; she points out that ‘[t]o judge by what many critics have to say, to write Holocaust fiction is tantamount to making a fiction of the Holocaust.’<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Vice, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Caruth, *Trauma* 5.

<sup>10</sup> Vice, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Vice, 1.

Whilst its role in representing historical trauma has on occasions been the subject of debate, the novel is firmly established as a valuable way to mediate postcolonial experience. The novel offers great potential for creative explorations of memory and selfhood—both of individuals, and at collective levels. Its figurative and experimental nature enables writers to explore fresh ways to address collective experiences such as marginalization, forced exile, and dislocation, as well as the disruptions which occur when established notions of community and nation are in flux. In this way, it may overcome the difficulties involved in representing others, which I noted in chapters one and two. Furthermore, insofar as it represents a western institution of English Literature which has established, exported, and enforced cultural values, the novel form has frequently been used to resist dominant traditions, through narratives which subvert accepted world-views and resist western hegemony. Engagement with this task is evident in the work of J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison, the three writers whose work forms the basis of Durrant’s examination of postcolonial mourning. Their novels, Durrant suggests, ‘invite us to participate in ceaseless labor of remembrance, a labor which radically redefines the borders of community by teaching us how to live in memory of both the dead and all those whose living human presence continues to be disavowed by the present world order.’<sup>12</sup>

It is with a particular concern for the role of the novel in representing all those ‘disavowed by the present world order’ that I now explore the representation of postcolonial trauma through the narrative framework of three novels. These are: *Skinner’s Drift*, Lisa Fugard’s exploration of the legacy of Apartheid in South Africa; A

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<sup>12</sup> Durrant, 1.

*Lake Beyond The Wind* by Yahya Yakhliif, which returns to the Palestinian catastrophe or *nakba* of 1948; and Bapsi Sidhwa's Partition novel, *Cracking India*. In order to evaluate how successfully the novel form mediates postcolonial trauma, I will engage in a close analysis of each of these texts against Anne Whitehead's theory that '[i]f trauma fiction is to be effective, it cannot avoid registering the shocking and unassimilable nature of its subject matter in formal terms.'<sup>13</sup> Whitehead highlights three literary techniques and devices which she claims recur in trauma narratives—a dispersed or fragmented narrative voice, repetition, and intertextuality—to suggest that, '[n]ovelists draw, in particular, on literary techniques that mirror at a formal level the effects of trauma.'<sup>14</sup> To these three features, I would like to suggest a fourth which, I suggest, recurs in novels exploring *postcolonial* trauma: the failure—or refusal—to achieve a sense of resolution or closure, either in the plot or for the characters. This is, I suggest, central to the postcolonial trauma novelists' task of representing the ongoing reverberations of trauma at collective levels. The rest of this chapter will employ close textual analysis to focus on the ways in which these conventions of fiction are manipulated and distorted by writers' attempts to represent postcolonial trauma. In view of the comparative approach of this thesis, it is fitting that each of the following texts explores exile or dislocation, experiences which I explored in chapter one using texts from similar geographic regions (Palestine, Southern Africa, and the Indian Subcontinent).

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<sup>13</sup> Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 83. This view is supported by Vice, who argues that Holocaust novels feature the same conventions as other works of fiction, but that, 'because of the subject matter, all these standard features are brought to their limit, taken literally, de-familiarized or used self-consciously. In this way, effective Holocaust fiction cannot help registering the shocking and unassimilable nature of its subject in formal ways'. Vice, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Whitehead, 84.

I. Lisa Fugard: *Skinner's Drift*

In the first text, Lisa Fugard's *Skinner's Drift*, the rugged landscape of the Northern Province in South Africa forms the backdrop to an exploration of the ongoing effects of Apartheid. Fugard explores the power shift taking place between the white and black populations following years of oppression through the microcosm of a white farming family (who live on a farm called 'Skinner's Drift') and the blacks in their employ. Born in the latter years of Apartheid, the protagonist Eva feels love, pride, and alternately, resentment and shame towards her gruff Afrikaner father and her fragile English mother. The novel focuses on Eva, a twenty-eight year old woman who has lived overseas for ten years. Returning to visit her dying father in hospital, she begins to explore the past, and the tragic events which led to her departure. These include her father's accidental killing of a small black child on their farm and her mother's death. Both these events were tragic hunting accidents; but they give way to Eva's residual questions regarding Apartheid's oppressive regime, and its dogmatic insistence upon white land ownership and domination.

When the novel begins, *Skinner's Drift*, the former locus of Eva's family's existence, is now deserted, and her father—who once sought to defend his land with the violence and passion of an archetypal Boer hero—is now an old man who lies inert and voiceless in a hospital bed. Alongside him lie other white Afrikaans farmers whose lives, spent struggling to protect and control the land, are also all but over. All illusions of white superiority banished, a black nurse caring for Martin notes how the dramatic national power shift which has taken place is now manifest at a personal level:

“Your nightmare, hey, Mr. van Rensburg, to have me looking after you? You know what my revenge is for all you old white farmers? To do such a good job that I bring you back to health. Maybe I get some *muti* from the *sangoma* and mix it into your jelly and custard and

make you younger. Mmm hmm, start a conspiracy, all across the country, turn all the dying old *boere* into young men! [...] So you have many, many years to experience the joy and freedom of our new South Africa!”<sup>15</sup>

One of the primary modes in which Fugard achieves her exploration of collective trauma in South Africa is through the structure of the narrative itself, which is fragmented and disjointed. In the telling of *Skinner's Drift*, Fugard collapses temporal order and rejects a linear approach to plot. Instead, present and past intersect in a manner that echoes the very conditions of traumatic experience. Fugard suggests that the past is not accessed directly but is triggered by memories, sensations, flashbacks, dreams, and other, more “official,” public forms of history. For Eva, returning to events of the past takes the form of an archaeological journey as she uncovers fragments of memory, many of which are too painful to excavate fully. Waiting for her father to awaken from his coma, she immerses herself in reading her mother’s recovered diaries. These trigger her own memories and, more importantly, enable her to access the past through a different perspective:

Day after day her childhood spooled out in her memory. Sightings of aardvarks and aardwolves; the purchase of irascible Shylock, Eva’s first pony; the excitement of the early harvests; a flask of afternoon tea beside the Limpopo and a swim when the river was flowing swiftly and crocodiles weren’t a threat. Eva hadn’t wanted to know how sweet the early years on Skinner’s Drift had been, and to have them documented so left her feeling tender. (30)

It becomes clear that Eva’s reluctance to think about the past is the partial consequence of what Judith Lewis Herman calls ‘an abnormal form of memory’ which encodes the traumatic moment so that, ‘[i]t is as if time stops at the moment of trauma’.<sup>16</sup> Reminded in this way of life “before,” Eva begins to recover memories of her childhood recorded

<sup>15</sup> Lisa Fugard, *Skinner's Drift* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 24. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>16</sup> Herman, 37.

in the diaries, yet all the while admonishes herself: ‘You know how this is going to end, stop reading them’ (32).

As she is the novel’s protagonist, it is through Eva’s eyes that much of the story is viewed. However, the use of third-person narration throughout the novel casts the reader in an observational role and diverts sympathy away from Eva and onto some of the other characters. This technique is similar to one used by Toni Morrison, who employs the third-person narrative in order to obtain an ‘intimacy in which the reader is under the impression that he isn’t really reading this; that he is participating in it as he goes along’.<sup>17</sup> Fugard develops this strategy by deftly switching points of view and employing multiple characters to lead the narrative. These characters present different perspectives, which challenge and subvert the isolating effects of trauma. As a narrative strategy, this technique also questions a traditional hierarchy of third-person narration whereby a protagonist dominates the narrative and takes priority over all the other characters. In presenting several of the chapters from different perspectives, Fugard draws attention to those silenced by Apartheid, highlighting an oppressive regime under which relationships are determined as much by what remains unsaid as by what is spoken aloud. Consequently, the events of the narrative are viewed through a variety of individuals’ perspectives, including the van Rensburg family (Eva, Lorraine, and Martin) and their black labourers (Lefu, the chief farm hand; Nkele, the domestic maid and Lefu’s daughter; and Mpho, Nkele’s son).

The effect of this is initially disorientating. The reader is required to deduce which character provides the voice for each chapter, and the emerging perspectives are

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<sup>17</sup> Morrison, quoted in Laurie Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (London: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 11.

strikingly different. This is common to literature that addresses traumatic experience, as Laurie Vickroy recognizes in her readings of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Larry Heinemann's *Paco's Story*. In these texts, she suggests that,

many voices, emotions and experiences intermingle to produce individual and collective memory and to counteract silence and forgetting. [Multiple] accounts sometimes reinforce and sometimes challenge each other, illustrating both the potential for sharing and healing but also missed connections, as when traumatic reactions isolate individuals with similar experience from one another.<sup>18</sup>

The resultant narrative thread of *Skinner's Drift* is similarly patchy and full of gaps. For example, Lorraine's neat diary entries are largely dispassionate as they recount life on the farm; similarly, Martin's perceptions are often hazy, to imply—we are led to presume—that he has been drinking. Importantly, these gaps are most evident during the key events of the novel, namely the killings, of both the black child and Lorraine. The former is presented through the eyes of Martin and does not clarify that it is a child who is shot; in fact, it is not clear exactly what happened until much later in the text. Instead, emphasis is laid upon the immediate emotional impact of the event on Martin's relationship with Eva: '[Martin] turned to find his daughter's terrified eyes, terrified and terrifying, as if they'd become unmoored, were floating towards him. [...] Eva had moved away. She hadn't brushed past him, but he felt something flowing from himself. A part of him was leaving. It was her' (43). The later event, the accidental shooting of Lorraine, is focalized through one of the least established characters, Martin's friend and fellow-farmer Jannie. The men have been out on a night hunt and have killed a lion. They return to the compound and Lorraine emerges to greet them:

Standing in front of the bakkie, with a dead lion in the flatbed, Jannie knew how vulgar the scene must look to Lorraine. He wanted to keep the peace, he wanted his friend Martin to have his celebration, and he wanted Lorraine to know that he knew the killing of the lion

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<sup>18</sup> Vickroy, 27.

distressed her. He was about to say something to her when Dolf, who was unloading the rifles, stumbled. The guns fell to the ground, a shot resounded and Lorraine was lifted off her feet and blown backwards. She hit the fence and fell to the ground, head twisted at a funny angle. (241)

This is the most direct reference ever made to Lorraine's death, and it is important to note that it reflects Jannie's perspective rather than that of any of the primary characters. Thus, in her narration of the novel's two central traumatic events, Fugard circumvents her protagonist in order to help the reader gain a sense of Eva's detachment from her experience, a detachment which means that she can only access it long afterwards. In fact, the journey on which Fugard draws the reader brings its own belated shock and sorrow as we finally become aware of what has taken place and begin to grieve for the characters ourselves.

Whilst emphasizing Eva's isolation, Fugard also uses a dispersed narrative voice to explore how the characters in the novel are related by their common experiences. In her use of multiple viewpoints, Fugard shows that no single perspective is sufficient to communicate the traumatic significance of what has taken place, or its range of effects. Rather, she draws together a collection of individual experiences to communicate collective suffering, consequently engaging in a process of dialogical witnessing, whereby different perspectives are brought together to create a collective testimonial. This inevitably gestures towards politics. In her inclusion of oppressed perspectives, Fugard provides agency for the formerly silenced, bringing their stories to public consciousness. In her vivid portrayal of the black characters (the strongest aspect of the text), she allows space for their hopes, fears, and anxieties to emerge within the story, filling in the gaps left by the selective amnesia of collective history. The attention she gives to these characters also breaks down basic stereotypes that are associated with



Apartheid, and raises fundamental questions such as who or what constitutes a victim, a perpetrator, a bystander, or a protester. For example, not all the black characters are victims, and not all the white characters are perpetrators. Indeed, we come to see that several of the white characters find themselves victimized, just as several of the black characters resist oppression in ways that might be considered aggressive and harmful to others.

As a structural and stylistic literary device, the use of a fragmented narrative enables Fugard to show the intensity with which traumatic memories have come to control Eva. It also increases the dramatic suspense and disrupts the structural clarity of the novel so that Fugard's lucid realist prose takes on a force that conveys the significance of what is taking place, even if the details themselves are at times somewhat ambiguous. This again evokes trauma. As Herman writes: 'Traumatic memories lack verbal narrative and context; rather they are encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images. [...] The intense focus on fragmentary sensation, on image without context, gives the traumatic memory a heightened reality.'<sup>19</sup> Finally, in her reliance upon social ties and a sense of community, Fugard highlights the role of the collective in addressing traumatic experience. Using a trope that recurs throughout much postcolonial writing, she challenges and subverts the grand narrative of history and presents instead a collection of fragments from multiple perspectives, which are all intrinsic to establishing a meaningful connection with the past. This emphasis enables Fugard to use Eva's story to engage with the wider, collective context of Apartheid.

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<sup>19</sup> Herman, 38.

The fragmented narrative is supported thematically through the use of repetition. Whitehead writes that, '[o]ne of the key literary strategies in trauma fiction is the device of repetition, which can act at the levels of language, imagery or plot. Repetition mimics the effects of trauma, for it suggests the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression.'<sup>20</sup> The use of repetition as a literary device mirrors the repetition compulsion that Freud recognized in trauma victims as being an obligation 'to *repeat* [...] repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it as something belonging to the past.'<sup>21</sup> Whitehead describes the process in the following way: 'By continually returning to the traumatic situation, the individual can master the amounts of stimulus which have broken through by binding them together and simultaneously construct a protective shield against trauma after the event.'<sup>22</sup> In Fugard's narrative, recurring images and motifs reinforce the notion of a deep-lying trauma, which dominates the narrative. One of these is an image of hunting, which recurs as an indication of violence and destruction. For example: 'Africa lay stretched beneath [Eva] like the ravaged hide of some ancient beast' (1) and 'it would have been so cosmopolitan if it hadn't been for that light, wild and fierce, as if gleaned from the eyes of animals that kill' (5). Another is water, which comes increasingly to represent renewal and hope for the black characters, promising to wash the land clean and bring all transgressions to light.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to recurring motifs like these, repetition is employed at a structural level through reference to traumatic symptoms such as flashbacks and dream sequences.

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<sup>20</sup> Whitehead, 86.

<sup>21</sup> Freud, in Gay (ed.), 594-626 (602).

<sup>22</sup> Whitehead, 119.

<sup>23</sup> This is enacted in a very literal way when Lefu discovers the child killed by Martin, which has been unearthed by heavy rain: 'he once again peered into the water. The silt was settling and Lefu saw the small skull and the delicate curve of ribs. He drew back, fearful. It can't be, he thought, then he once again knelt down and stared into the donga. A scrap of blue cloth, caught on a piece of bone, swayed gently in the water (97-98).

These show repetition used as a thematic literary device which mirrors the repetition-compulsion. Both Eva and her father experience conventionally recognized trauma symptoms, such as flashbacks and nightmares. These intrusions draw them back to the death of the child so that their lives are haunted by the past. In one passage, Martin is 'flung out of sleep, a buffalo of a memory bearing on him, making him gasp, adrenalin shooting into his heart, his gut in spasms' (36). Out hunting at night, he begins to use a machine gun instead of a rifle, obliterating animals so that they can barely be recognized and cannot be eaten. A black labourer, Mosanku, observes that Martin is 'a crazy one' (88): 'Van Rensburg is usually a careful man, those eyes know just where to shoot. A bullet in the neck, one that breaks the spine, or in the heart. But these impala had been shot many times. The skins were torn and the meat was full of pieces of metal' (87-88). Eva, too, appears to suffer from a compulsion to repeat the past. The day after the child is killed, she returns to the bushveld to bury it. Then, she begins to bury all the animals her father has killed. Traveling around the farm early in the morning, she routinely collects destroyed animals in secret and buries them in the same place that the child is buried. This attempt to conceal her father's transgression suggests an effort to soothe her conscience and absolve her guilt. It also evokes the Freudian notion that traumatized individuals repeatedly return to the scene of trauma in order to relive the event and master its effect on them.

In her emphasis upon the collective nature of postcolonial trauma, Fugard uses familial relationships as a microcosm to show how a single traumatic experience may reverberate in different ways in different lives, until ultimately it refers back to an original, colonial trauma. In doing this, Fugard establishes a series of links between her characters, emphasizing the ways in which their lives are interrelated. For example,

each white character has a black counterpart, a character whose life is bound to him or her, serving as a parallel, “other,” or “double.” Thus, within the text, the chief farm laborer, Lefu/Ezekiel, serves as other to his master, Martin. This parallel is voiced by Mosanku to Lefu: ““We do not live separate from these white people. [...] I say to myself that I do what I want with my life, but I am here because Baas Jannie is here. I am like this with Jannie Louw,” he said, and he entwined his arms. “And you, my friend? You are like this with a crazy one”” (88). Lefu acknowledges this link when he reflects that ‘in riding [horses] with Eva he had trespassed into Martin’s life’ (89), usurping his position of authority and power. Indeed, Lefu comes to represent something of a father-figure for Eva; it is he whom she enlists to help her as she seeks to bury animals killed by her father, and it is he in whom she seeks solace: ‘He smelled of earth and fire and she wanted to reach down to touch his face, to believe he’d come to her. She wanted to tell him everything, wanted him to help her’ (286).

In a similar way, the maid, Nkele, can be read as Lorraine’s other in the text. Like Lorraine, she is trapped, unable to stand up to the powerful and passionate men who control her. Both women are more liberal than their male counterparts (Lefu and Martin respectively); furthermore, both are rebellious and resist their circumstances in quiet, subversive ways. For example, Lorraine chooses to be cremated, something Eva recognizes as a ‘final act of rebellion’ against her life on the farm (3); Nkele satisfies herself with executing her domestic tasks with a spirit approaching vengeance, admitting that ‘[m]urdering the carpet was a deeply satisfying chore’ (151).

Finally, their children, Eva and Mpho, who are both born at the latter stages of Apartheid, are alike in their refusal to acquiesce in Apartheid’s oppressive regime. Both

struggle to follow the models established for them by their parents and instead strike out independently, attempting to forge new identities in the new society of post-Apartheid South Africa. However, where Eva chooses to escape from her homeland and ignore the traumas of her past by remaining silent, Mpho is empowered by democracy and the arrival of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the region. The novel's climax finds them meeting at Skinner's Drift. Mpho appears to have moved into the abandoned farm with all the confidence and assertion of a newly liberated prisoner. He is intent upon bringing Martin's transgressions to light. He has begun to dig around the farm, hoping to unearth the bones of the child Martin killed, and take them to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Eva finds a diary where Mpho has written "Martin Van Rensburg Shot an Afrikan Child on the Farm Called Skinner's Drift," underneath which he testifies to the killing of the child as a story carried by his grandfather for many years but now given to him. He writes, 'The white people think we are animals and they shoot us. They throw our bodies away. They think they are safe. But I am not afraid. This is my land. I speak now. I will tell them what happened' (277).

The pairing of these characters enables the reader to perceive the two parallel worlds orbiting Skinner's Drift. This is exemplified in the way that the black characters each have two names: an English one (Lefu calls this 'a white-world name' (60)), and an African one. Nkele often refers to her 'white-world' name as another identity: 'Grace the quiet maid who was prompt, obedient and well mannered; Grace the cleaning presence, who was almost a non-presence, so much so that the white people would sometimes forget she was even there' (157). She suggests that, while Grace is submissive, feelings of anger and rebellion are growing inside Nkele that she can scarcely contain: 'Downstairs in the kitchen she squeezed the loaves of bread from the

bread box. Nkele would have cut four fat slices from the freshest loaf; good girl Grace cut two slices from the stalest loaf' (160). This duality in identity and allegiance echoes the same sense of division and segregation that defined South Africa's Apartheid regime. Although Apartheid advocated the separation of white and black people, Fugard subverts this notion by showing how these groups are intrinsically linked, depending upon each other for survival.<sup>24</sup>

This use of repetition and 'doubleness' also further complicates the central traumas of the text because for every white character that is traumatized, a black character has a different experience of the same event and is consequently traumatized in a different way. For example, while Eva is traumatized after witnessing the death of the child and attempts to protect her father by burying it in secret, Lefu is traumatized by his own collusion in the crime when he unwittingly helps to cover the deed by burying animals with Eva. He feels betrayed by Eva when he realizes that he has been participating in an act that further humiliates and degrades his own people. Of course, it is the traumas themselves that are most clearly linked and opposed. For where Lorraine's death is publicly witnessed, deeply mourned, and remembered, the other death—that of the small child that Martin kills—is never named and, apparently, never publicly noted. It takes place in the dark and remains a secret. This act is repressed, and remains unvoiced until the end of the text. Lorraine's death can, then, be viewed as a repetition of an earlier, colonial trauma. Because it is not consciously willed and no life-affirming explanation can be offered for it, her death captures what Freud referred to as the 'daemonic' quality of reenactment—'a compulsion to repeat which overrides the

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<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, while the black characters are allocated white names, so their employers can refer to them easily, giving white people African names is deemed an honour. Indeed, the only white character to have an African name is Eva, whose Sotho name "Naledi," meaning star, is bestowed on her as a young girl by Lefu as a token of affection (60). In this way, names come to represent a play for power and an act of resistance; Lefu's naming of Eva shows how he subverts white oppression and turns it into a black man's privilege.

pleasure principle'<sup>25</sup>—or as an example of man's tendency towards 'death instincts'.<sup>26</sup> In turn, the death of the nameless child comes to represent all the countless unspoken wrongs committed against the oppressed peoples of South Africa. As each death represents a reenactment of a previous crime, Fugard establishes the notion of cyclical violence, the thoughtless disposal of life that comes to define the systemic racism and oppression of Apartheid. Her use of repetition, then, at levels of language, imagery, and plot exposes the interrelatedness of traumatic events and how they bind together segregated peoples. As a literary technique, this emphasizes the far-reaching impact of traumatic events and their consequences, while constantly referring back to an original trauma that occurred during colonization.

Alongside repetition and a fragmented narrative, Whitehead argues that, faced with the challenges of narrating trauma, novels frequently employ intertextuality, a literary device which acknowledges the text as 'a momentary convergence of a wide range of intertexts: [to quote Barthes] 'citations, references, echoes, cultural languages [...] antecedent or contemporary.' Barthes description of intertextuality implicitly allies it with the act of memory.'<sup>27</sup> By connecting a text to a series of intertexts, Whitehead suggests that writers are able to add multiple layers of interpretation to their novels. She claims that they tie it implicitly to an act of memory, as repressed or forgotten 'textual' memories resurface to haunt narratives in a way similar to the re-emergence of traumatic memories from the subconscious. In *Skinner's Drift* intertextuality is employed in order to expose the different perspectives of those who have been forgotten, or marginalized. In one instance, a reference to a comic book produced for white children exposes the subtlety of the Apartheid regime, where white heroes battle

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<sup>25</sup> Freud, in Gay, 594-626 (605).

<sup>26</sup> Freud, in Gay, 594-626 (618).

<sup>27</sup> Whitehead, 85.

against black enemies and their Communist overlords. When Lefu/Ezekiel buys a comic book *The Adventures of Buck de Vaal*, to help young Mpho learn how to read, he is shocked to discover its racist message and his son's familiarity—at such a young age—with the language of conflict:

When the rising moon set the nightjars trilling at one in the morning, [Lefu] was still awake berating himself for being so foolish as to buy the comic for Mpho. He knew how it would end, who would be killed and who would be saved, and the ease with which the words AK47 had fallen from the mouths of the children, tumbled out as soft as the patter of rain, distressed him. (66)

As well as these overt intertextual references, there is a more implicit link between Fugard's text and the foundations of Trauma Studies which reinforces a claim I outlined in the introduction to this thesis that the way in which some of trauma's primary theorists (including Freud and Caruth) have configured the experience is problematic. This is shown at the centre of Fugard's narrative, which describes a trauma reminiscent of the original example of traumatic neurosis suggested by Freud of Tancred in *Gerusalemme Liberata* yet with a strikingly different emphasis. While there is no evidence that might lead us to believe that Fugard is aware of trauma theory and scholarly writings on the subject, there are several similarities between this incident and the traumas she describes. Like Tancred in Tasso's epic, Fugard's character Martin van Rensburg accidentally kills someone, having mistaken his identity. Like Tancred, Martin is traumatized and provoked to further violence. He, too, is bound to compulsively repeat what he has done, a repetition that culminates in the death of his wife some time later. In the introduction, I noted the problematic way in which Freud highlights Tancred's trauma as the epitome of what it means to be traumatized, and his apparent refusal to acknowledge the victimization of Clorinda, the innocent victim of this



murder. In contrast, Fugard's text points towards the unnamed child as the focal concern for the narrative. Thus Martin and Eva's traumas are secondary; Martin suffers for his crime, and Eva is traumatized by what she sees, but neither experience equals that of the child. In this way, *Skinner's Drift* highlights the need to recognize those who are so victimized and 'forgotten' by marginalization that they have no voice at all. It suggests that any theory of trauma which fails to consider those who find themselves victims, yet are silenced by its devastating effects is ultimately inadequate. This focus suggests that a reconfiguration of traumatic experience may yet be needed, one which fully represents the impact of trauma upon the collective, and focuses on those most silenced, especially in the postcolonial context.

This emphasis on the voiceless subjects of postcolonial trauma is replicated in Fugard's narrative through her use of a fragmented narrative voice and, in particular, her reliance upon the black characters to provide context to and alternative perspectives on events. Her approach privileges silenced and oppressed victims of trauma. It also highlights how the postcolonial context collapses conventional boundaries that make up subjectivity (notably the boundary between the individual and the collective, and the personal and the political). The resulting narrative insistently focuses upon the interrelatedness of people, especially in their connections to the past. It embodies the African spirit of *ubuntu*, or "togetherness," which Antjie Krog identifies as the concept that 'a person is a person through other persons'.<sup>28</sup> Drawing together different fragments of traumatized experience, Fugard underlines the complex relationship between the individual and the collective in order to indicate a wide-scale crisis of identity at a national level. This crisis becomes most clearly apparent at the end of the novel as

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<sup>28</sup> Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull* (London: Random House, 1999), 399.

Mpho's impending visit to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission suggests that the events on the farm represent just one episode in a national crisis. Such an emphasis implies that a theoretical reconfiguration of traumatic experience—one that acknowledges the complex relationship between trauma and the postcolonial context and its long-term consequences for national identity—may be needed.

I have shown how Fugard manipulates three literary devices which Whitehead suggests recur in trauma fiction. In her employment of a fragmented or dispersed narrative voice, repetition, and intertextual links, Fugard manipulates the novel form to vividly communicate traumatic experience. Fugard emphasizes the relationship between individual and collective identity, in order to explore a specifically postcolonial experience of trauma. However, Fugard's failure to achieve any real sense of closure, either for her characters, or for the narrative itself has provoked criticism from some readers.<sup>29</sup> I wish to argue that this emphasis upon authentically representing collective trauma means that there is no way the novel can end in a satisfactory, or conclusive manner. This suggests that there may be a fourth feature of trauma fiction which applies specifically to postcolonial novels: the unresolved, or inconclusive ending.

The ending leaves open several key questions. Will Eva sell the farm? Will she reconcile with her father before he dies? Will Mpho go to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission with his claims and will Eva's fears of being prosecuted as an accomplice to her father be realized as a consequence? Furthermore, Eva's relationship with the past remains ambiguous. It is not clear whether she has adequately addressed her past experiences—both the domestic tragedy which estranged her from her father, and the

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<sup>29</sup> For an example, see Darryl Wellington, 'Dark Memories Elicited from the Era of Apartheid,' *The Christian Science Monitor*, <<http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0117/p15s01-bogn.html>> [accessed 18th September 2008].

ramifications of her upbringing upon her sense of national identity. Has she begun a process of healing and recovery? What, in fact, might it mean to 'recover' or 'heal' from Apartheid in South Africa? Rather than responding to these questions, Fugard can be seen to refuse a sense of closure within the novel. Instead, she exposes the way in which the traumatic legacy of colonial violence continues to reverberate in the lives of its victims, as well as witnesses and even perpetrators. In particular, the use of the family unit as a microcosm for national trauma shows how guilt, shame, and Apartheid crimes may be passed down from one generation to the next. Fugard uses *Skinner's Drift* as a vehicle of resistance against the silencing, shaming effects of her nation's past. She rejects the perpetrator's tendency to forget historical crimes and instead reveals the humanity at the centre of the conflict. This is evident in Fugard's unsympathetic representation of Eva, in particular Eva's self-centeredness and the way she shares her family's obsessions with the darker aspects of their survival (adultery, drought, betrayal, rebellion, and violence). Their neuroses are evident even before the central traumas of the text take place. In contrast, the black characters existing on the periphery of the family's world exude self-possession and poise; they engage with the larger questions of Apartheid because they feel its effects so keenly. Towards the end of the novel, Mpho's desire to expose the murder of the unknown child indicates the anger which may yet be unleashed over historical crimes. This suggests that Eva's experiences of returning to *Skinner's Drift* may represent a small incident in a long and troublesome future for the region. However, even when these two opposing groups seek reconciliation, there is no sense of conclusion. Eva's final meeting with Lefu perfectly epitomizes this point. Eva wants to reconcile the past and make amends for her part in the wrongs committed by her family, so she apologizes to Lefu. His response is startling: 'You want me to forgive you, Naledi. For what? For telling me I am black and I cannot speak, I cannot see. They

all tell me that, people tell me that every day. You are not the first. And I forgave you a long time ago' (292).

The questions which this novel leaves open-ended should provoke us to consider how writing about postcolonial trauma might offer new possibilities, and new boundaries for fiction writers. For an authentic, sincere engagement with traumatic memory must, argues Caruth, address the problem of how to help alleviate suffering and understand its nature 'without eliminating the force and truth of the reality'<sup>30</sup>. In *Skinner's Drift*, Fugard shows how personal trauma in South Africa becomes embroiled in a greater trauma, that of Apartheid. She exposes the deep-rooted and ongoing impact of postcolonial trauma, which means that recovery and reconciliation cannot be tied up within one character's renewal but belongs to all. Thus there can be no satisfactory conclusion to the text; the resolution falls victim to the messy remnants of Apartheid.

## II. Yahya Yakhliif: *A Lake Beyond the Wind*

*A Lake Beyond the Wind* explores *nakba*, the Catastrophe of 1948, when Zionist forces clashed with volunteers of the Arab Liberation Army and many Palestinian towns fell to Israeli occupation. The town of Tiberias, set on the shores of Lake Tiberias, is the geographic focus of the novel; historically this location has been particularly vulnerable in the resettlement of land as a result of conflicts between the Jews and the Palestinians. Consequently, the novel explores much of the traumatic loss which took place in rural Palestine during this time. It also addresses the genesis of the refugee problem, which continues to shape Palestinian national identity. This text was originally published in 1991 in Arabic as *Buhayra wara'a al-rih* and later translated into English in 1999.

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<sup>30</sup> Caruth, *Trauma*, vii.

The absence of a single protagonist in this novel immediately sets it apart from the autobiographical narratives which I explored in chapters one and two. Instead of charting the experiences of an individual, the novel closely follows the experiences of three figures: Najib, a fisherman who volunteers for the Arab Liberation Army; Abd al-Rahman, an Iraqi volunteer among the Arab irregulars who have been enlisted to help defend the land; and Radi, a small boy who lives on the shores of the lake in Samakh. As in Fugard's novel, the use of multiple narrators helps to communicate the collective nature of traumatic experience; here, the trauma in question is that of the 1948 war in Palestine. In addition to the narrative's triple focus, children, army volunteers and military leaders, the simple men- and womenfolk of Tiberias and even animals all take turns as the central characters whose subjectivity is used to narrate the story. Through them, the narration takes several different stylistic forms. In some passages a third person prose simply follows the lives of several different characters, drawing the reader alongside as an observer. This enables Yakhlif to explore individual characters against the backdrop of a specific historical moment. This is exemplified in the novel's opening:

Radi sat in his uncle's shop, behind the plumbline scales. As he waited for his uncle to come back, he sold a few things but mostly he was just bored. People in Samakh didn't really know what to do with themselves. They were waiting—waiting for the unknown. The whistle of the Haifa-Deraa train didn't sound now. There was nothing to fill the space of the small town except anxiety; nothing any more, to evoke a sense of security.<sup>31</sup>

When Radi returns home, he is surrounded by the male members of his family and community. One of them, Najib, takes up the thread of the narrative, which then follows Najib as he signs up to join the Arab Liberation Army (ALA). From this point, the text shifts between the scenes of war and encampment, as Najib and his fellow soldiers discover the reality of war, to the domestic scenes of Tiberias, where Radi and his

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<sup>31</sup> Yahya Yakhlif, *A Lake Beyond the Wind*, trans. May Jayusi and Christopher Tingley (Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire, Arris Books, 2003), 1. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

family live. As the narrative follows the thoughts and actions of different characters, the prose takes on a fluidity, connecting the isolated camp where the ALA are based with the community living beside the lake.

In contrast, other passages (namely those of Abd al-Rahman the Iraqi) adopt first person narration, using journal and storytelling forms to tell a series of personal stories. One of these recounts Abd's own journey from Iraq to Palestine to join the army; another describes a romance between one of Abd's fellow soldiers and his love in Damascus. Both these subplots divert from the main story-line, thus increasing narrative suspense. However, they also serve to highlight the importance of Palestine as a physical and spiritual site where identity is conferred. Thus, Abd's difficult journey to Palestine becomes a form of spiritual pilgrimage, and Asad al-Shahba's courtship can be seen as an allegorical representation of the love between Palestinians and the land where they belong.

At a structural level, the two kinds of narration serve different purposes and achieve different ends. The third-person passages establish the scene, involve a wide cast of characters and describe the events which occur and their effects on the community in passages like the opening excerpt I have already quoted. These sections are characterized by simple, realist language and understated prose, encapsulating the emptiness and sorrow of the misfortunes which occur. In contrast, the use of first-person narration conveys the emotional heart of the story, employing sensuous, personal prose, to take on the appearance of autobiographical writing. For example, when Abd al-Rahman describes his journey to Palestine, he writes: 'I emerged from the furnace of the desert. From between the grains of sand. The winds surrendered me to the winds, and the frost nipped my nose and the tips of my fingers' (53).

However, the trope also has a political function. Here, as in *Skinner's Drift*, the use of multiple narrators, voices, emotions, and responses serves to counter the silencing effects of trauma and force a reassessment of the way in which history has been constructed. Yakhlif's multiple representations of the *nakba* focus on the personal impact of this event, which has since become synonymous with the foundation of the Israeli nation. The combination of an autobiographical technique in Abd al-Rahman's narrative and the multiple perspectives of the people of Samakh draw the reader into the story, encouraging a sense of identification so that they feel a part of the community. This makes the destruction more painful to read; the sense of loss is reinforced at all levels of society and even shared by the reader.

In this text, repetition is employed as a literary device, establishing a set of trauma-signifiers in symbolism and metaphor. Using recurring themes, Yakhlif refers to resurfacing memories that invoke a personal trauma. These, in turn, signal back to an earlier traumatic experience of colonization. Consequently, recurring themes and motifs foreground and echo a central historical trauma, so that anxiety and tension come to pervade the narrative. One of the most significant examples of this is in descriptions of the physical landscape, which is used as a recurring motif to convey and measure growing feelings of anxiety. In the days preceding the outbreak of fighting, Yakhlif describes how

All the talk revolved around the coming days, whose terrors would turn the blackest hair white. Even the sparrows sensed the fear and, shunning the white open spaces, settled on the telephone lines.

A disaster was coming and there was a sense of the earth starting to tremble. Around this time, the time of siesta, the trees and the wind fell silent. Even the waves of the lake were still.

It was like the silence and stillness before an explosion at the stone quarries. (2)

Yakhlif depicts a landscape where violence and conflict has destroyed a natural sense of order and tranquillity. Such invocations of land and landscape are similar to those employed by Fugard, who also explores the way in which conflict may destroy or endanger the relationship between individuals and a landscape. Sometimes the surroundings appear to share or reflect this growing tension. For example, Yakhlif writes that '[t]he silence was oppressive and the night heavy, with no one to light a lantern or lift his voice in song. An anxious silence settled over the sky, over the whole earth' (187).

Where descriptions of the landscape portray a foreboding atmosphere, the presentiment is echoed in the arrival of a bullet-proof vest ('a vest tied at the back and hugging the chest so no bullet could get through to the heart' (3)) which Radi obtains at the beginning of the narrative and which becomes a significant recurring motif throughout the novel. This jacket, sold to Radi by a departing British soldier, brings the first palpable news of war; it serves as an ominous symbol of the threat against the Palestinian people, evoking grand notions of war and heroism. These give way, ultimately, to disappointment, and to the pain of failure and loss. The vest is invested with a mythic quality; it represents bravery, authority, pride, and the honour associated with fighting a worthy cause. When Najib sees it he says: 'That armor deserves a brave fighter in it, [...] Someone who'll be worthy of it' (8).



Initially, the vest promises to provide unparalleled protection; Mansour notes, upon a close inspection of the piece that, 'It's really something. If a fighter's wearing that, all the bullets in the world won't pierce his chest' (13). Radi feels that possessing the vest means he is treated 'like a man' (16). He decides to sell it to an officer of the Arab Liberation Army, Ahmed Bey, believing that '[h]e was the knight who could wear it and set off boldly to war' (16). However, Ahmed Bey's courage and bravery prove somewhat superficial; once he puts it on, Najib notices that '[i]n actual fact it was the vest that wore the Bey. Yes, that was it! The Bey had taken on the awesome appearance of a lion with its mane puffed out' (30-1). Later, this assessment is proved correct as Asad al-Shahba witnesses Ahmed Bey withdraw from battle before his soldiers, 'running off after his car had got stuck in the mud' (37). When the combat mission fails, the Bey attempts to cover up the defeat by claiming that the vest was obtained as a spoil of war and offers it to his superior in an act of deference. At this point Najib, shocked with Bey's corrupt behaviour, is 'overwhelmed with a sense of sadness, grief, and defeat' (38). He steals the vest and disappears into the wilderness.

In this way, the vest, which initially represents victory and strength, later comes to symbolize the decay of traditional values, corruption, and the hopelessly ill-equipped ALA. This notion is exacerbated by the fact that the jacket is a remnant of the British presence in Palestine; it is a colonial object and thus confers a history of oppression and Palestinian subjection. Leaving the jacket behind as a remnant of British protection also highlights Palestinian vulnerability, as the British abandon them to an uncertain future. Najib's refusal to relinquish his hopes for Palestine despite the overwhelming odds facing his people in the war is symbolized by his attachment to the vest. When the jacket is finally lost in battle, Najib's naive romanticism and idealistic hopes collapse, broken by his realization of the inevitability of what has happened.

In Yakhlif's text, a single object is invested with a variety of meanings, so that it comes to refer both to an immediate trauma (the conflict between the Palestinians and Jews), and an historical trauma (that of Palestine's earlier colonization, culminating in the Balfour declaration and British departure from Palestine). The vest references the ongoing suffering Palestinians have experienced from attempts to occupy their land, thus connecting this particular conflict to a pattern which has been repeated in the history of this region. It encapsulates the feelings of betrayal and vulnerability which have been carried over from the past, showing how Palestinians have been abandoned by those who promised to protect them. The vest's final disappearance demonstrates just how ineffectively Palestinian interests have been protected, thus exacerbating their vulnerability and symbolically prophesying what is to come. The recurring motif also comes to represent an incomplete, or broken memory. Through it, readers are encouraged to draw together historical and textual pieces in order to review the fall of Samakh within its wider context. These links increase the tension within the text itself as the reader becomes aware that the events described have far-reaching implications as part of a deeper trauma of dislocation and dispossession.

Where both Fugard and Sidhwa (as I shall shortly demonstrate) make direct references to other texts to expose the subtlety of colonial legacies in South Africa and Pakistan, Yakhlif formulates his entire text around an implicit reference to the biblical Sea of Galilee. His novel effectively reconfigures this space as a symbol of Arab identity, and a focus for much of the Middle East. This is communicated particularly forcefully to readers of the novel's English translation, who will be most accustomed to viewing this space as a Christian site.

Yakhlif returns to the events of 1948 in order to revisit the genesis of the refugee problem and examine the bond between Palestinians and their homeland. For this reason the lake of the title is particularly important because it represents a reclamation of Palestinian space. In *A Lake Beyond the Wind* the Lake of Tiberias represents harmony and pastoral living; it is a domestic space, providing rest, solace, work and play for the locals who visit it. Radi feels his father's tenderness toward him to be 'as vast as the lake' (13). For Najib, the lake represents home. Whilst in the army he finds himself moving 'in obedience to some compass in the depths of him. The distant smell of the lake kept drawing him on' (40). As tensions grow, the lake becomes 'turbid' (52); it reflects the troubled skyline, and the warfare to follow. At one point Radi notes that his aunt is lost in thought, 'staring at some point in the heart of the lake, beyond the fishing boats. Maybe she was thinking of some spring past, full of tranquillity, comfort and goodness, and of a spring approaching when there'd be no peace of mind, when only God knew what would happen' (50). When, towards the end of the text, Najib tries to return to his hometown, his arrival at the lake prompts him to realize the true extent of the Palestinian loss.

The use of the lake as an image of home and return is particularly significant for the way it shows Yakhlif appropriating an image which has become embroiled within the various contestations of Israeli/Palestinian space. For, whilst Yakhlif refers to the lake only in local, familiar terms, in the West, Lake Tiberias is more commonly known as the Sea of Galilee, a biblical space where Jesus Christ spent time teaching his disciples and performing miracles. Yakhlif does not refer to the location's religious significance, despite the fact that by 1948 the town was well-established as an important site of Christian pilgrimage. Instead, he emphasizes its personal associations and the domestic activities which locals perform around the lake, such as Radi's attempt to

catch fish and the wildlife which can be seen from shore. In this way, Yakhlif de-familiarizes the space. However, despite this de-familiarization, biblical echoes continue to resonate. This creates an interesting parallel within the narrative as Najib the fisherman comes to remind the reader of the eager fishermen who became Jesus' disciples, and Radi's character evokes the small boy who gave Jesus his food thus becoming part of the miraculous feeding of the five thousand. Furthermore, the simplicity of Yakhlif's conversational prose is evocative of the Gospel language used to describe activities around the same lake in Bible. The biblical overtones give the location special significance, and help the reader to recognize the tragic destruction which war has brought. Ultimately, this intertextual echo, or resonance, between Yakhlif's text and biblical stories about the Sea of Galilee is central to the strength of the narrative, which seeks to reconfigure an historical event which has since become heavily mythologized and appropriated as a political tool for those on both sides of the conflict.

Yakhlif's emphasis on everyday, domestic life echoes a similar focus in *I Saw Ramallah*. Yakhlif, like Barghouti, explores the impact of war upon individuals and families. His attention to detail is shown in his use of the child Radi's perspective; it is also evident in the way he follows seemingly inconsequential characters such as the dog, who senses the danger which is to come to the region. However, when the disaster actually occurs, Yakhlif does not describe the details. Rather, he represents the experience from the perspective of Abd al-Rahman and the other soldiers, emphasizing their disappointment over the military defeat rather than the violence of the battle itself. Furthermore, Yakhlif does not describe the way in which people are forced to leave their homes and become refugees. Instead, the narrative passes from the feelings of impending doom which overwhelm Samakh to the aftermath of the crisis, when,

confused and depressed, the community is journeying away from the lake into unknown territories. In this way, where Barghouti returns repeatedly to the moments of his loss, Yakhlif omits the very scenes of trauma which are vital both to his narrative and to Palestinian identity. Consequently, the novel ends abruptly, before the fullness of what has happened has been realized.

The ending of *A Lake Beyond the Wind* can be seen as a refusal which serves several ends. Firstly, Yakhlif replicates the symptoms of trauma itself by failing to represent the moment of departure and rendering it instead a disrupted, incomplete memory, which is so overwhelming that it cannot be accessed directly. Secondly, in this omission, Yakhlif implies that the future or destinies of the people living in this area have become caught up in the larger events of history. He suggests that the context of war dehumanizes individuals, because of the way it sweeps through their lives, drawing them into events beyond their control or even their sphere of interest. This is exemplified in the final reflections of Abd al-Rahman, the Iraqi. Unwilling to return to Iraq where he believes he will be associated with the disappointments and losses of a failed military effort, Abd decides to stay with Najib who plans to search for the remaining inhabitants of the Samakh community who are wandering in the desert. Abd reflects that 'after all, I'd tied my destiny to the destiny of these people, who'd lost their home and their towns and villages' (213). The narrative concludes with Abd the Iraqi reflecting on the 'lonely road' (214) lying ahead.

Furthermore, the novel's ending shows the text working retrospectively, as it foregrounds events whose outcome is already known. In his detailed depiction of individuals living in community, Yakhlif re-creates a world which no longer exists. The central trauma, which is the loss of Palestine and the ensuing exile of Palestinians, is

symbolized in the fall of the region to the Israeli forces. However, Yakhlif is able to leave it unspoken. Instead, the title can be understood to imply this aspect of the text, as it considers the future of Palestine and its religious and spiritual significance (symbolized in the lake), beyond the conflict (which is symbolized by wind). Yakhlif plays upon readers' knowledge of the outcome of this incident in the Palestinian/Israeli conflict—that many of these characters are destined to become refugees, unable to return to their homes, and possibly forced into permanent exile. This knowledge exacerbates the tension and the sense of tragedy which builds throughout the narrative. It also enhances the descriptions of life before the troubles, thus showing how the past may come to obtain mythic status.

This represents a valid response to the way in which novels about historical trauma are based upon an event whose outcome is already known, which means that novelists are unable to utilize conventional narrative components such as suspense, the ability to choose an ending, a character's agency to resist or bring about change, and the identification of moral categories such as good and evil—tropes which Sue Vice calls 'novelistic staples.'<sup>32</sup> In this way, Yakhlif's refusal to provide a sense of closure not only represents an endless deferral of the traumatic encounter, but also reflects the anti-climax and disappointment which characterized the conflict itself. This shows the impact of trauma communicated at the level of the metanarrative; it captures the sense of hopelessness which some Palestinians feel towards the possibility of a satisfactory resolution to the conflict and replicates it within the process of writing fiction. Paradoxically, despite the predominantly slow-moving narrative and the characters' sense of impending doom, the omissions of the final pages are not entirely surprising. Rather, in its careful reconstruction of the past, *A Lake Beyond The Wind* encapsulates a

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<sup>32</sup> Vice, 3.

sense of denial regarding the conflict. This is exemplified in the subplot involving Asad. At the novel's end, Asad's apparently unquenchable romanticism leads him to believe that he will one day be reunited with this love. However, for the reader, the logistical obstacles which stand in his way make this seem unlikely. Asad's romance captures something of the endlessness of the pursuit facing Palestinians who seek to return to a sense of unity and security which can only be found in the past.

### III. Bapsi Sidhwa: *Cracking India*

The third text I wish to examine in this chapter is Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Cracking India*, which was published originally as *Ice-candy-man*.<sup>33</sup> This novel follows the events of Partition through the perspective of a young Parsi girl, Lenny. Lenny is opinionated and naive; an eight-year old girl who observes far more than she comprehends and, because she has polio, is kept out of school. Lenny is cared for by Ayah (her Hindu nanny), and spends her time surrounded by Ayah's various admirers. These include the charismatic yet irascible Muslim Ice-candy-man, Sharbat Khan the knife-sharpener, the lecherous cook Imman Din, and Massour. Lenny's experiences of Partition come primarily through these characters, all local artisans and labourers who, alongside her family, neighbours, and her wonderful 'Godmother,' make up Lenny's geographically and intellectually 'compressed world'<sup>34</sup> and who are all embroiled in the *maelstrom* which overwhelms the country at Partition. Much of the plot's action concerns Ayah who, during Partition, becomes the victim of one of her many admirers, Ice-candy-man.

Where Fugard and Yakhlif draw upon multiple perspectives to communicate the suffering of a collective group of people, *Cracking India* is told by a small child, using

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<sup>33</sup> American publishers decided to change the name to *Cracking India* because they thought the original too obtuse; in the Indian Subcontinent the title has remained *Ice-candy-man*.

<sup>34</sup> Bapsi Sidhwa, *Cracking India: A Novel* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 1991), 11. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

first person, present tense narration. The partiality and incompleteness of Lenny's narration encapsulates the absences which characterize trauma, and these effectively communicate to the reader its damaging, fragmenting impact. For example, Lenny's recognition of the changes occurring during Partition is somewhat simplistic. She notes: 'I become aware of religious differences. It is sudden. One day everyone is themselves—and the next they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols. Ayah is no longer just my all-encompassing Ayah—she is also a token. A Hindu' (101). In the novel's pivotal moment, Ayah's former friends and admirers allow her to be captured and raped by a group of Muslims, a humiliation designed to shame and disgrace her for life. For Lenny, it is this event, rather than the migration and violence of the masses, which epitomizes the horrors of Partition. This event destroys Lenny's innocence, propelling her out of childhood into another, less comprehensible realm.

It is in this way that the prism of Lenny's perspective creates an intensity which at times overwhelms the progression of the narrative. For Lenny's childish concerns—her obsession with glass jars, and her growing interest in procreation—offset the wider tensions which permeate the greater issues of the novel. Political issues are not accessed directly, but are presented obliquely, in fragments and overheard conversations or revelations brought by Cousin (whose reliability is almost certainly dubious), and are subject to Lenny's skittish attentions. This lends itself well to Sidhwa's particular way of configuring Partition, exemplified at one point when Lenny considers how exactly India is going to be 'broken' (101). However, it also distracts the reader from significant plot developments, as is clear when a neighbouring house which has been abandoned becomes a home for recovered women: those who have been raped, kidnapped and violated in other, hideous ways. Lenny, however, believes the place to be a prison and



avoids it. Consequently, the reader never gains more than a glimpse of this aspect of post-Partition recovery. Perhaps more significantly, because she is unable to present any viewpoint or experience other than her own, Lenny is unable to testify to Partition's horrifying violence, of which she hears rumours but experiences little. This means that some of the most gruesome scenes of violence are recounted by Ranna, Lenny's young friend, who describes his own escape from the slaughter in his village during which many Muslims died. Finally, Sidhwa refuses to remain historically accurate; she describes Gandhi's visit to Lahore as taking place seven years after it actually did, and conflates the burning of Lahore with the celebration of *Holi*, a Spring festival which would have taken place several months earlier.<sup>35</sup>

It is perhaps for these reasons that Marianne Wiggins argues that '[m]uch of Sidhwa's trouble in telling this tale lies in her choice of narrative voice [...] As character fails, so does any sense of the politics of the time—so does any sense of place.'<sup>36</sup> Several other critics voice similar complaints, remarking that

The story is not about Partition, though Partition looms large in its pages; it is about "Lame Lenny," a little girl who has polio, who turns eight at a time when no one feels like celebrating birthdays and who is as concerned about her dawning pubescence as about the freedoms (and fears) of midnight.<sup>37</sup>

Despite this, Sidhwa makes it clear that Lenny is central to the transmission of traumatic memory, with its silences, gaps, and reliance upon the group to communicate the full horrors of this collective trauma. Indeed, Ralph Crane argues that Lenny's voice may provide further evidence of the postcolonial aspect of this text as

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<sup>35</sup> Ralph J. Crane claims that these changes show how Sidhwa understands her child narrator and make her a reliable witness because, 'the historical signposts or references in this novel are necessarily limited because Lenny doesn't understand much of what she hears.' Ralph J. Crane, 'A Passion for History and for Truth Telling,' *The Early Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa* ed. by R.K. Dhawan and Novy Kapadia, (New Delhi: Prestige, 1996) 48-60 (58).

<sup>36</sup> Quoted by Crane, in Dhawan and Kapadia (eds.), 48-60 (53).

<sup>37</sup> Shashi Tharoor, 'Review of *Cracking India*' *The New York Times*, 6th October 1991. <<http://members.aol.com/bsidhwa/index.html>> [accessed 18th September 2008].

we are reminded that there is no single truth—there are always many ways of interpreting the events which are being played out in Sidhwa's Lahore of 1947. An unreliable or apparently unreliable narrator is always, one hopes, used for a purpose. [...] the fact that Lenny's unreliable narration proves, after all, to be reliable in its own way, causes us to at least question the British and Indian versions of the truth that have hitherto been accepted.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, whilst Sidhwa's deferral and delaying of truth is frustrating for the reader, it is characteristic of the belatedness of trauma. Sidhwa's use of a child narrator is important because it gives voice to an outsider, a figure 'so marginalized that,' as Crane writes, 'in less-skilled authorial hands she could easily have vanished off the page altogether.'<sup>39</sup> As a young girl, a female, a Parsi and a victim of polio, Lenny inhabits a space on the fringes of her society. In particular, as neither Hindu, nor Sikh, nor Muslim, she is cast as an observer to the religious conflicts dominating colonial and postcolonial India in the 1940s. She views Partition through an unprejudiced lens, which is free from the biases of religion, or politics, or (by virtue of her age) gender. Furthermore, she is compelled to tell the truth (with a self-confessed 'wretched truth-telling tongue' (251)). Her truth-telling instinct is so strong that it causes her to betray Ayah in the novel's decisive moment. In many ways, these factors make Lenny an ideal narrator; sharply observant, yet passive, she is silenced by her position of social marginality, and is powerless to contribute to the movement of public opinion because she is unable to interact fully with those around her. This also means that, at the height of the troubles, when moral imperatives are apparently disregarded within their community, Lenny's understanding of good and evil remains constant. Her innocence exacerbates the tragic and horrific nature of what takes place, as it contrasts so dramatically with her simple perspective of the world. This is evident in her response to

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<sup>38</sup> Crane, in Dhawan and Kapadia (eds.), 48-60 (55).

<sup>39</sup> Crane, in Dhawan and Kapadia (eds.), 48-60 (53).

witnessing the brutal murder of the Hindu Banya: ‘The whole world is burning. The air on my face is so hot I think my flesh and clothes will catch fire. I start screaming, hysterically sobbing’ (147). Later, Lenny attempts to understand the event, by re-enacting it within the safety of a child’s game:

I select a large lifelike doll with a china face and blinking blue eyes and coarse black curls.

It has a sturdy, well-stuffed cloth body and a substantial feel. I hold it upside down and pull its pink legs apart. The knees and thighs bend unnaturally, but the stitching in the center stays intact.

I hold one leg out to Adi. “Here,” I say, “pull it.”

“Why?” asks Adi looking confused.

“Pull, damn it!” I scream, so close to hysteria that Adi blanches and hastily grabs the proffered leg. [...] Adi and I pull the doll’s legs, stretching it in a fierce tug-of-war, until making a wrenching sound it suddenly splits. We stagger off balance. The cloth skin is ripped right up to its armpits spilling chunks of grayish cotton and coiled brown coir and the innards that make its eyes blink and make it squawk “Ma-ma.” I examine the doll’s spilled insides and, holding them in my hands, collapse on the bed sobbing.

Adi crouches close to me. I can’t bear the disillusioned and contemptuous look in his eyes.

“Why were you so cruel if you couldn’t stand it?” he asks at last, infuriated by the pointless brutality. (148)

In this passage, a broken doll becomes a haunting metaphor for torn and violated human bodies. Lenny’s attempt to understand perpetrators of violence leaves her ashamed, and shocked by her capacity for destruction. Without depicting the atrocious killings, Sidhwa chillingly evokes the tragedy and the ‘pointless brutality’ of the innocent civilians who were killed or violated during Partition. Furthermore, as Lenny destroys her own doll, we become aware of the personal implications of Partition violence, as it destroys her sense of safety, security, and the familiar cocoon of her close relationships.

The impact of Partition violence produces symptoms of trauma in Lenny which resemble the compulsion to repeat. These are shown in references to ongoing nightmares which connect her to the pain of others. Interestingly, these dreams often refer to the Second World War, an event which Lenny herself notes she would have been too young to fully understand at the time: 'No one had taught me to fear an immaculate Nazi soldier. Yet here he was, in nightmare after nightmare, coming to get me on his motorcycle' (31). In other nightmares, Lenny experiences the chilling horror of dismemberment, and other forms of physical torture, which indicate her fear of Partition violence. One of these, during which she dreams she is in a room filled with children being prepared to be crucified, becomes a ghastly prophecy, for soon after Lenny witnesses a girl being dangled from a stick in the centre of Lahore.

Whilst Lenny's disturbing nightmares are a literal symptom of trauma, they also serve a literary function, establishing trauma-signifiers in symbolism and metaphor. They refer to resurfacing memories which invoke a personal trauma. These, in turn, give way to an earlier traumatic experience of colonization. Here, as in Fugard and Yakhliif's texts, references to the physical landscape recur to show individuals re-negotiating their sense of belonging and (dis)connection to the nation. For example, Sidhwa explores the demise of British colonialism primarily through the Queen's Park. Here Lenny sits with Ayah and her entourage in the afternoons as they joke, play and talk about current political developments. When the text begins, a large statue of Queen Victoria overlooks the park and disturbs Lenny's carefree days: 'majestic, massive, overpowering, ugly. Her statue imposes the English Raj in the park' (28). However, as the conflict develops, the atmosphere in Queen's Park shifts. First, the Sikhs appear to keep to themselves, then the Queen's shadow appears to diminish. Finally, one day Lenny notes that '[t]he Queen has gone! [...] The garden scene has depressingly altered.

Muslim families who added colour when scattered among the Hindus and Sikhs, now monopolize the garden, depriving it of colour' (249).

The sense of disconnection which Lenny experiences in relation to physical changes in Lahore is also reflected in another recurring motif: the troubled relationship between Lenny and her mother-figures in the narrative. Vickroy argues that trauma narratives frequently focus on the relationship between mothers and children (especially daughters), because '[t]hese intimate relationships bear the effects of social, cultural, economic mediations more powerfully because of traumatic circumstances.'<sup>40</sup> She suggests that

As their identities are formed in these circumstances, daughters feel a conflicted protective fearfulness toward their mothers and a dread of reliving their mothers' traumas. [...] This focus is representationally significant because women and children are more frequent exemplars of subjugation worldwide in that they are the most vulnerable to poverty and abuse.'<sup>41</sup>

In *Cracking India*, Sidhwa uses the mother-daughter relationship allegorically, to explore oppression, colonization, and Partition as well as possible responses to it. These responses are represented by the different mother-figures in the text, which include Lenny's mother, Ayah and Godmother. Silenced by religious and cultural convention, politically impotent yet targeted in the atrocities which occurred during Partition, these figures represent those most vulnerable to violence and oppression at this time. Each has absorbed something of the same processes of domination and subordination that characterize colonial rule; consequently, the domestic sphere becomes a place where the psychological consequences of oppression are played out.

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<sup>40</sup> Vickroy 4.

<sup>41</sup> Vickroy, 4-5.

The relationship between Lenny and Ayah is particularly significant, as a symbol of Partition. Lenny is deeply traumatized when Ayah is victimized by Muslims because she is a Hindu. She feels herself culpable in this act, as she betrayed Ayah's hiding place to Ice-candy-man in an act of misplaced trust. This is significant, for it encapsulates the complexity—and the immediacy—of the conflict. When Lenny and Ayah meet again, Ayah has become a dancing girl, cast out as a fallen woman who has been taken as Ice-candy-man's personal possession. Lenny notes the dramatic change: 'Where have the radiance and the animation gone? Can the soul be extracted from its living body? Her vacant eyes are bigger than ever: wide-opened with what they've seen and felt' (272). For Lenny, Ayah's apparent submission to her fate is as shocking as the violence wrought against her. Highlighting this is central to the text; Jay Wilder writes that '[a]long with political ineffectiveness, Sidhwa draws out the most damaging effect of the Partition, the symbolic desecration [of] women on both sides of the conflict.'<sup>42</sup> He quotes Sidhwa's observation that '[v]ictory is celebrated on a woman's body, vengeance is taken on a woman's body. That's very much the way things are, particularly in my part of the world.'<sup>43</sup>

As Ayah symbolizes the victimization of women under colonial rule, so Godmother represents the covert resistance which is harboured through inner strength. Lenny takes refuge in Godmother from the 'perplexing unrealities of [her] home on Warris Road' (11), claiming that '[t]he bond that ties her strength to my weakness, my fierce demands to her nurturing, my trust to her capacity to contain that trust—and my loneliness to her compassion—is stronger than the bond of motherhood [sic]' (13). In fact, Godmother exerts a forceful control over the local community; she represents the

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<sup>42</sup> Jay Wilder, 'Bapsi Sidhwa' (2002), *Postcolonial Studies at Emory*, 15th February 2004 <<http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Sidhwa.html>> [accessed 18th September 2008].

<sup>43</sup> Sidhwa, quoted in Wilder, 'Bapsi Sidhwa.'

empowered feminine spirit of wisdom and knowledge, which contrasts with the male leaders behind the Partition, who cause destruction through their ineffective political rhetoric. Godmother's 'immense power' (223), we read, is such that '[n]o baby—not even a kitten—is delivered within her sphere of influence without her becoming instantly aware of its existence' (222-3). In the text Godmother's role as a socially dominant force highlights the relationship between authority, identity, and memory, as she empowers Lenny both in her feminine identity and in her position as one who can witness, and record the events of Partition. She demonstrates that it is possible to actively resist wrongdoing, whilst maintaining a neutrality which endears her to all sides. This encapsulates the position of the Parsis in India and Pakistan at this time, who famously remained neutral throughout the conflicts which continue today to divide Muslims and Hindus.

In *Cracking India*, intertextuality works at a stylistic level, referencing European and North American literary texts and setting them alongside local narratives. Throughout the text, emphasis is placed upon Punjabi folk-tales, literature and songs, which represent wisdom, insight and root the text's ethics within a distinctly Punjabi world-view. This is evident in the parallel versions of the Romeo and Juliet story (the original, 'Heer and Ranjah' is told to Lenny by a Sikh neighbour; soon after Ayah tells her a similar Punjabi version. However, it is most clear in the sections of Urdu poetry, which are cited at the beginning of several key chapters and throughout the text by various characters. Most notable of these poets is Mohammed Iqbal, who has been described as the spiritual father of Pakistan, the most widely acclaimed modern Urdu poet of the subcontinent, and whose writing dominated the age of Partition.<sup>44</sup> Iqbal advocated unity between Hindus and Muslims, and sought equilibrium between a

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<sup>44</sup> According to D.J. Matthew C. Shackle and Sharukh Husain, *Urdu Language* (London: Third World Foundation, 1985), 109.

mythological Islamic past and the fast-changing world he saw around him.<sup>45</sup> This is epitomized in the verses which Sidhwa quotes at the beginning of chapter 13:

The times have changed; the world has changed its mind.

The European's mystery is erased.

The secret of his conjuring tricks is known;

The Frankish wizard stands and looks amazed. (120)

Sidhwa's frequent recourse to Iqbal's poetry accomplishes several different ends.

Firstly, it shows her attempting to convey the atmosphere which surrounded Partition, encapsulating the mix of hope, sorrow, anxiety, passion, and fear which characterized Partition times and fueled public fervour. Iqbal's representative voice breaks the intimacy of Lenny's world, reminding the reader of the collective dimension to Lenny's experiences. It also places Partition in the context of the mythological, ancient history of subcontinental Asia, in phrases such as 'Give me the (mystic) wine that burns all veils,/ The wine by which life's secret is revealed, /The wine whose essence is eternity' (287). This is compounded by references to Zauq, Faiz, Ghalib and other Urdu poets, whose romantic verses help to establish the characters' relationship with their country as akin to a courtship, a deep bond of love and loss. In her use of these poets, Sidhwa claims them as voices of Partition, rather than Islamic voices. This is significant because it emphasizes the shared experiences of Hindus and Muslims, rather than stressing the religious divisions.

Furthermore, Sidhwa's use of Urdu poets and local mythology helps her to reevaluate the legacy left by the British and assert the value of her nation's own literature alongside western, canonical forms. She admits as much when she says that

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<sup>45</sup> Shackle and Husain, 112. Shackle and Husain also note that, '[i]n 1930 in his presidential address to the All-India Muslim League [Iqbal] seemed to advocate the concept of a future Pakistan, though he still thought of it as 'a consolidated North West Indian state'. Shackle and Husain, 116.



I feel if there's one little thing I could do, it's to make people realize: We are not worthless because we inhabit a country which is seen by Western eyes as a primitive, fundamentalist country only [...] I mean, we are a rich mixture of all sorts of forces as well, and our lives are very much worth living.<sup>46</sup>

This is compounded by the way she uses intertextual references to underline her dual literary heritage. Writing in English, Sidhwa addresses an audience who would situate her work within the shadow of 'Anglo-Indian' writers like Kipling. Consequently, intertextual references to literary texts throughout *Cracking India* show Sidhwa systematically writing against the different versions of Partition—British, Pakistani, and Indian. Perhaps the most significant of these concerns the character 'Ice-candy-man,' whose name provided the novel's original title and its framework. This name refers to a play by Eugene O'Neill entitled *The Iceman Cometh*, which addressed the ideals of success and aspiration through a salesman, Hickey, and his group of fellow drunks which, in turn represent Christ and his twelve disciples.<sup>47</sup> Dan Geddes describes Hickey as 'the Iceman of life-killing cold truths, who shatters the personal illusions, the "pipe-dreams" of the other twelve in the circle. Similarly,' he continues 'Ayah, has a circle of twelve followers. The Ice-Candy Man, the Judas figure, betrays his beloved Ayah, and shatters the amicable illusion of Ayah's circle, revealing the cauldron of lust that had always inspired it.'<sup>48</sup> Thus both *Cracking India* and O'Neill's play explore the envy, bitterness and lust which drive human behaviour. Crane argues that

In O'Neill's play, published in 1946, Sidhwa has found a framework for her dramatic re-creation of Lahore during the months leading up to Partition. Through this intertextual referencing, and by responding to a particular literary text, Sidhwa is re-confirming the role

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Sidhwa, (1990) *Massachusetts Review* <[http://voices.cla.umn.edu/vg/Bios/entries/sidhwa\\_bapsi.html](http://voices.cla.umn.edu/vg/Bios/entries/sidhwa_bapsi.html)> [accessed 18th September 2008].

<sup>47</sup> This connection is confirmed in a remark from Lenny when she and Ayah are sitting in the park: 'Ice-candy-man is selling his popsicles to the other groups lounging on the grass. My mouth waters. I have confidence in Ayah's chocolate chemistry [...] lank and loping the Ice-candy-man cometh' (28).

<sup>48</sup> Dan Geddes, 'Review of *Cracking India*' (2000), *The Satirist.com* <<http://www.thesatirist.com/books/CrackingIndia.html>> [accessed 17th September 2008].

of fiction as a shaping-force in history, while at the same time exposing the influences that are working on her as a writer who divides her time between Pakistan and the United States. By referring to the influences of British and American literary texts, Sidhwa is once again reflecting on the influence of Britain, and, more recently, America on the history of her own country.<sup>49</sup>

*Cracking India* concludes with the apparent departure of Ice-candy-man. A foreboding figure of impending aggression and threat for much of the novel, his loss implies an end to the violence and destruction which has overtaken Lenny's world. However, as the novel closes much of Lahore remains in chaos; Lenny hears that her former neighbours' houses are being looted, and violence continues to break out in her community. Furthermore, the massive demographic shifts which have taken place suggest tensions will continue to impact the area for some time. Finally, Lenny remains concerned for Ayah, whose transformation and subsequent attachment to Ice-candy-man fill her with unease. Thus the novel fails to regain the calm and tranquillity that characterized its opening chapters.

The implication that the full impact of the Partition has yet to be realized is perfectly epitomized through the novel's focus on Lenny. By the end of the novel her experiences of violence, and her own betrayal of Ayah have become interwoven; through these incidents she feels herself to be both an outsider who has witnessed catastrophe, and an active participant in Partition. The full effects of this disruption on the formation of her identity remain unknown, but are implied through the sense of alienation that characterizes the final pages of the narrative, and through Lenny's rejection of her childhood friend, Adi. Again, Sidhwa shows how these experiences and

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<sup>49</sup> Crane, in Dhawan and Kapadia (eds.), 48-60 (59).

wider collective anxieties are absorbed by Lenny's childish concerns. This underlines both the way in which Partition trauma is 'normalized' by its victims, and how it becomes repressed as a series of painful memories which have not yet been fully integrated into identity. The inconclusive nature of this ending is disconcerting for the reader, and yet strangely reassuring. Through it, Sidhwa captures the essence of the latency which follows trauma: the reader is aware that the full effects of Partition are yet to be realized, but is encouraged that Lenny and the other characters will reconstruct a semblance of normality until its repercussions are felt. Such a conclusion also indicates the impossibility of achieving closure to such an event. There is no way the reverberations of Partition can be captured within the narrative; indeed, Lenny's singular hope that the trouble has passed only serves as a warning to readers of the dangers of underestimating the significance of such a catastrophe.

### Conclusion

It is evident that the novel form facilitates a creative and insightful exploration of postcolonial trauma. Each of the three narratives I have examined in this chapter responds to the isolating effects of postcolonial trauma in their use of literary features such as narrator, perspective, style, plot, and theme, so that the reader is sharply aware of the complex range of subject positions involved in different ways, and to different degrees, with the traumatic event at hand. Whilst Sidhwa, Fugard, and Yakhliif employ different narrative styles, each seeks to represent trauma in a way that can impress upon the reader its fragmentary effects—its silences, gaps of memory, and its recurring consequences. This is exemplified in the use of multiple or child narrators, shifting tenses and disrupting chronology. In *Skinner's Drift*, historical crimes haunt the text through repetitions at the level of narrative and meta-narrative. In *A Lake Beyond the Wind*, the reverberations of political tension are shown in the experiences of a number

of those particularly marginalized by conflict, for example through Radi, (a child), Abd, (an outsider), and the animals who represent the natural landscape, which Yakhliif highlights as a further casualty of war. Conversely, in *Cracking India*, the use of a child's viewpoint exemplifies the way in which trauma troubles memory and limits perspective whilst simultaneously being absorbed, or normalized by the individual. Through these features each novel achieves a vivid intensity and a lucidity, which impresses even as it investigates complex theoretical and political questions.

Where I have suggested that life-writing modes such as autobiography and the testimonio may struggle to recover the past with historical exactitude, these novelists take advantage of their freedom from conventional life-writing practices such as first-person narration, linear chronological progression, and strict temporality; they experiment with ways of representing trauma and the ambiguity which is one of its central features. Each author explores the past symbolically—an arguably more effective way to engage readers with the events in question. This is particularly important when the trauma in question has been experienced by a group, and an author wishes to explore its collective dimension. This is shown in Sidhwa's description of Gandhi's march, which she misplaces by several years. Of this Sidhwa says:

This is the wonderful thing about poetic license and fiction. That's why it's called fiction, when you manipulate events to arrive at the larger truth. The eyes of a child allow you also to get away with certain things. I mention Gandhi's salt march—I knew it had taken place long before. But as a novelist you can take liberties. I feel I can represent history more truthfully this way; what is significant is harvested and revealed in an imaginative way.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Sidhwa in interview with Julie Rajan (2002), *Monsoon*, <[http://www.monsoonmag.com/interviews/i3inter\\_sidhwa.html](http://www.monsoonmag.com/interviews/i3inter_sidhwa.html)> [accessed 18th April 2007].

The advantages of the novel as a mode to represent trauma have been noted within contemporary literary criticism. For example, Whitehead suggests that this subject-matter has helped to push the genre in new directions:

fiction itself has been marked or changed by its encounter with trauma. Novelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterized by repetition and indirection. Trauma fiction overlaps with and borrows from both postmodern and postcolonial fiction in its self-conscious deployment of stylistic devices as modes of reflection or critique.<sup>51</sup>

However, in these texts, literary conventions are appropriated and subverted not only to represent trauma, but to emphasize the relationship between trauma and postcolonialism. Each writer's manipulation of formal novelistic conventions underlines the traumatic legacy of colonialism in a particular region. One of the key ways in which this is achieved is through their framing of the disruptions of trauma at collective levels. This contrasts with the emphasis I noted in autobiography and testimonio upon narrative as a way of recovering or restoring a coherent identity or history. And so, where the absences and elisions I observed in life-writing narratives proved detrimental to the authentic representation of trauma, in these texts an emphasis is made upon the 'revelation of the act of forgetting rather than of that which has been forgotten.'<sup>52</sup> Consequently, omissions become powerful ways of exploring the possibility of narrating postcolonial trauma without failing to bear witness to the sufferings of entire communities. This emphasis questions whether there is any way in which a traumatic past can be recovered by a community which may incorporate victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and others who are also complicit in different ways. Whilst the single authorship of each of these novels necessarily limits this process, the emphasis each text places upon the interrelatedness of people presupposes that the reader also becomes a

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<sup>51</sup> Whitehead, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Durrant, 117.

participant in the process of ‘the work of disruption’<sup>53</sup> which Durrant considers is central to the work of the postcolonial novelist:

the novel is a private experience that makes a singular appeal to each of its readers, even as it evokes the idea of some sort of community of readers. And this singularity of appeal is perhaps its peculiar merit, for it allows a certain mediation between the personal and the collective, the ethical and the political. It is tempting to argue that the novel allows the reader to experience the political as the personal, to work through collective loss as if it were his or her own. But it is equally possible to argue that the novel forces the reader to confront his or her insertion in the collective, the way in which one’s own history, as Cathy Caruth puts it, “is never simply one’s own”. Thus it might be more accurate to say that postcolonial narrative enables us to work through our *relation* to history; it is not a communal act so much as an act of creating community.’<sup>54</sup>

In the texts explored in this chapter, the process of creating a sense of community though the act of reading is exemplified in the use of literary devices such as fragmentation, repetition, and a refusal to allow closure; these features enable writers to ‘translate’ traumatic experience so that readers become, in a sense, witnesses to real historical trauma, even if it is mediated by fictional techniques.

In addition, using tropes which recur throughout much postcolonial writing, these writers challenge and subvert grand narratives of history, gathering instead fragments of disrupted, but authentic, experiences and placing them together. Each shows how this is intrinsic to establishing a meaningful connection with the past. One such trope is the practice of making intertextual links and references. The postmodernist framing of intertextuality has meant that it has frequently been used by postcolonial writers seeking to re-write history, or solicit a re-interpretation of literary texts, whose meaning has previously been understood from a western or Eurocentric perspective. This form of ‘writing back’ explores how processes of colonialism function at levels of culture and

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<sup>53</sup> Durrant, 117.

<sup>54</sup> Durrant, 11.

art, linking these forms to their historical context. By referencing other texts, postcolonial writers create links and parallels with existing literature, and read history contrapuntally.<sup>55</sup> For novelists addressing postcolonial trauma, intertextuality offers a further opportunity to draw attention to a traumatic experience, as they expose the prejudices and limitations of dominating (usually western) world-views, and bear witness to previously ignored experiences. Whitehead notes that '[t]rauma fiction overlaps with postcolonial fiction in its use of intertextuality to allow formerly silenced voices to tell their own story.'<sup>56</sup> She cites Toni Morrison's use of intertextual references to signal the ongoing traumatic legacy of slavery:

Through intertextual reference to her own fiction, Morrison reveals that the trauma of slavery has not been laid to rest but resurfaces in the lives and actions of the protagonists. She signals the haunting power of a traumatic past which can be readily identified by the attentive reader but remains beyond the reach or grasp of the characters themselves.<sup>57</sup>

Given the strengths of these narratives—in particular, their powerful employment of literary tropes to represent postcolonial trauma at formal levels—it is interesting to note that some of these conventions may also serve to support an author's credentials by asserting a personal connection with the history in question. In her examination of Holocaust fiction, Vice notes that intertextuality and anterior sources recur as ways of confirming authenticity over a narrative. She writes that, 'critics have invariably considered the biography of the author [of a Holocaust narrative] to be highly relevant'<sup>58</sup> and highlights the frequency with which questions arise over an author's connection with—or claim to—the Holocaust. She suggests that an (auto)biographical link of some kind may quash anxieties about questions of authority, even if the connection is

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<sup>55</sup> Said describes this as 'a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts.' Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Viking, 1993), 59.

<sup>56</sup> Whitehead, 85.

<sup>57</sup> Whitehead, 85.

<sup>58</sup> Vice, 3.

somewhat tenuous. This is because ‘on the whole fewer unsympathetic questions are raised about those with the ‘right’ to fictionalize the subject because of their second-generation or Jewish identity [...] than those who do not own such a right.’<sup>59</sup> However, there is an inherent paradox within the assertion of such credentials, because fiction is by definition invented. Vice admits that such criticism implies a failure to distinguish the genre from nonfictional modes of cultural representation:

‘Authority’ appears to be conferred on a writer if they can be shown to have a connection with the events they are describing; this obviously means that the writer’s biography must be transparently available for all to know. This way of approaching Holocaust fiction is another result of not properly detaching it as a genre from testimony, of which one might more reasonably demand an authentic connection between the author-narrator and the events described.<sup>60</sup>

However, such questions also suggest that authenticity and accuracy, which are the primary criticisms raised against autobiographies or testimonies, also recur within trauma fiction.

In light of this, it is interesting to note that there are strong autobiographical elements in each of these novels which bind the writers to their stories, and link them to the traumatic experiences they describe. Bapsi Sidhwa, who was born in Lahore and was seven years old during Partition, shares much with Lenny, her protagonist. Like Lenny, she suffered from polio and consequently spent much of her childhood isolated from other children. In interviews she has described her recall of Partition as being fragmented, yet remembers violence, mobs and the Queen’s statue in the Park, which symbolized the British Raj for the citizens of Lahore.<sup>61</sup> Lisa Fugard’s story is also based

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<sup>59</sup> Vice, 4.

<sup>60</sup> Vice, 4.

<sup>61</sup> Sidhwa, ‘New Neighbors,’ *Time*, 11th August 1997, 150:6 <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/1997/int/970811/spl.neighbors.html>> [accessed 18th September 2008].



around real events in South Africa. She took the nucleus of her novel from an article in a local newspaper about white men poaching in the Limpopo Valley.<sup>62</sup> Like Sidhwa, she shares much with her protagonist; both Fugard and Eva grew up in South Africa during Apartheid, and left prior to its end to live in New York. In interviews Fugard has admitted that their closeness in age, gender and race made it difficult for her to write about Eva:

As a writer, I like to have a lot of distance from my characters. Because she is close to my age, curiously enough, she was the hardest [character to write]. Particularly in the last chapter, where she has to face what she's done and how complicit she is—it was so hard to write that at one point I had to change her name from Eva to Evan. I had to make her a male character, because I felt otherwise I was writing about myself. Then, with the computer, I just changed all the Evans back to Eva. And I found that I had reached something authentic, that I had reached some kind of truth that I just couldn't have reached when her name was Eva.<sup>63</sup>

Finally, Yakhliif's novel also betrays an autobiographical connection, for the writer was born in Samakh in 1944, and has lived most of his life as a refugee. His novel, then, considers Palestinian history in the context of his own past. Whilst the autobiographical elements of these texts may appear incidental, there can be no doubt that they lend each text a level of authenticity which influences their reception. For example, the fact that Sidhwa is, like Lenny, a Parsi has enabled *Cracking India* to gain currency as a Partition text.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, Fugard's South African identity has helped her novel gain credence to write about Apartheid.<sup>65</sup> Whilst these connections suggest that the novel may assist in some way with the transmission of collective trauma, it also suggests that accusations of

<sup>62</sup> In interview with Adlen Mudge, 'African Odyssey,' *Bookpage.com*. <[http://www.bookpage.com/0601bp/lisa\\_fugard.html](http://www.bookpage.com/0601bp/lisa_fugard.html)> [accessed 18th September 2008].

<sup>63</sup> Mudge, 'African Odyssey.'

<sup>64</sup> Parsis practice the Zoroastrian religion, a monotheistic pre-Islamic religion of ancient Persia dating from around the sixth century. Their religious and cultural neutrality in Indian and Pakistani politics is generally accepted.

<sup>65</sup> This is supported by her father's reputation as the country's most prominent playwright and vocal anti-Apartheid spokesman, Athol Fugard. It is arguably this connection that authorizes Fugard to take on the perspective of black Africans in her novel.

exploitation influence the way in which the novel form is used to represent postcolonial trauma.

Each of these writers manipulates generic categories for their own ends: they invent narratives in order to explore historical—even personal—traumas, eschewing the need for factual verifiability when it suits them and employing autobiographical tropes where these prove useful for the task at hand. Thus, where I suggested that life-writing practices such as autobiography and testimonio are constrained by the need for historical precision and verifiability, these writers are able to use history to arrive at a different truth, and explore the emotional significance of an event at collective level, whilst relying on their autobiographical relationship to the text to gain credibility. This combination is surely an attractive option for those wishing to explore traumatic pasts.

## 4. Film

*Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak.*

*But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introducing Film

At the beginning of chapter three, I moved from an examination of nonfiction to consider fictional modes of cultural representation. I argued that the novel is a valuable form for mediating postcolonial trauma. I highlighted some of the advantages offered by this mode, especially its ability to show how trauma causes a crisis of identity, one which is often replicated across different cultures, and different generations. I also noted some of its disadvantages, including the potential for voyeurism, and the possibility that novels may diminish, or exploit, the suffering of real trauma victims. The final chapter in this thesis extends that discussion of fiction, with an examination of films which explore postcolonial trauma.

Like novels, films are judged largely on their artistic quality and their ability to communicate a message, rather than for their contribution to historical record. Consequently, both modes tend to place a great emphasis upon entertaining their audiences. This contrasts with the way in which both autobiography and testimonio tend to call for acknowledgment and affirmation of the writer or testifier's experience; sometimes even calling for action on their behalf. Like novels, films do not need to

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<sup>1</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 7.

adhere to verifiable truth, and are not restricted to representing personal experiences; this flexibility facilitates a creative engagement with the past which is particularly useful for those seeking to explore experiences which are particularly traumatic, such as the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, or the Partition of India in 1947. In contexts such as these, the past may remain guarded, or repressed, by its survivors, even as its impact continues to reverberate in society. Through novels and films, second and third generation survivors without firsthand experience or fully formed memories of a traumatic event are able to explore a collective history whose consequences they have inherited. In addition, as living memories of such events begin to disappear, films and novels become even more important a media in which memory—and the processes of remembrance—may be preserved.

However, despite these similarities; the two modes offer different approaches. This is confirmed by the number of novels examining historical trauma which are then adapted into feature films. These include: Bapsi Sidwaha's novel, *Cracking India*, which was made into a feature entitled *Earth* (dir. Deepa Mehta, 1998), and Thomas Keneally's *Schindler's Ark* (1982), which was adapted into the blockbuster 'hit' *Schindler's List* (dir. Steven Spielberg, 1993). The very existence of these adaptations at all indicates that the specific properties of film may be able to mediate postcolonial trauma in ways that the novel does not.

The most obvious difference between the two modes is that film is a *nonliterary* form of cultural representation. Although they may be based upon, or adapted, from literary narratives, films are defined by their visual component; this is central to their popularity and their impact. Films tend to be more accessible than

literature and are often considered to be a form of popular culture, or ‘low art.’ This accessibility can be positive, particularly because it facilitates an engagement for those who do not like reading or who are illiterate. It also means that films can play a role in the transmission of oral narratives. However, the mode also has its drawbacks. Films are frequently considered a ‘light’ form of entertainment; they are often treated as spectacles to be consumed by audiences, who choose to visit the cinema (or watch a DVD) in order to relax, escape, and be entertained rather than to engage their intellects. Whilst some films are more demanding on the viewer than others, a large number—often ‘blockbuster’ films produced in Hollywood—do not require a significant intellectual investment. Film critic Robert Kolker writes that,

when compared to a novel or a painting or a symphony, the emotional demands made by most films seem shallow and unambiguous. Unlike the traditional high arts, film [with certain exceptions] does not demand great intellectual powers to understand it. Film is too often condemned, [...] as being exploitative, commercial, and stupid.<sup>2</sup>

This aspect of the mode has had a significant influence in shaping the kinds of films that are produced, and how much publicity they receive. For example, Kolker suggests that films with violent or sexual content frequently receive more attention, as ‘many producers believe that the targeted audience of filmgoers lies between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five, and that they need sexual titillation and vicarious experience delivered in the most banal and violent ways.’<sup>3</sup> Such concerns over subject-matter underline the way in which film has become a commodity, and is marketed accordingly.

The commodification of film has led to the establishment of certain cinematic genres. These genres provide a context, which helps viewers to know what to expect, and how to interpret what they are seeing. For example, a film may be constructed in

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Kolker, *Film, Form and Culture* (London: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 171.

<sup>3</sup> Kolker, 172.

the style of a science fiction, action, romance, or comedy, and would, therefore include certain cinematic and stylistic elements which have become recognizable formulaic practices associated with that genre. This often includes particular styles of acting, as well as certain types of actor, the use of a musical score, the structure of the plot and any subplots, and how the film is edited—all these features help a narrative fall into a recognizable type and achieve a desired effect on the viewer. Thematic and narrative tropes establish a sense of familiarity with the viewer. Consequently, genres can be seen as master narratives, which are made interesting through variation and invention.

Some cinematic features recur across different genres. One of these is closure, which is a staple component of many different cinematic genres, and which helps to give films a sense of a ‘happy ending’ and resolution. Kolker defines closure as

that conventional narrative event in every kind of fiction that stitches together the loose ends, the broken lives, the ruined love affairs, the villains still at large, the people physically and emotionally lost, all that has become unwound as a narrative moves along. More than simply ending a story, the act of closure brings back into harmony and balance lives and events that have been disrupted. That harmony and balance is always contrived to fit with what filmmakers believe to be dominant cultural values: victory over evil, as defined by the film, comfort to the previously afflicted, redemption of the lost and abused, reassertion of the family as the most valued cultural unit.<sup>4</sup>

Narrative tropes like closure help films to tell a ‘universal’ story that audiences will be able to relate to and enjoy. However, it is important to remember that this universalism is culturally determined by those producing films. Given that Hollywood remains the film industry with the greatest global influence, many film which are produced today reflect the dominant cultural ideology of the U.S. This suggests that, in films which

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<sup>4</sup> Kolker, 212.

attempt to resist or subvert the values or aspirations of dominant western culture, it may be difficult to achieve a sense of closure.

Repetition and familiarity play an arguably greater role in film than they do in literary forms such as the novel, where creativity, and innovation in the use of language and style are more commonly welcomed as new ways of perceiving things. In contrast, an audience's expectation of films is often limited. Kolker argues that people generally look to films for affirmation of already held ideas; consequently when a film diverges from this or fails to adhere to the conventions of a particular genre, he suggests that it risks rejection.<sup>5</sup> This has important implications for films which attempt to explore unfamiliar, shocking or controversial subjects. Such films require a different kind of engagement from the viewer, and, in turn, seek a different response. This is exemplified in a number of recent films addressing the Rwandan genocide. Each—to a greater or lesser degree—explores the failure of the West to provide sufficient assistance to those in need. The political dimension of such films does not adhere to the 'requirement' for comfort, familiarity, and wish-fulfillment within films. Instead, they seek to challenge existing beliefs, and invite audiences to recognize their own complicity with this tragedy. These films must, therefore, exercise great care in their exploration of these events to avoid alienating viewers.

Another difference between novels and film is in the way they mediate or interpret experience. Films take on the appearance of reality; they are able to re-create or re-enact a visual moment with a vivid intensity completely different to that which can be accomplished using the written word. Words are clear transmissions, or

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<sup>5</sup> Kolker, 4.

interpretations, of reality; images *appear* to be actual, immediate, and unmediated. This enhances the believability of the genre, but it is an illusion and should not presuppose authenticity. The illusion of reality, which is key to the success of film, is often based upon a viewer's willingness, or desire, to overlook the way in which film mediates reality, and simply believe what they see on the screen. In this regard, whilst it is a more self-consciously artificial art form than photography, film can be seen to function in a similar way. In *On Photography*, Susan Sontag notes that the photograph is often treated as an authoritative source, despite its inherently artificial nature:

While a painting or a prose description can never be other than a narrowly selective interpretation, a photograph can be treated as a narrowly selective transparency. But despite the presumption of veracity that gives all photographs authority, interest, seductiveness, the work that photographers do is no generic exception to the usually shady commerce between art and truth. Even when photographers are most concerned with mirroring reality, they are still haunted by tacit imperatives or taste and conscience.<sup>6</sup>

This illusion has important implications for films which represent historical suffering. For example, in re-creating scenes of Jewish persecution during the Second World War, Holocaust films have educated viewers on the contexts and conditions of this traumatic experience. In the absence of actual footage, many who watch these films will accept the cinematic representation as historical truth, so that these scenes will come to stand for, or in place of, their understanding of the event itself. However, these scenes are often carefully constructed to ensure that the audience responds to what they see in a specific way—most often with a mixture of horror and empathy. This can be illustrated with reference to a memorable scene from *Schindler's List*, which portrays the evacuation of Jews from the Krakow ghetto by Nazi troops. In the midst of the chaos and panic, a little girl is shown wandering the streets amongst the crowds of evacuees and Nazi soldiers. In a predominantly black and white film, she is marked out from

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<sup>6</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Group, 2002), 6.



everyone else by the red colour of her coat. The use of colour draws the viewer's attention to the unnamed girl, emphasizing her isolation and vulnerability. In this scene, individual suffering is juxtaposed against the trauma of collective displacement; its poignancy is designed to underline the tragic nature of this event and elicit a sympathetic response.

The impact of the girl in the red coat is enhanced by another specific property of film: the unique combination of elements, including edit choices, shots, and supporting music, which are part of the basic construction of film, and from which the plot and story are built. Although these features may be overlooked by viewers who are more concerned with whether or not the characters are 'realistic,' they are intrinsic to the artificial, self-conscious nature of the form, and the illusion it creates. They help to establish the 'virtual world' which a viewer is encouraged to enter, despite the barriers of lens and screen. These elements are vital to the attempt to build a connection between a viewer and a film's characters. This is exemplified by use of colour in *Schindler's List*. Shortly after the chaos of the street scene, the same little girl can be seen, wearing her red coat, lying in a pile of bodies, having been killed by the Nazis. Where viewers were previously asked to feel sympathetic towards the little girl in the red coat, this scene is designed to elicit their shock, and outrage. It is a powerful and memorable moment, which helps to show the tragic loss of innocent victims of Holocaust atrocity.

The impact of this scene has contributed to the success of *Schindler's List*, a film which highlights the mode's capacity to both educate and entertain large numbers of viewers. This was the first Hollywood 'blockbuster,' made by a Jewish director, to attempt to convey Nazi acts of genocide. When it was first released in 1993, *Schindler's*

*List* became associated with a specific cultural moment of active memorialization of the Second World War and the Holocaust almost fifty years on. According to Trudy Gold, this film was seen by a quarter of the population of Britain, nearly a third of the population of Germany and ‘had a profound effect on global consciousness of what the Holocaust was.’<sup>7</sup> It helped to renew public interest in the Holocaust, and, in the period following its release, an unprecedented number of films, as well as other related media, were produced on the subject. In addition to its pedagogic value, the film was acclaimed for its creativity; it was nominated for twelve Academy Awards, and won seven, including Best Picture. *Schindler’s List* challenged the suggestion that popular or mainstream culture was an inappropriate forum in which to represent this kind of atrocity. It attempted to show that historical trauma could be effectively represented through a Hollywood-style dramatization. Through its popularity, *Schindler’s List* gained an unparalleled ability to shape (or manipulate) knowledge of the Holocaust in collective memory. It is tempting to suggest that, for many people, the Holocaust is now viewed through *Schindler’s List*, as this has been one of the most prolific films on the subject. It is an example of the way in which films may help to contribute to a society’s values and even propagandize an ideology.

Finally, where novels are usually produced by a single author, films are the result of many imaginations. Screenwriters, casting directors, designers (of sound and set), editors, composers, cinematographers, researchers, and others, all collaborate with actors, directors and producers to construct a film. Although directors play an arguably dominant role in the final ‘product,’ complete authorship cannot be attributed to any

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<sup>7</sup> Trudy Gold, ‘An Overview of Hollywood Cinema’s Treatment of the Holocaust,’ in *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television since 1933*, ed. by Toby Haggith and Joanna Newman, (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), 193-197 (196).

single individual. This suggests that the mode may—to a certain extent—represent a collective response to the events or issues it explores. Correspondingly, films are often received by a group of cinema-goers; the collective imagination of the audience contributing to the way in which a film is *interpreted*. This may include, for example, references they make to other films of a similar genre; it may also reflect the political and cultural climate into which a film has been released. A good example of this is the surge of films addressing the Rwandan genocide, (including the two I shall examine in this chapter,) which were released to coincide with its tenth anniversary. Such films contribute to the way in which this event has been remembered; they become part of a cultural moment, and may provoke dialogue about how to memorialize the past and how to address current contexts of aggression, such as violence in Darfur, Sudan. However, the way in which films are produced also means that they are economically determined. Film production can be expensive, sometimes prohibitively so. Indeed, where a novelist may only be expected to produce a portion of a literary text before a publisher will agree to buy and print their novel, a film will usually undergo a lengthy and expensive process in order to gain financial support before production even begins. Even then, constraints of the industry and of budget mean that finances may be withdrawn or run out at any point. These different financial pressures determine who is able to produce films, suggesting that this mode may suffer from its own elitism, and may be inaccessible for those without cultural authority or financial backing.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will consider the advantages and liabilities of film as a mode for the representation of postcolonial trauma, with particular focus on three films: *The Killing Fields*, *Hotel Rwanda*, and *Sometimes in April*. I have deliberately chosen three films which address the trauma of genocide in postcolonial

contexts, in order to enable comparison with chapter two, which examines testimonios from similar contexts.<sup>8</sup> I hope that this consistency will also help to continue to bring coherency to the thesis as a whole, just as chapters one and three both explore traumatic dislocation. Given a recurring concern I have noted so far in this thesis for the way in which postcolonial trauma collapses the boundary between individual and collective, personal and political realms, I will be particularly interested in the way that film facilitates a collective engagement with postcolonial trauma and how, if at all, these films appropriate cinematic conventions of genre and narrative in order to resolve questions of voicelessness and silence for marginalized groups.

### I. *The Killing Fields* dir. Roland Joffe

Over 14 years after it was produced, Roland Joffe's directorial debut, *The Killing Fields*, remains the most significant feature film to represent the mass killings of Cambodian citizens at the hands of the Khmer Rouge between 1975 and 1979. This British production was released to a remarkable reception: produced by Lord David Puttnam (who also produced *Chariots of Fire* in 1981), it was nominated for seven Academy Awards, and won three.<sup>9</sup> *The Killing Fields* explores the friendship between two men—*New York Times* reporter Sydney Schanberg and his Cambodian assistant Dith Pran—who worked together in Cambodia in the 1970s covering the war in neighbouring Vietnam. When his wife and children are evacuated, Dith Pran decides to remain in Cambodia with Sydney Schanberg, in order to follow the story of the escalating tensions there. However, encouraging Pran to stay behind quickly becomes a source of guilt and regret for Schanberg, who is forced to leave him behind when all western

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<sup>8</sup> My choice to use *The Killing Fields* should allow for further comparison with Chapter Two, given that its main Cambodian character, Dith Pran, was played by Haing Ngor, who wrote *Survival in the Killing Fields*.

<sup>9</sup> These were, the award for Best Supporting Actor (Haing Ngor), Best Cinematography (Chris Menges), and Best Film Editing (Jim Clark).

journalists are ordered out of the country. Schanberg spends the next few years searching fruitlessly for Pran, who is by now absorbed into the terrifying fullness of the Khmer regime. At this point the film divides to follow Pran's experiences of work camps in parallel with Schanberg's mounting remorse and growing criticism of U.S. foreign policy back at home. The final scene of the film shows their reunion once Pran has escaped to a refugee camp in Thailand. Schanberg seeks Pran's forgiveness for his part in Pran's sufferings and Pran readily forgives his former colleague claiming that there is "nothing to forgive,"<sup>10</sup> although at this point the long-term consequences of trauma upon his life remain unknown.

According to Puttnam,<sup>11</sup> the film's primary focus was not the Khmer regime itself, but the friendship between Schanberg and Pran—the bond between the two men, which develops through their work in Cambodia, and which connects them throughout the Khmer Rouge regime despite the fact that they are apart. This focus is supported by the film's structure. The opening scenes depict Schanberg and Pran working together in Phnom Penh; their separation serves as one of the film's most climactic moments; and it is their reunion, with the renewal of their bond, which provides closure for the film. As a U.S. journalist, Schanberg links the viewer to Cambodia, he introduces them to the conflict, which provides the framework for the film, and shapes the resultant perspective on the region. However, when he is forced to flee, Schanberg is denied access to the events of the genocide; he, like those living in Europe and the U.S., are unable to experience firsthand the Khmer Rouge itself. His inability to witness leaves him ineffectual as a journalist, just as he becomes impotent in his role within the film as interpreter of events for the viewer. Therefore, whilst Schanberg is ostensibly the film's

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<sup>10</sup> *The Killing Fields* dir. Roland Joffe (Warner Bros. Pictures, 1984) [on DVD].

<sup>11</sup> Speaking on *Omnibus: 'The Killing Fields'*, dir. by Robin Lough, (BBC, 1984) [on DVD].

protagonist, he is absent from what are arguably the film's most significant scenes, which show the suffering of Cambodians under the Khmer Rouge. These are mediated through Dith Pran, whose experiences shape viewers' understanding about what actually took place within the country at this time. Consequently, despite claims that they were not seeking to make a film about genocide, the film's focus on Sydney and Pran's friendship facilitates an insightful exploration of the Cambodian genocide.

The focus upon a friendship rather than a single protagonist benefits the film's representation of suffering in Cambodia in several key ways. Firstly, it allows the film to penetrate a non-western context which was 'closed' to outsiders, and communicate something of the suffering experienced by millions but seen by few except its victims. In this way, it tackles one of the primary challenges of representing genocide, instances of which are usually kept away from the public eye and performed in secrecy. Schanberg's inability to bear witness is an important indicator of the way in which Cambodia became impenetrable for western journalists (and was therefore unrepresented by them) during five years of the Khmer Rouge regime. He represents those on the 'outside' who were trying to gain news from within Cambodia and simultaneously attempting to raise the profile of this atrocity in the U.S. In contrast, through Pran, the viewer is able to enter an unfamiliar world, where they encounter local Buddhist customs, the primitive conditions in which Cambodians were forced to live in prison camps, and other aspects of the Khmer Regime. The 'hidden' nature of their oppression and suffering is powerfully communicated in these scenes, through the use of dialogue which is conducted entirely in Khmer without an English translation or subtitles.

Secondly, following two separate characters and story-lines helps to communicate the film's political subtext. The relationship between Dith Pran and Sydney is symbolic of the relationship between Cambodia and the U.S. at this time. Sydney, who is overbearing, inquisitive, thoughtless, but well-meaning, comes to represent the U.S. whilst Pran can be seen to represent Cambodia—his subservience towards Sydney represents the way in which Cambodia was used by the U.S. for its own purposes in Vietnam. The resultant emphasis on the friendship between these two men becomes, therefore, an exploration of Cambodian dependency upon the U.S. (and Europe, to a lesser extent); it links local Cambodian tensions with the U.S. and the French, Cambodia's former colonizers; it exposes U.S. involvement in Vietnam and its 'secret' bombing of Cambodia; and it implies that this contributed to the economic and social conflicts which enabled the Khmer Rouge to gain power. Furthermore, it underlines the sense of abandonment felt by Cambodians following the evacuation of the foreigners. This is effectively communicated in one memorable scene where, despite having been promised safe passage out of the country, Pran's family are retained by officials because they are Cambodian, and almost prevented from boarding waiting helicopters.

Perhaps most interesting, however, is the way in which the film's focus upon two separate characters implicitly questions the suitability of the conventional emphasis upon a single hero or protagonist figure when it comes to addressing postcolonial instances of genocide. Had the film focused solely upon Sydney's experiences in Cambodia, it might have failed to address the issue of Cambodian suffering, and the representation of the closed world of the Khmer Rouge would have been more difficult to achieve. Alternatively, had Dith Pran been the film's protagonist, U.S. involvement in the region may have been given less attention; in addition, in order to maintain the

film's appeal to a wide audience, it would have been necessary to use English for the film's Cambodian scenes, thus weakening the authenticity of this aspect of the film. Instead, the two characters work together, helping to present a more balanced and insightful representation of this historical event than could have been achieved with a single protagonist figure. For example, as the film segues back and forth between the Cambodian death camps and the U.S., Pran's apparently stoic acceptance of beatings, starvation, and ill-health is juxtaposed against Schanberg's mounting anger at western indifference and his own betrayal of Pran.

However, the construction of *The Killing Fields* as a romance, or homosocial love story between Sydney and Pran, is also problematic. Firstly, it sentimentalizes and oversimplifies the Cambodian context. Through Pran, Cambodians are represented as a submissive, loyal and heroic people, willing to act courageously and committed to the U.S., without realizing that they are being exploited. Correspondingly, certain existing stereotypes about North Americans are reinforced through Sydney's overbearing nature, his belief that he has the sole ability to rescue those in need, and his authority to validate Pran's experience by broadcasting it in the *New York Times*. Secondly, the film's relational focus means that very little of the historical context of Cambodia is given; neither the fall of Phnom Penh nor the rise of the Khmer Rouge is described in any real detail. This imbalance undermines the exploration of U.S. complicity in the sufferings of this region, which its director Roland Joffe suggests was a 'central argument' of the film.<sup>12</sup> Only a brief reference is made (in the opening credits) to the bombing of Cambodia by the US, but there is no mention of the fact that this was kept secret from the U.S. public. Consequently the film's indictment of U.S. foreign policy over this

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<sup>12</sup> *Omnibus*, dir. Robin Lough.



issue lacks weight and substance. Instead, the film's political dimension is confined to—and dependent upon—the symbolic nature of the friendship between Sydney and Pran, and the extent to which each can be seen to represent their country.

Secondly, the film's narrow focus means that its representation of the collective nature of Cambodian suffering is limited. Although the majority of the film is set in Cambodia, Pran is the sole named Cambodian character; he is also the only Cambodian able to elicit the audience's sympathies as all others remain undeveloped or are members of the Khmer Rouge. Furthermore, Pran's ability to represent Cambodian suffering is restricted because of his exceptional status: although some middle-class Cambodians (like both Pran and Haing Ngor) had the opportunity to leave the country before the fall of Phnom Penh if they wished, the majority did not. Pran's connections within the western media meant that he was protected from some of the early troubles, and his family were able to escape to safety. When he finally escaped to Thailand, Pran knew that his U.S. connections would gain him safe passage out of the region and reunite him with his family; many Cambodians (Haing Ngor included) did not have this certainty to sustain them throughout the years of the regime. In addition, the film is dominated by male characters; Pran's wife is the only woman mentioned, and she appears in two short scenes (one of which takes place in New York), but never speaks. The absence of a female perspective contrasts sharply with Haing Ngor's analysis of how his response to the communist revolution regime differed from that of his wife's. This omission means that the film is unable to represent the diversity of suffering endured by the Cambodian people.

Thirdly, the emphasis upon friendship can be seen as a melodramatic contrivance which sentimentally dramatizes the situation and means that there is no place for a realistic representation of the true horrors of the regime. As the film opens to mounting violence and Sydney's life in Phnom Penh, it provides no idea of life in prewar Cambodia or of the peace in rural areas, which would have helped to highlight the terrible conditions of prison camp life to which Pran is subjected. This omission contributes to the stereotypical presentation of Cambodians, who are either quiet, submissive, loyal, and westernized (like Pran) or deeply repressed, angry, and uncivilized. Furthermore, no time is given to explore the Khmer Rouge—from the rural peasants who welcomed it and subjugated 'new' people like Pran, to the Phnom Penh elite who imposed it. Although the Khmer Rouge notoriously tortured and killed people indiscriminately, *The Killing Fields* shows little of the grotesque reality of these activities. This was a feature noted by both Dith Pran and Haing Ngor after the film was made, as Ngor notes in his testimonio: 'Pran and I agreed, in all seriousness, that we would have liked the movie to show more violence, to reflect what had really happened in Cambodia.' (488) Indeed, it is significant that *Survival in the Killing Fields* contains more explicit references to violence and torture than *The Killing Fields*. This implies that the testimonio form may be more suitable to represent extreme suffering than film, as it is not constrained by audience sensibilities or industry requirements to remain 'universal.' Ngor suggests that this is due in part to audience expectations, which determined the film's chances of success:

I felt the film should be more violent, to show what the Khmer Rouge was really like, but Roland [Joffe] did not agree. In terms of historical authenticity, I was right; in knowing what the movie audiences would tolerate, he was. If the film had shown how bad things really were under the Khmer Rouge, Westerners would have refused to see it. (483)

Ngor suggests that the film was produced primarily for audiences in the West; a notion that corresponds with much of the content of the film. However, this focus weakens the film's value for those like Ngor and Pran who had experienced the regime themselves. In a review of the film, David P. Chandler suggests that Cambodian refugees were disappointed by what they considered to be the film's inauthenticity. He suggests that this prevented them from being able to watch the film as a way of working-through their own experiences of the trauma.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, despite its predominant focus upon Pran and Sydney's friendship, the film never succeeds in showing them as equals. For the first part of the film, Sydney underestimates Pran's abilities, and at times treats him like a servant. Later on, he becomes symbolic of the West's complicity in the crimes of the Khmer Rouge, for he effectively sentences Pran to death by encouraging him to remain in Cambodia. Whilst he begins to feel a sense of his own responsibility towards Pran, even as the film closes, Sydney has achieved an arguably greater sense of resolution or closure than Pran. Whilst Sydney is relieved to have found his friend, Pran is yet to be reunited with his family, move to the U.S., or see his country at peace. The absence of a sense of resolution for Pran implies that he is of secondary importance in the film; a notion which is confirmed in his award for best *supporting* actor, despite the film's ostensibly dual focus. Interestingly, this argument was explored by a review which appeared following the release of the film in 1986:

The perception of Pran's *secondary* importance makes a point that often recurs in American works on IndoChina. The region and the war are seen, by many writers, centripetally, as

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<sup>13</sup> According to David P. Chandler: 'many [Cambodians] think that the violence of the regime [...] was unnecessarily played down. For them the footage about Democratic Kampuchea and Pran's predicament were the important portions of the film. They had come to the film, in a sense, to visit a ceremony and pay their respects. David P. Chandler 'Review: *The Killing Fields* and Perceptions of Cambodian History' (1986), *Pacific Affairs*, 59: 1, 92-97 (96).

places and events that happen to Americans; the war becomes “*America’s* longest”; it is inconceivable that the Vietnamese—or the Cambodians—should be allowed onto the center of their own national stages, competent to make their own decisions and their own (occasionally mismanaged) history, and the perception is that Americans are *something* to them, rather than the reverse.’<sup>14</sup>

In this way, the film’s focus on the friendship between Pran and Sydney is potentially detrimental to the way it addresses the traumatic nature of the Cambodian ‘killing fields.’ For some critics, this concern is reflected in audiences’ responses to the film. As Denis Wood has argued, ‘people drive off from films like *The Killing Fields* in their BMWs and Buicks without managing to connect their possession of these expensive machines with the very root-cause of the American involvement in Cambodia.’<sup>15</sup> He suggests that the use of Cambodia as subject-matter serves merely to sensationalize the film, rather than provide insight into this trauma:

*The entire political apparatus of this film lies in its choice of subject, NOT in the way it understands that subject.* Though it says, “This is a topic of interest,” it has nothing interesting to say about the topic; and in this way *The Killing Fields* is paradigmatic of the “serious” “political” film, hovering in anxiety over an abstract issue—war, poverty, corruption—embodied in a potboiler of a story (otherwise who would watch it?) sufficiently removed in space and/or time so that, while capable of raising anxiety in the moviegoer during the screening of the film, it is incapable of inviting the viewer to action, or even contemplation of action. Worse, because these films typically end on an upbeat note [...], they often generate the sense that any problem that might have existed elsewhere, and formerly has been taken care of: “Everything’s okay, now. Go back to sleep.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Chandler, 92-97 (93).

<sup>15</sup> Denis Wood, ‘Seeing and Being’ (1986), *Film Quarterly*, 39: 3, 62-64 (62).

<sup>16</sup> Wood, 62-64 (62-63).

On the other hand, despite the film's limitations, it has been instrumental in promoting awareness of the sufferings experienced by Cambodians between 1975-1979.

Ngor himself notes that:

Until [the film was released] relatively few people knew what had happened in Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge years—intellectuals and Asia experts had, maybe, but not the general public. The film put the story of those years in terms that everybody could understand, because it was a story about the friendship between two men. (489)

The success of this film is not only evident in the accolades it received from the Academy but also in the impact the film has had on those who helped to produce it. For example, David Puttnam has described how producing *The Killing Fields* instigated a later career change to become the director of UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees).<sup>17</sup> One of the actors, Spalding Gray, used his experiences of filming in Thailand to inspire a later theatrical monologue *Swimming to Cambodia* (1987). In addition, Roland Joffe used his experiences directing *The Killing Fields* to inform later projects, that also explore the legacies of colonialism (such as *The Mission*). In a different way, Haing Ngor was also emotionally affected by his part in the film. In interviews at the time of its release Ngor suggested that his experiences of the Khmer Rouge and the film's re-construction of the Khmer Rouge had become interwoven: 'For me, movie not different. I have enough experience in Communist times. I put emotion into the movie. We have a lot of scenes like in Khmer Rouge time. Everything the same.'<sup>18</sup> In his testimonio, Ngor describes how he found it difficult to distinguish between the film and his own past; he suggests that, at times, scenes for the film resonated with his own memories, causing him distress and anxiety: 'Usually I could cross from the hotel to the film role and back again. But sometimes on location

<sup>17</sup> 'David Puttnam on *The Killing Fields*' dir. Anwar Brett (Optimum Releasing, 2005) [on DVD].

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Samuel G. Freedman, 'In The Killing Fields, A Cambodian Actor Relives his Nation's Ordeal,' *The New York Times*, 28th October, 1984. <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=940CEEDE1539F93BA15753C1A962948260&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=all#>> [accessed 17th September 2008].

my defences fell apart and I slipped back into the hunger and terror of the Khmer Rouge years.’ (481) However, rather than helping him to overcome his trauma, Ngor suggests that the experience of acting out or reliving his past traumas took a toll on his psychological well-being: ‘We filmed in Thailand for four and a half months. It was a stressful time for me. I lost weight. My nightmares were even more frequent than before.’ (483). Puttnam acknowledges the pain Ngor experienced in performing these re-enactments, but believes that it helped him to achieve a measure of catharsis so that, by the end of the film, he had sufficiently recovered from his trauma to arrive at the final party dressed in Khmer Rouge costume as a joke. Ngor remembers the incident differently:

before we left Thailand we had a big cast party in Bangkok. Everyone came prepared to have a good time. I did too. But I showed up in black trousers, black tunic and black rubber-tyre sandals. In Khmer Rouge costume. To remind them that we were doing more than just making a movie. (484)

Ngor’s descriptions of his experiences whilst filming highlight the role film-making can play in helping individuals to address their personal trauma through a process of acting out, or reliving the past. However, it also shows how, despite its honourable intentions, *The Killing Fields* risked neglecting the victims of the genocide itself, in order to reach its target audience of mostly American and European viewers.

## II. *Hotel Rwanda*, dir. Terry George

*Hotel Rwanda* has been by far the most commercially successful film made about the Rwandan genocide to date; it has received huge publicity, and has attracted large audiences. In 2004, it was nominated for three Academy Awards (best actor, best supporting actress, and best original screenplay) and by September 2008 had earned more than \$23.5 million. It remains the most prolific cinematic representation of the

Rwandan genocide. This success may seem remarkable, after all, in the year of its release mainstream cinemas in Europe and North America were dominated by several Hollywood blockbuster sequel films: *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, *Shrek 2*, *Spider-Man 2*, and *Ocean's 12*. Previous releases from these film series had already accrued tens of millions of dollars at the box office, and huge publicity was given to which would earn the most. In contrast, *Hotel Rwanda* was made on relatively a low budget; it had few notable 'stars', a relatively unknown director and a limited initial release. However, close analysis suggests that *Hotel Rwanda* was carefully constructed in order to attract the largest possible mainstream audience and thus compete for audiences with these blockbuster films. This is particularly apparent in the film's storyline, which echoes that of director Steven Spielberg's hugely successful film *Schindler's List* (1993). However, the aspiration towards commercial success can also be viewed as problematic for the way it impedes exploration of the specificities of the Rwandan genocide and leads, ultimately, to an oversimplification of the role of Paul Rusesabagina, whose portrayal in the film has since been questioned.

*Hotel Rwanda* opens just prior to the genocide and shows its protagonist, Paul Rusesabagina, working as the manager of the *Hôtel des Mille Collines*, a resort in Kigali which is frequented by overseas diplomats, journalists, and aid workers. When violence begins to escalate, Paul agrees to shelter a number of Tutsis who are fleeing Hutu persecution. These include his Tutsi wife (Tatiana) and their children, along with several friends and neighbours. From this point on, Paul must keep Hutu rebel forces away from the hotel using bribes, flattery, and quick-wittedness, whilst increasing numbers of Tutsis arrive at his door in search of refuge. As foreign aid workers are evacuated and the UN 'peacekeeping' forces are shown to be impotent to provide any real protection

or take action against the rebels, Paul is left to save and protect as many Rwandans as possible. When they are finally evacuated from the hotel, Paul, his wife and their children travel to a refugee camp in Uganda. Here, they are able to rescue and adopt two newly orphaned children, whose parents (Tatiana's brother and his wife) had been killed during the genocide. The final sequence shows the newly formed family leaving the refugee camp, departing for a new life.

Whilst its context is Rwandan, the basic premise of *Hotel Rwanda* parallels what is arguably its only clear predecessor: Steven Spielberg's 'Holocaust epic,' *Schindler's List*. Both films focus upon a man who uses his political position, social influence, and ingenuity to rescue potential victims from being killed during genocide. Both Oskar Schindler and Paul Rusesabagina are urged to participate in acts of genocide. In the earlier film, Oskar Schindler is a business man who collaborates with those sending Jews to their deaths until a change of heart compels him to save them instead; in *Hotel Rwanda*, Paul Rusesabagina is invited on several occasions to join with the Interahamwe in killing Tutsis, but always refuses. In both films, the refusal to comply with the activities of those perpetrating genocide is depicted as a heroic act; it provides the focus for an exploration of the struggle against the so-called inhuman forces perpetrating genocide. Additionally, both films are biographical, insofar as each protagonist is based upon a real-life individual and his experiences. The closeness of the two films has led to *Hotel Rwanda* being dubbed 'an African *Schindler's List*' on more than one occasion.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> For an example, see Ty Burr, 'Cheadle brings quiet power to 'Rwanda,' 1st July 2005, *The Boston Globe*, <<http://www.boston.com/movies/display?display=movie&id=7112>> [accessed 18th September 2008].



In many ways, the parallel is advantageous. Through its use of Paul Rusesabagina as a heroic protagonist, *Hotel Rwanda* is able to build upon the success of *Schindler's List*, which helped genocide to be recognized as a subject worthy of and suitable for mainstream cinematic representation. This film implied that genocide could be presented on film in a way that communicated the full horror of the event without alienating a 'mainstream' cinema audience or offending genocide survivors. This is an appealing combination for a filmmaker seeking to draw attention to a genocide which had received much less media attention than the Holocaust, and in which countries in Europe and America were complicit for failing to act.

Interestingly, the depiction of both Oskar Schindler and Paul Rusesabagina resonates with the Hollywood tradition of the 'unlikely hero' figure. This figure is exemplified in the child protagonist, Jim, in *Empire of the Sun* (1988); Jeffrey Wigand in *The Insider* (1999); the eponymous hero in *Erin Brokovich* (2000); and Frodo Baggins in *The Lord of the Rings* (2001, 2002, and 2003). In each of these films, the protagonist elicits sympathies from viewers precisely because he is ill-equipped to assume the qualities of the conventional hero, but stands up against 'evil' nevertheless. Furthermore, in both *Schindler's List* and *Hotel Rwanda*, the focus upon an individual allows for an examination of genocide which sees good 'triumph' over an inhuman regime. As Paul and Oskar find redemption and hope in helping others, so the distressing nature of the subject matter can be presented in a hopeful way, fulfilling audiences' expectations for closure and resolution, if not an entirely 'happy ending.'

Drawing upon an established cinematic formula in this way helps the viewers of *Hotel Rwanda* relate more easily to the events of the Rwandan genocide. This is

particularly important given the widespread ignorance which continues to characterize western understanding of the realities of this genocide, and, more broadly, of Africa itself. Rather than forcing the audience into a world with which they are unfamiliar, with no frame of reference or context to draw from, the choice of a recognizable—even familiar—formula helps viewers to relate to the characters in the film. The film's focus upon Paul Rusesabagina supports this identification, as he a middle-class, relatively westernized, business man. Early in the film, several scenes help viewers to identify with its subject-matter. For example, Paul is shown joking with foreign guests in the *Hôtel des Mille Collines*; later on, he returns to his family home to find his children playing skipping games on the front lawn, and drawing in colouring books; that evening, he and his wife Tatiana host their friends for dinner, where they drink beer and make jokes together. Ultimately, this portrayal of a western lifestyle counters essentialist stereotypes of 'primitive' life in Africa, and helps viewers to recognize the humanity of the Rwandans caught in this violence. When the violence begins, this identification is central to eliciting viewers' sympathies. Consequently, they share Paul's horror when he fully realizes the proposal to kill all Tutsis.

*Hotel Rwanda's* focus upon a lone protagonist figure also facilitates an exploration of the psychological trauma experienced by individuals caught in the middle of genocide. This is shown most powerfully when Paul is confronted with the massive scale of the genocide, as he is driving with a member of the Interahamwe militia for whom he is doing favours. The two men leave the *Hôtel des Mille Collines* early one morning when all is quiet and the sun has not yet risen; at one point the van they are traveling in begins to jolt and jerk as it travels over an uneven ground. Eventually they stop, and upon opening the van door, Paul realizes that they have not been driving over

crevices and potholes in the road's surface, but over hundreds of dead bodies which have been left in the road. This realization is communicated to the viewer in a 'draw back' shot, as the camera pulls away from a close up of Paul's face to reveal the bodies, partially shrouded in early morning mist, littering the roadway. Once back at the hotel, Paul begins to shake; he struggles to remove his shirt and tie—an activity which symbolizes his inner turmoil and his efforts to 'cleanse' himself from what he has witnessed. In the next scene, Paul tries to make sense of his experience in a conversation with a fellow hotel worker. As they talk, the two men watch a group of Rwandan children dancing in the gardens of the hotel. Gentle Rwandan song accompanies their movements and represents a brief moment of tranquility.

It is in its emphasis on Paul's humanity, which is evident in these scenes, that *Hotel Rwanda* successfully communicates the sense of moral outrage which is arguably its most powerful message. Scenes of violence and turmoil are juxtaposed against tender moments of love and friendship—especially between Paul and Tatiana—to help viewers recognize the catastrophic of this event, contextualize it within a love story. Director Terry George suggests that this focus stemmed from a desire to present a universal story, and attract as wide an audience as possible for the film:

I wanted to make a [...] film that everyone could go and see and not feel that they had to turn their heads away, [...] [I wanted them to] be caught up in the tension of it, [...] caught up in the love story between this devoted husband and wife and also caught up in the human drama and feel that they are with Paul. So [in terms of] the horrific element of it, it was important for me not to focus on that at all, I didn't want anyone to feel that they could avoid this film because it was gory and it would be distasteful to them.<sup>20</sup>

Consequently, the film portrays relatively little violence; in fact, perhaps its most disturbing scene shows no killings, but portrays instead the evacuation of the westerners

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<sup>20</sup> 'Director's Commentary,' *Hotel Rwanda* dir. Terry George (United Artists, 2004) [on DVD].

from the hotel. As tourists and foreign business men board the buses which will take them to Kigali airport, a group of nuns are forced to separate from their Rwandan orphan charges. Distressing scenes of separation symbolize the way in which Rwanda has been abandoned by the West, and implies that lingering racist attitudes render an African life less valuable than that of a white person. This inequality is powerfully captured as the bus pulls away from the hotel leaving the Rwandans standing in the rain, whilst a white woman on the bus clutches a dog in her arms.

However, the film's primary focus upon Paul means that its representation of genocide is ultimately limited. It fails to explore to any extent the motivations of perpetrators who were incited to kill neighbours and friends, and it does not explore any other contexts of the genocide, such as rural Rwanda, where many people were forced to hide in caves and swamps in order to survive. Furthermore, some claim that the emphasis upon humanity rather than barbarity means the film does not show enough violence. For example, critic David Thomas believes the story is told with 'too much restraint,' and does not effectively 'capture the visceral horror of the event':

this is one of those rare cases where it seems the presentation isn't violent enough. It feels like the blow has been softened, and this is one punch that should not be pulled. In effect, the audience feels like they're being given the tourist version of the massacre instead of the real thing.<sup>21</sup>

More troubling perhaps, is another critic's suggestion that, through its references to *Schindler's List* and other genocide films, *Hotel Rwanda* has assisted in turning the horrors of genocide into a series of cinematic or narrative tropes. In reference to Paul's early morning encounter with the scale of the killings, Katrina Onstad notes:

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<sup>21</sup> David Thomas 'Review,' *filmcritic.com*, <<http://ngintip-film.blogspot.com/2007/09/hotel-rwanda-2004.html>> [accessed 17th September 2008].

The strange, and perhaps dangerous, sensation one gets watching *Hotel Rwanda* is the unshock of the familiar; the specificity of what went on in Rwanda is, in a way, lost in the generic category “genocide film.” When the fog clears and the camera pulls back for the inevitable “reveal”—stacks of dead bodies—one recalls uncannily similar climactic moments in the 1984 film *The Killing Fields*, about Cambodian genocide, [amongst other scenes in other genocide films]. Of course, such unimaginable moments have occurred, and are occurring, but do they lose their power when they become cinematic tropes, reducing horror to a plot or a hero’s redemption?<sup>22</sup>

This comment highlights the danger that the generic conventions of films may lead filmmakers to diminish the specificity of an event. Whilst *Hotel Rwanda* attempts to help viewers understand the causes of this particular genocide, and whilst it addresses the culpability of the West, it is necessarily limited by its own aspiration for commercial success.

Furthermore, the emphasis upon Paul Rusesabagina as a heroic protagonist has proved problematic in the controversy which has emerged over the film in Rwanda itself. *Hotel Rwanda* brought Paul Rusesabagina to prominence, and he has gained prestige internationally as a hero of the genocide.<sup>23</sup> However, his heroism has come under question since the release of this film, as some survivors have disputed Rusesabagina’s version of events. One of them, a receptionist at the *Hôtel des Mille Collines* at named Pasa Mwenenganucye, has accused Rusesabagina of charging refugees to stay at the hotel and ejecting those who could not pay. Mwenenganucye has also expressed horror at the way he was portrayed in the film (as Gregoire, a Hutu worker who moves into the hotel’s presidential suite and drinks champagne whilst others are dying). In an interview with *Reuters Press*, he has claimed furiously that:

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<sup>22</sup> Katrina Onstad, ‘Filming the Unfilmable: The Challenge of the Genocide Movie,’ *cbc.ca*, 2nd February 2005 <<http://www.cbc.ca/arts/film/genocide.html>> [accessed 17th September 2008].

<sup>23</sup> In November 2005 he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the United States’ highest civilian award. He is also a recipient of the National Civil Rights Museum’s 2005 Freedom Medal.

'The movie is Hollywood fiction. If it's (supposed to be) a true story, then it's a basket of lies'.<sup>24</sup> Rusesabagina has denied such accusations, and claims that he simply wanted to tell the truth about what happened at this time: 'To such people [as Mwenenganucye] I tried to be fair, [...] But they were celebrating, serving themselves from the cellar. No survivor has said 'he charged and kicked me out for not paying'.<sup>25</sup>

Other Rwandan survivors have also criticized Rusesabagina, accusing him of exploiting a national tragedy and re-writing history for his own gain. Rwanda's President Kagame has called the film a 'falsehood,' and had argued that Rusesabagina is not an appropriate symbol of heroism for the Rwandan genocide, but is instead 'a manufactured hero'.<sup>26</sup> Kagame has been particularly critical of what he considers to be the construction of Paul's heroism outside Rwanda. His criticisms are encapsulated in an editorial which was published in Rwanda's premier daily newspaper, *New Times*, six days after Rusesabagina had received the U.S. President's award in 2005. This article said that Rusesabagina would 'go down in the annals of history as a man who sold the soul of the Rwandan genocide to amass medals.'<sup>27</sup> In a two-hour radio broadcast discussing Rusesabagina, Francois Xavier Ngarambe (the president of Ibuka, the umbrella body of genocide survivors' associations) publicly claimed that he 'has hijacked heroism. He is trading with the genocide. He should be charged.'<sup>28</sup>

In response to these criticisms Terry George has defended the film's portrayal of Paul Rusesabagina. He claims that the production team working on *Hotel Rwanda* made

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Arthut Asiimwe, 'Hotel Rwanda Hero in Bitter Controversy,' *Reuters*, 4th April 2007 <<http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSL04209686>> [accessed 18th September 2008].

<sup>25</sup> Asiimwe, 'Hotel Rwanda Hero in Bitter Controversy.'

<sup>26</sup> Asiimwe, 'Hotel Rwanda Hero in Bitter Controversy.'

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Terry George's response to the criticisms. Terry George, 'Smearing a Hero: Sad Revisionism over Hotel Rwanda,' *The Washington Post*, 10th May 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/09/AR2006050901242.html>. [accessed 18th September 2008].

<sup>28</sup> George, 'Smearing a Hero.'

every effort to remain historically accurate.<sup>29</sup> George suggests that Paul's unpopularity can be linked to his outspoken criticisms against what he sees as ongoing injustices within Rwanda. These, Rusesabagina claims, have escalated to the point where Rusesabagina claims he no longer feels able to live in Rwanda, but remains in Belgium where he fled following the genocide for fear—he says—of a government campaign against him.<sup>30</sup> One of his primary complaints concerns discrimination against Hutus since the genocide, which he claims means that Tutsi crimes (such as the killings of Hutus by liberating RPF forces) have not been sufficiently addressed or are being ignored due to overwhelming sympathy towards Tutsis. In his memoir *An Ordinary Man*, he writes that

the popular image persists that Rwanda is today a nation governed by and for the benefit of a small group of elite Tutsis. Kagame's government has done little to show the world a different picture. The Parliament is widely known to be a rubber stamp for the will of the president. Those few Hutus who have been elevated to high-ranking posts are usually empty suits without any real authority of their own. They are known locally as *Hutus de service* or "Hutus for hire." [...] The same kind of impunity that festered after the 1959 revolution is happening again, only with a different race-based elite in power. We have changed the dance but the music remains the same.<sup>31</sup>

Rusesabagina's criticisms also extend to raising awareness about other contexts of genocide, ('What happened in Rwanda is now happening in Darfur, in the Congo, in all of these places they are butchering innocent civilians'.<sup>32</sup>) and a critique of the systems of power which mean that African contexts of genocide do not receive as much attention as those elsewhere ('it is high time we know that a human life in Africa is as

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<sup>29</sup> George, 'Smearing a Hero.'

<sup>30</sup> George, 'Smearing a Hero.'

<sup>31</sup> Paul Rusesabagina with Tom Zoellner, *An Ordinary Man: The True Story Behind 'Hotel Rwanda'* (London: Bloomsbury, Publishing, 2006), 254-5.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Jeevan Vasagar, 'From four-star sanctuary to star of Hollywood: the hotel that saved hundreds from genocide,' *The Guardian*, 16th February 2005. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/feb/16/rwanda.film>> [accessed 18th September 2008].

important as a human life in the West'<sup>33</sup>). Kagame's criticisms of Rusesabagina can, therefore, also be viewed as fears over the latter's developing political voice, anxieties that he may seek to establish his own rival political party in Rwanda and undermine Kagame's governance.

In conclusion, this film powerfully communicates the horrors of genocide, eliciting sympathy from a mainstream audience. *Hotel Rwanda* has been instrumental in raising awareness about the Rwandan genocide—a strength which should not be underestimated, despite the film's weaknesses. In addition, the film has enabled a Rwandan survivor to speak out about the injustices of the genocide, and gain agency as a political figure both within Rwanda, and internationally. It is hoped that the profile of figures like Paul Rusesabagina will help to secure international awareness of tensions in this region, and continue to enhance understanding of western complicity in these local contexts. *Hotel Rwanda* also exemplifies the dangers of misrepresentation which may occur if films either sensationalize or diminish historical events in order to reach a wider audience. In addition, the furore created by *Hotel Rwanda* highlights the ethical responsibility of filmmakers to consider the community of victims they seek to represent. At a time when former perpetrators and victims continue to argue over genocide crimes, both in the Rwandan media and in the law courts of the International Tribunal, it is hardly surprising that the depiction of one man's apparently unequivocal heroism may incite resentment, particular from those (like Kagame, suggests Rusesabagina<sup>34</sup>) who wish to claim that they, too, acted heroically. Thus, this film,

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<sup>33</sup> Kyle Smith, Dietlind Lerner and Michael Fleeman, 'Beyond Brave,' *People*, 24th January 2005, <<http://www.mahoganycafe.com/pimages/paull.jpg>> [accessed 18th September 2008].

<sup>34</sup> Asiimwe, 'Hotel Rwanda Hero in Bitter Controversy.'



which appears to celebrate survival, may actually endanger the real process of reconciliation within the community it seeks to profile.

### III. *Sometimes in April* dir. Raoul Peck

Whilst attracting a smaller audience than either *The Killing Fields* or *Hotel Rwanda*, the third film in this chapter might be considered a more 'authentic' illustration of the trauma of postcolonial genocide and its symptomatic aftermath. Where the other two films can be seen to rely on the use of narrative tropes to help viewers relate to unfamiliar contexts, *Sometimes in April* subverts certain conventions and replicates the symptoms and long-term effects of trauma within the narrative, in order to encapsulate the way that traumatic experience fragments identity and disrupts communities. In this way, this film functions in a similar way to the postcolonial novels I examined in chapter three, which rejected the traditional, dominant conventions of the form to represent postcolonial trauma. Consequently, where both *The Killing Fields* and *Hotel Rwanda* depict heroic figures and incorporate elements of a conventional love story, *Sometimes in April* challenges the idealism which surrounds conventional notions of heroism, by focusing primarily upon a victim of trauma in the aftermath of his experience. This perspective assists in an exploration of the possibilities of catharsis or recovery in Rwanda, and the extent to which these may be bound up in a collective exploration of the past, and the response of the wider international community.

*Sometimes in April* examines the Rwandan genocide retrospectively. The film is set in 2004, ten years after the one hundred days of killing. Its central plot follows Augustin Muganza, a genocide survivor and teacher, who travels to Tanzania to visit his brother Honoré. Honoré is on trial as part of the United Nations International Tribunal,

for perpetrating acts of genocide through Radio RTLM, the Hutu hate radio station which orchestrated much of the violence in 1994. Augustin is a former Captain in the Rwandan military. His wife Jeanne, and his three children all disappeared during the genocide. Early in the film, it becomes clear that Augustin has not resolved any of his painful memories of this time; rather, he is plagued by his feelings of loss, anger, regret, and survivor's guilt. The story of his genocide experiences unravels through unwelcome but forceful images from the past—the very symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—which are evident within Augustin's day-to-day reality. The film segues back and forth between two temporalities (1994 and 2004), returning over and over to scenes of the genocide, from the perspective of its aftermath. This communicates something of the intensity of the experience of the one hundred days of killings, alongside its traumatic interruptions of daily life afterwards. Replicating traumatic experience at a structural level within the film also helps to communicate the notion of traumatic belatedness; as events are not represented as they occur, but retrospectively. This perspective enables *Sometimes in April* to capture something of the long-term impact of trauma in a way that *The Killing Fields* and *Hotel Rwanda* do not: by acknowledging—and exploring—its long-term effects.

As the film opens, Augustin is shown struggling to resolve his inner turmoil; he is unwilling to reconcile with his brother for his complicity in the genocide, but is also unable to forgive himself for losing his children, nor look forward to the future optimistically. He continues to wear his wedding ring, and refuses to accept that his wife is dead. He is transfixed by his experiences of genocide, epitomizing the way in which trauma victims are unable to move on from the past. Yet Augustin's ambivalence and denial do not simply stem from the trauma of his genocide memories; even in the

early stages of violence he fails to act decisively, denying rumours of killings as hearsay, and hesitating to move his family to safety. This contrasts with the emphasis in *Hotel Rwanda* upon a heroic protagonist whose decisions enable good to ‘triumph’ over evil. Paul Rusesabagina is characterized by his strong will, inner strength, and determination. In contrast, Augustin exemplifies the passive bystander; he hesitates to act, even when the evidence of Tutsi killings is undeniable. Ironically, where Paul is represented as an ‘unlikely hero,’ Augustin has been trained for leadership; his physicality exudes the strength and power commonly associated with a ‘action hero’ figure. However, where Rusesabagina courageously risks his life in order to save others, Augustin fails to act at a crucial moment. As the film opens, Augustin has abandoned himself to his sense of personal failure; when a pupil asks him “What kind of soldier were you?” his answer is unequivocal: “A very bad one.”<sup>35</sup>

In the commentary accompanying the film on DVD release, the director Raoul Peck recognizes that Augustin is not a typical hero. He suggests that:

usually the hero—what they teach you in film school—[...] the hero have an ambition, have an end and this end is contradicted by the reality around him. So the whole film is about him fighting those ... obstacles [...] and here [in this film] you have a man who has no answers. He have to go through this [journey to Tanzania] to find those answers, he’s ambivalent, he’s hesitating because he is confronted to something he buried deep down in his conscience [...] he doesn’t want to deal with it. [sic]<sup>36</sup>

However, the depiction of Augustin as a broken man supports his credibility as a trauma victim. It underlines the impact of trauma upon individuals as a recurring symptom which continues long after the initial shock, or terror, is over. Furthermore, by highlighting the way in which trauma fragments identity and collapses an individual’s

<sup>35</sup> *Sometimes in April*, dir. Raoul Peck (Home Box Office, 2006), [on DVD].

<sup>36</sup> ‘Director’s Commentary,’ *Sometimes in April*.

established sense of selfhood, *Sometimes in April* implicitly questions the suitability of a heroic protagonist figure to represent postcolonial trauma. Instead, *Sometimes in April* explores Augustin's hesitancy and his brokenness; it shows how trauma silences and oppresses its victims, so that they cannot achieve a sense of closure, or move on with their lives. Augustin exhibits some of the central responses to trauma, including denial, immobilizing terror, guilt, and long-term distress. Thus, *Sometimes in April* provides some insight into post-traumatic stress disorder.

Furthermore, insofar as Augustin has been disempowered, and forced to witness violence he is impotent to prevent, he is symbolic of the oppressions wrought by colonialism. Through Augustin, Peck articulates the frustrations of the postcolonial subject, who is paralyzed by oppression, unable to speak out, and unable to become an agent of change. Augustin is a casualty of the way in which Rwandans were abandoned during the genocide; his expectancy—like that of Paul Rusesabagina—that the West would come to Rwanda's aid stems from a similarly privileged background, and relatively western lifestyle. Thus, whilst he regrets his own failure to act, he is also angry at the inaction of the West. This sense of dual responsibility is highlighted early in the film. A group of students watch a televised press conference, which shows the former U.S. President Bill Clinton belatedly acknowledge the horrors of the genocide. Afterwards, one of the students asks Augustin, "Could it have been stopped? All the dying?" to which Augustin replies, "Maybe if some of us were more courageous. Maybe if the world had paid more attention. I don't know."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Sometimes in April*, dir. Raoul Peck.

Augustin's personal guilt is partly the consequence of his ignorance about what happened to his family. Augustin last saw his wife and sons attempting to leave Kigali under the protection of his brother, Honoré. He travels to Tanzania in order to discover—and finally accept—their deaths. However, when he arrives, he finds it difficult to meet with his brother, or attend the court hearings where Honoré is being prosecuted. In the flashback scenes showing life before the genocide, the connection between the two men is evident—despite their different perspectives on the rising ethnic tensions in Rwanda, they are brothers, bonded by blood, and loyalty. Ten years later, Augustin has denounced their relationship, claiming that Honoré is “nothing to me.”<sup>38</sup> However, in contrast with his brother, Honoré has accepted the past; at the tribunal he describes how he was initially unaware of the way in which his radio propaganda made him complicit with the genocide, yet he has finally realized his own culpability and is ready to face what he has done. He wants to tell Augustin what happened to his family and bring about a reconciliation between the two brothers. As he writes in a letter to Augustin: ‘When I finally realized that I was an actor in this tragedy, I chose not to live with that. I thought my debt bring me peace—I was wrong. Only the truth can ease my guilt. Dear Augustin, I must tell you what happened’.<sup>39</sup>

Through the relationship between Augustin and Honoré, *Sometimes in April* explores the possibility that recovering the past may lead to a sense of catharsis. However, the scenes which show their reunion are characterized by awkwardness and silence; both men are hesitant and wary of each other, and all the ease of their former brotherhood is gone. Their first meeting is very different to the reunion scene at the end of *The Killing Fields*, which shows Pran and Sydney joyfully back together again; it

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<sup>38</sup> *Sometimes in April*, dir. Raoul Peck.

<sup>39</sup> *Sometimes in April*, dir. Raoul Peck.

also counters *Hotel Rwanda*'s 'happy ending,' where Paul and Tatiana leave the refugee camp, having found their niece and nephews alive. The apparent ease of these reunion scenes, which are accompanied by uplifting music and a sense of cathartic resolution, contrasts with the meetings between Augustin and Honoré. These show how tensions and alienation continue long after the genocide itself has finally ended. However, the two brothers need each other to help them understand the past. Whilst Augustin needs his brother to help him move beyond his denial, Honoré longs for his brother's forgiveness. Thus, through these brothers, *Sometimes in April* highlights the cost of true reconciliation, of an acceptance of shared culpability, and a decision on both sides to relinquish the past.

Interestingly, the struggle between Augustin and Honoré to accept each other can be seen as a microcosm for the wider struggles of post-genocide Rwanda. The estrangement of these two men—one of whom was a perpetrator, whilst the other was caught up as a victim, bystander, and witness—powerfully encapsulates the way in which the genocide has alienated previously close families, friends, and communities from each other. In the film, this wider context is explored through scenes of the International Tribunal in Tanzania and local *gacaca* meetings in Rwandan communities, where survivors come forward to testify about genocide experiences. The sense of fragmentation and brokenness across the nation is also evident in Augustin's encounter with a secret witness, who is due to testify in Tanzania. They meet when each is struggling to overcome personal trauma. Augustin is in his hotel room, drinking beer and crying following a visit with his brother, when he hears weeping coming from the adjacent room. Speaking through the wall, he attempts to comfort the woman, who is due to give her testimony a few days later. Hearing the depth of her suffering, Augustin

is shaken out of his personal grief. He agrees to go to her tribunal and provide moral support, despite the fact that, up to this point, he has been unwilling to hear the truth about what happened to victims during the genocide. This decision to acknowledge what has happened marks the beginning of his character's post-genocide recovery; insofar as it represents an act of courage, it should be recognized as his most significant demonstration of 'heroic greatness.' In turn, Augustin's support helps to encourage the secret witness to testify about how she was raped by a group of Hutu militia. Another example of the sense of shared grief in Rwanda is explored through Augustin's girlfriend, Martine. Prior to the genocide, Martine was a teacher at the rural boarding school where Augustin's daughter Anne-Marie was a student. Augustin and Martine are drawn to each other through their shared sense of loss over the girl, and their own incapacity to save her. At the end of the film, Martine revisits the school; afterwards, she testifies at a *gacaca*. The film's references to these individuals' experiences and to their efforts at reconciliation through trials and tribunals helps develop a sense of the massive scale of suffering experienced during the genocide, and the long process of collective recovery.

An emphasis upon multiple perspectives of the genocide is important for several reasons. Firstly, it challenges the notion that one authoritative perspective or 'master narrative' is adequate for presenting this kind of trauma. Consequently, where the other films in this chapter have focused largely upon individual experiences of genocide, this film explores the impact of the genocide upon a group of people by incorporating multiple perspectives and a variety of contexts. Augustin's struggle to overcome the past can be considered symbolic of these other contexts—and the film's climactic scene where he finds out about his family certainly helps him move towards a

sense of closure—but the film makes it clear that his individual catharsis is insufficient to address the scale of the atrocities and their wide-reaching, long-term impact.

Secondly, the use of multiple perspectives enables a more holistic view of the genocide. The film juxtaposes the stories of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders during the genocide. These include those of U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Prudence Bushnell in the Washington administration, and the response of the international media, which is represented through news reports and radio announcements. It also explores the survivors, former perpetrators, and witnesses who must reconcile the past ten years on. For a western audience, the film's broad perspective is invaluable tutelage; several of the contexts described, for example, the rural swamps where many hid, or the churches where thousands sought refuge, are also told in journalistic accounts like Philip Gourevitch's *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families*. Here those vignettes reach a different audience. Their inclusion shows that, alongside the middle-class Rwandans whose lives were thrown into turmoil, there were also many living in poverty, who had no way to defend themselves and no education to help them understand the unjust nature of the conflict. This perspective is powerfully illustrated in Martine's encounter with a farmer and his wife. It helps to create a sense of compassion for those complicit in the violence, and even a measure of understanding towards those who committed killings.

Furthermore, as the film hints towards the alleged 'backlash' crimes committed by the liberating RPF forces against Hutu civilians, it further challenges the suitability of a straightforward 'happy ending,' or sense of closure for this kind of subject-matter. These aspects of the film can be seen to develop my argument in chapter three, where I suggested that postcolonial trauma novels are characterized by a resistance of closure.



The 'loose ends' which remain at the close of *Sometimes in April* suggest a similar device is at work. Here, the refusal to allow closure indicates the deep personal pain experienced by individuals like Augustin, and refutes the possibility of an easy or straightforward recovery. It also extends the film's focus on the experience of genocide at a collective level in Rwanda. Finally, the absence of closure can also be seen as a resistance of the conventional cinematic narrative, and the cultural values that it represents. The perspective which it presents contrasts with that of *The Killing Fields* or *Hotel Rwanda*, but it is arguably more realistic.

Thirdly, by drawing together multiple perspectives, the film explores the possibility that a fictional mode of representation such as film may emulate some of the properties of the testimonial narrative. This is evident in the moment when the secret witness Augustin encounters in Tanzania gives her testimony at the tribunal. In his commentary of the film, Peck has described how this scene is directly based upon the testimony of a real witness, 'JJ,' who was the first to establish rape as an act of genocide. Peck has described how he refused to edit any of the content of this scene, but insisted on including all of the original court transcription, so that he could capture the moment authentically. Whilst this scene does not stand as a legal testimony, it is significant for the way it gives voice to an actual experience of genocide, reconstructing an important historical moment which would then be seen by a large public audience.

Emphasis upon authentically reconstructing historical moments is also evident in the choice to film entirely on location in Rwanda. Peck describes how his belief that the film needed to be authentic led him to transport film equipment from France to Rwanda, rather than use locations in South Africa, as other Rwandan films (including *Hotel*

*Rwanda*) had done. This means that *Sometimes in April* is the only film to have shot in the actual *Hôtel des Mille Collines*—ironic perhaps, given that *Hotel Rwanda* is based almost entirely in this location. Peck is also able to boast that many of the scenes in his film were filmed exactly where their real counterparts occurred. This strengthens the film's claim to accurately represent the past, and helps it to achieve a documentary-style authenticity. It also refutes criticisms of sensationalism or exploitation.

However, the success of this is limited. Peck weaves together real and fictional accounts of genocide, at times conflating several incidents; elsewhere altering real experiences in order to increase the film's dramatic effect or establish a sense of pathos.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, in drawing upon the case of witness 'JJ,' the film can be seen to appropriate an individual's tragedy in order to help Augustin resolve his trauma and achieve personal closure—an act which privileges the actions of Augustin over a figure who is arguably more heroic. The juxtaposition of these testimonial elements also disrupts the plot. Some scenes—whilst factually correct—complicate the film's central thread and make it difficult to follow. In addition, it is difficult to believe that all of these experiences could be connected, which increases the film's sense of melodrama, detracting from its claim to realism.

Finally, the film's use of multiple perspectives enables a fuller indictment of the role of the western nations. As in *Hotel Rwanda*, the culpability of the West is central to the message of this film. Whilst the majority of the film's action is set in Africa, scenes

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<sup>40</sup> For example, the experiences of Augustin's wife, Jeanne, are based upon real events. Jeanne, along with many other Tutsis, is depicted seeking refuge at a church during the genocide. However, the church priest betrays their location to some local Hutu militia who arrive at the church intending to rape the women and kill all the Tutsis. Peck describes how Jeanne's experiences in the film are based upon the testimony of a woman who hid at the same church. However, where Jeanne commits suicide by firing a grenade as an act of resistance, her real-life counterpart decided not to commit suicide because she thought her children needed her. Peck has described how he altered the testimony of the woman upon whom Jeanne's experiences are based in order to show her resisting the genocide in an act of courage. 'Director's Commentary,' *Sometimes in April*.

which play out in Washington, in combination with media footage, help to explore the way in which the genocide was largely ignored by the rest of the world. Certain scenes are clearly designed to make the viewer uncomfortable, as when a journalist asks “The rebel forces, are they Tutu or Hutsi?” and, when corrected, continues “Which ones are the good guys?”<sup>41</sup> Within the administration itself, Prudence Bushnell is shown battling against disinterested bureaucrats who claim, “We do not want another Mogadishu,” and ask “What is our vital interest in Rwanda?”<sup>42</sup> whilst chaos and acts of barbarity continue in Rwanda. Images also establish a symbolic connection between Rwanda and the West, as when the green plants swaying around bloody victims lying in the rural swamps are juxtaposed against the green leaves of trees lining the grounds of the Washington administration. The film’s critique extends to the colonial legacy in Africa, which it suggests laid the foundations for ethnic unrest. The relationship between colonialism and the genocide is established through archive footage used in the opening credits. One shows white colonials immaculately dressed in safari strip meeting naked tribesman with painted bodies; another portrays white men measuring the noses of black people. These images serve as implicit references to the Holocaust, slavery, and even the colonization of Native Americans in the U.S. They help to contextualize the genocide within the context of other acts of oppression. They suggest that if viewers were horrified by these western acts of oppression, they should also be upset about the forces of oppression which facilitated the Rwandan genocide. The film’s indictment of the West is affirmed in the epigraph—a quote from Martin Luther King Jr.—which reads: ‘In the end we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.’<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Sometimes in April*, dir. Raoul Peck.

<sup>42</sup> *Sometimes in April*, dir. Raoul Peck.

<sup>43</sup> *Sometimes in April*, dir. Raoul Peck.

The attempt to encapsulate the social, historical, geographical, and psychological complexities of the Rwandan genocide represents one of this film's greatest strengths. It is achieved through the juxtaposition of an individual protagonist against the trauma experienced at a collective level in Rwanda—an insightful and engaging approach to mediating postcolonial trauma. However, it could be argued that these strengths were achieved at the expense of obtaining a wider audience. This film was produced in partnership with Home Box Office (HBO) Film, and was made primarily for a television audience in the U.S. rather than for cinema release. This format made possible the film's complicated narrative structure; it also facilitated the inclusion of long scenes, like the testimony of witness 'JJ,' which do not further the main plot. The advantages of this format are reflected in the film's length: at 2 hours 20 minutes, *Sometimes in April* is nearly a third longer than the average feature film. However, films produced for television are often dismissed as inferior; it is assumed they will attract a smaller audience, so they are given smaller budgets, lower profiles, and are separated from mainstream releases for awards. Consequently, this film will never be able to reach as many people as either *Hotel Rwanda* or *The Killing Fields*; it may never get the critical recognition it deserves and will not have the same status or longevity as a result. This is a significant weakness. Juxtaposed against the commercial successes of *The Killing Fields* and *Hotel Rwanda*, it is frustrating that this film—which is arguably more insightful, and more authentic—should fail to attract a wider audience.

### Conclusion

There can be no doubt that those seeking to confront postcolonial trauma in film face a series of moral and ethical dilemmas, beginning with how to represent the horrors

of experiences such as genocide—a subject which, arguably, defies visualization—without alienating audiences from the screen, or (worse) distorting their perceptions of the historical events themselves. In my analysis of *The Killing Fields*, *Hotel Rwanda*, and *Sometimes in April*, I have shown that choosing how to represent physical suffering is just one of these dilemmas. Others include: the dangers of sensationalizing, simplifying or trivializing the past, the tendency to conflate history and fiction, the problem of how to represent heroism without glamourizing individuals, and the question of how to prevent the further exploitation of trauma victims. I have also shown that the generic conventions of the film mode may impede the accurate representation of postcolonial trauma. This is because the pressure to depict a strong hero or incorporate a sense of closure into a film may cause filmmakers to simplify real experiences of suffering. Negotiating these issues may mean that a film fails to authentically represent historical trauma. Alternatively, a filmmaker may feel that they have to sacrifice the commercial demands of mainstream cinema audiences—and the possibility of a high profile release—in order to encapsulate the complexities of an event.

In addition to these concerns, those seeking to represent postcolonial trauma through film must decide how to represent unfamiliar contexts to western viewers without using exotic or essentialist stereotypes. They must consider how to explore the role of the West without being heavy-handed, or alienating viewers. Furthermore, it could be argued that effective mediation of postcolonial trauma should restore dignity to those who have suffered, rather than exploiting them, or causing them further oppression. This is of particular concern where survivors are asked to re-enact instances of suffering or violence which are similar to their own. Of course, the use of survivors in genocide films has its advantages, one of which is the agency it gives individuals to

help tell their own stories. For example, Peck claims to have been surprised by the level of cooperation from survivors who wanted *Sometimes in April* to remain faithful to historical truth, even if this meant rehearsing painful memories:

Sometimes, it would happen that an actor seemed traumatized by a scene, or would feel transported ten years before into 1994 and reliving some traumatic moment they went through. When I was the one to say, well, maybe we should stop, they were pushing me saying, “no, let’s do another take. Don’t worry, we’ll have time to cry. But the world, the rest of the world has to know this story.” And so we went to tell it.<sup>44</sup>

However, the film-making process may also damage the process of recovery for these victims. I have already described Haing Ngor’s struggle to play Dith Pran in *The Killing Fields* without conflating the experience with his own memories. Ngor’s testimonio *Survival in the Killing Fields* raises a concern regarding the way in which survivors are treated during filming, and whether or not filmmakers are sensitive to their needs or equipped to deal with them. For example, Ngor describes the filming of the scene where Sydney and Pran are separated, and suggests that the additional stress he experienced at this time was largely dismissed by the film crew:

[b]etween takes the wardrobe man handed me tissues without looking at me. ‘Roland,’ I said after the sixth take, ‘I don’t think I can do this again.’ Roland paid no attention. He shot the scene a seventh time and this time everything was right. When I came off the set the cast and crew looked at me in absolute silence. The kind of silence that is louder than applause. I kept on walking, because in my mind I was still on my way out of the French embassy, heading toward death in the countryside. (481)

Although there has been relatively little vocalized concern over the psychological impact of the making of this film on Ngor, the use of survivors in other genocide films—particularly those produced more recently—has proved controversial. For example, in a 2006 article in *The Observer* Alice O’Keeffe highlighted some of the criticisms which

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<sup>44</sup> ‘Director’s Commentary,’ *Sometimes in April*, Dir. Raoul Peck (Home Box Office, 2006) [on DVD].

have been leveled at films shot in Rwanda and, in particular, a BBC production, *Shooting Dogs* (2005). This film attempted to raise awareness about the Rwandan genocide by recreating the exact details and conditions of a massacre at a Rwandan school, *L'École Technique Officielle*. It includes several scenes of violence, during which woman and children are shown being hacked to death by machete-wielding militia. O'Keeffe writes that

Aid workers have expressed concern that some local people were traumatised by witnessing the reconstruction [of the massacre]. On one occasion, students from a nearby school had to be taken to hospital and sedated when they suffered flashbacks after overhearing the chants and whistles of the angry mob. One member of the crew suffered a breakdown when he was taken back to the street where he had been forced to hide down a manhole for three months to escape the killers.[sic]<sup>45</sup>

Another critic of *Shooting Dogs* has accused the BBC of profiting from other people's suffering. Mary Kayitesi Blewitt, of the UK based Rwandan Survivors' Fund, has suggested that filmmakers seeking to explore the Rwandan genocide should invest in the nation's recovery; however she claims that the BBC caused additional anxiety and depression in Rwandan survivors during the production of *Shooting Dogs*, without giving a penny away.<sup>46</sup> Helen Bamber, Holocaust survivor and director of the Helen Bamber Foundation for conflict survivors, has argued that the filmmakers involved in *Shooting Dogs* failed to show sensitivity towards the fragility of contemporary Rwanda, because they did not question any of the extras about their involvement in the 1994 massacre.<sup>47</sup> In response, the producer of the film David Belton highlights the difficulties of remaining authentic to history without becoming insensitive to local needs:

We took great pains to avoid local people being confronted with the disturbing scenes, and had two trauma counsellors and medical staff on hand. [...] We made the film in Rwanda

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<sup>45</sup> Alice O'Keeffe, 'Anger At BBC Film,' *The Observer*, 19th March 2006, p.6 of the News section.

<sup>46</sup> Mary Kayitesi Blewitt, quoted in Linda Melvern, 'History? this film is fiction' *The Guardian*, 19th March 2006, p. 32 of the Comment section.

<sup>47</sup> O'Keeffe, 'Anger at Genocide Film.'

because the Rwandans wanted us to. They were appalled that *Hotel Rwanda* was filmed in South Africa, with South African actors.<sup>48</sup>

However, Belton's comment highlights a danger of filming in areas which are also economically deprived. In these contexts, survivors may willingly participate in traumatic re-enactments at the expense of their mental well-being, in order to ensure that their nation's troubled histories are told—or perhaps more troublingly, simply to get paid work. Interestingly, the identity of filmmakers may be an issue here. The production companies involved in both *The Killing Fields* and *Hotel Rwanda* were predominantly North American or European; there is evidence in both films that victims may have been exploited. In contrast, *Sometimes in April* was directed by a Haitian with a reputation for Pan-African film projects. Peck claims that: 'For me, it was an inseparable approach. As a black person, a Haitian, and part of the so-called "third world," I had to make sure that I would be able to look "my people" in the eyes after making this movie.'<sup>49</sup> This suggests that Peck believed his postcolonial background helped him to represent this genocide in an accurate way; it implies that, as with all the other narratives discussed in this thesis, the identity of the author, and their relationship with their subject, is of the greatest importance. As this chapter has shown, it is not possible to completely separate an author (or group of authors) from the story they are telling because their connection, and their culturally determined perspectives, indicate the extent to which they are likely to be sympathetic to the postcolonial struggle to gain agency and represent marginal experiences.

The challenge to mediate postcolonial trauma effectively, without incurring further trauma upon its victims, has become one of the central concerns of this thesis.

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<sup>48</sup> O'Keeffe. 'Anger at Genocide Film.'

<sup>49</sup> 'Director's Commentary,' *Hotel Rwanda*.



Despite its limitations, the advantages of the film mode suggest that it is well worth attempting to resolve this issue. After all, each of the films examined in this chapter shows that this mode is a valuable tool in which to explore postcolonial trauma. They do this not only as they take it for their subject matter, but also in the way in which they combine elements which are specific to the mode—such as camera techniques, style and choices of editing, music, and actors—with devices which are more closely related to the literary form, such as form, genre, structure, characterization, language, and plot. Furthermore, each of these films involves a number of survivors in their reconstructions of the past. Consequently, they can be seen to explore the possibility that the process of film-making itself may participate in a collective form of working-through. However, in order for this to occur, filmmakers need to recognize their ethical responsibility to engage with postcolonial trauma in meaningful ways. This needs to involve an acknowledgment of the culpability of the West where it is appropriate. It also requires a commitment to negotiate the challenges presented by the film mode, without ignoring those individuals, communities, and nations who are still working through their own traumas so that they, too, may move on from the past.

## Conclusion

Real memory is active, alive, embodied in the social – that is, in individuals, groups and nations. This is the memory that is needed to construct the future. Real memory is always transitory, notoriously unreliable, and haunted by forgetting: in a word, real memory is human.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis has argued for a closer conjunction between Trauma Studies and Postcolonial Studies. Its central imperative is to draw these two disciplines closer together, through an examination of representations of postcolonial experiences of trauma. I began by arguing that Trauma Studies has failed to address postcolonial trauma to a sufficient degree; I suggested that responses to the trauma of the terrorist attacks of 11th September 2001 exemplified a tendency towards selective amnesia within contemporary western society. I argued that this instance can be seen as symbolic of the way in which Trauma Studies has frequently ignored, overlooked, forgotten or excluded certain categories of trauma, thus preventing their victims from receiving adequate acknowledgment and affirmation. In addition, I suggested that further exploration of the traumatic nature of certain experiences of postcolonialism was needed if Postcolonial Studies was to fulfill its potential, to help those who have been disempowered following colonialism move to a position of empowerment and agency. It has been my objective to begin to rectify these imbalances, and develop fuller conversations between these two schools.

I have structured this thesis as a comparative study of the role and function of four different narrative genres (two of which are nonfictional, and two of which are

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<sup>1</sup> Andreas Huyssen, in Bennett and Kennedy (eds), (16-29) 28-9.

fictional), in order to highlight the different ways in which postcolonial trauma is mediated through varying forms of cultural representation. I have examined the representational techniques employed by various postcolonial narrators, and noted the opportunities afforded by these different genres of narration. Several findings emerge from this research. Firstly, a powerful engagement with postcolonial trauma is evident in each of the narratives which I have explored in this thesis. Each of these acts of narration testifies to the shattering impact of trauma in disruptions, hauntings and textual disturbances which are evident at levels of the narrative and metanarrative. This confirms the importance of cultural representation in enhancing the way postcolonial trauma is understood. However, there are advantages and disadvantages in the way each genre negotiates traumatic experience, which I shall now summarize.

In chapter 1, I suggested that its emphasis upon identity formation made autobiography a powerful tool for representing the way in which trauma shatters or collapses an individual's sense of self. I suggested that the literary components of these narratives (including style, structure, and characterization), combined with their claim to factual status, help to communicate the devastating impact of dislocation in a compelling way. However, I also noted that the attempt to represent postcolonial trauma frequently puts pressure on the 'autobiographical pact' by which the genre is defined. This was evident in Fuller's text, where the author refers to her younger self as 'Bobo'; it was also shown in *I Saw Ramallah*, when Barghouti's preoccupation with his brother's story led to a conflation of the two identities. This threatened the validity of the narrative in question but it also gave way to a further line of questioning regarding the suitability of the autobiographical mode for use by otherwise privileged individuals who have been disempowered by colonialism. This has been a recent source of investigation for critics of life-writing, including Leigh Gilmore and Gillian Whitlock.

As autobiography continues to be used by traumatized peoples seeking to represent themselves, narratives addressing postcolonial trauma will remain at the centre of debates regarding this genre's development.

In chapter 2, I discussed the role of the interlocutor, as a co-writer, translator or mediator who shapes the production of a testimonial narrative and the way it is received. Despite the credibility and endorsement offered by such a figure, I suggested that interlocutors often undermine a text, and weaken its claim for authenticity. I argued that this was of a particular concern in the postcolonial context, as it represents a form of cultural imperialism whereby non-western experiences are appropriated and re-worked in order to satisfy a western audience. Where this means glossing over the culpability of the West and its ethical responsibility to address its past crimes (as in the case of Rwanda and, to a lesser extent perhaps, Cambodia), the interlocutor may endanger an original intention of the narrative. In these instances, I suggested that careful moderation was needed of the role played by those who act as mediators so that narrators can have more control over the way they are represented. Nevertheless, I suggested that for victims of genocide or other extreme trauma in the postcolonial context, the testimonio offered a valuable way to speak out about historical crimes, and demand some kind of response from an audience.

In chapter 3, I demonstrated the important role played by the novel in replicating the experiential components of trauma—including the fragmentation of identity and compulsive repetition—at a formal level. I argued that this mode helped to process and disseminate collective experiences of trauma, and enhance wider understanding of the silencing effects of historical oppressions such as Apartheid, Partition, and in the dispossession of Palestinian peoples in 1948. As a mode of postcolonial discourse, I

showed how novelists employed literary tropes in order to expose their own incapacity to recover a history; this enabled them to engage with the past in an authentic way, impressing upon readers the way in which these significant traumas have been overlooked. Despite their fictional status, I suggested that an autobiographical link between a novelist and their subject matter enhanced the value of a postcolonial trauma narrative, because it meant that an author could not be accused of voyeurism or of diminishing the suffering of others for the sake of a good story. I suggested that the potential for this kind of exploitation represents the greatest disadvantage of the novel mode for negotiating postcolonial trauma.

In chapter 4, I explored the possibilities offered by film. I argued that this medium engages with trauma at a collective level, because of the way it is corporately produced by a group of individuals and received by a mass audience of viewers. The strengths of this mode include the power of its visual format and its immediacy. I noted in particular the role played by the mode in empowering individuals (such as Paul Rusesabagina and Haing Ngor) to become agents of change within their societies. However, despite these strengths, I showed how the collective ‘authorship’ of films could also be problematic. I explored some of the constraints upon film-makers; these included needing to adhere to the demands of the film industry, and satisfy audience expectations. I suggested that these limitations could undermine the authenticity of the story being told, and prove detrimental to survivors involved in its production.

In addition to the advantages and disadvantages of these individual modes of narration, general tendencies or themes can be seen in the different ways in which traumatic hauntings or disturbances are exhibited. For example, in life-writing narratives, I have shown that the emphasis upon a self-representing individual

describing his or her real life experiences helps to communicate the way in which trauma shatters a coherent sense of identity. This validates their account and, theoretically at least, authorizes them to speak on behalf of others. In fictional narratives, such as the novel and film, I argued that creative explorations of the past facilitate a shift from a single protagonist to a wider traumatic context. I claimed that an emphasis on representing collective trauma placed pressure on certain conventions of fiction, such as the importance of resolution or closure at the end of a narrative, and considered the extent to which this could be seen to represent a subversion of traditional, dominant cultural values, as a way of mediating postcoloniality.

Furthermore, in chapters 1 and 3 I argued that the fragmenting effects of trauma can be seen to pervade autobiographies and novels at a formal level, perhaps most evidently at the levels of style and structure, which replicate the (re-)negotiation of identity following a shattering experience of dislocation in the postcolonial context. I suggested that this focus upon interiority enabled the narrative to function in some ways as a form of working-through; however, I also noted a tension between the individual and the collective, as a protagonist or story gained some kind of representative status for a shared experience of postcolonial trauma. Conversely, in chapters 2 and 4 I observed a greater emphasis upon the public aspects of identity. I also noted additional external pressures—from the publishing industry and audiences who ‘consume’ trauma—in these modes. These, I suggested, influenced what stories come to be told and how they are narrated. Consequently, I argued that both film and testimonio may constrain possibilities for individual working-through; however, through them, trauma victims are able to gain agency and be empowered.

From this research, it is evident that no single mode of narration is privileged to communicate the complexity or severity of either postcolonial trauma, (in its different

manifestations) or its diverse range of effects. Rather, each mode has its own strengths, and correspondingly, each mode is limited in some ways. It is fortunate then that it is unnecessary to choose between these modes, as each contributes to extend our understanding of postcolonial trauma and, in different ways, enables individuals to speak out about their experiences.

In light of the significance of postcolonial trauma, which I have explored through these four modes of narration, I turn now to consider the wider implications of this thesis for the conjunction I wish to effect between Postcolonial Studies and Trauma Studies. I began by asking to what extent Trauma Studies might be considered Eurocentric, given the foundations of psychoanalytic methodology as outlined by Freud and others. Each of the narratives I have examined recounts a crisis of identity, which occurs following an incident which is deeply significant in its nature and symptomatic aftermath. In this way, these experiences can be seen to resonate with the understanding of psychological trauma as outlined by Freud and others, which I described in the Introduction. However, in other ways these narratives mediate experiences which diverge from established ideas about trauma.

Firstly, in each of the narratives I have studied there is emphasis upon a central relationship between the individual and the community or nation of which they are a part. Thus an individual experience of trauma becomes implicated in collective trauma. As I argued in my analysis of *Skinner's Drift*, addressing personal traumas without responding to this wider context is insufficient. Fugard's representation of her protagonist Eva shows how an individualistic approach to recovering historical suffering fails to do justice to the way in which citizens in postcolonial contexts may become implicated in each others' traumas. Eva epitomizes the individualistic approach

to identity and suffering which can be seen to be typical of western culture. It is her gradual realization that others are implicated in her experiences in ways she had not conceived that helps her to move beyond her trauma and develop an alternative approach to her life and her relationships with others. In *Sometimes in April*, an emphasis upon shared trauma leads to a complex juxtaposition of different experiences, each of which underlines the interrelatedness of victims, perpetrators and bystanders. This kind of examination benefits from the specific properties of the film mode, but it questions some of its conventions, such as the reliance on a heroic protagonist to change the world around him. Interestingly, Peck's exploration of the Rwandan genocide and its legacy includes an assessment of the role of western nations in this crisis. Although this relationship deserves a fuller exploration than the film offers, Peck underlines the interconnectedness of the West and Rwanda; he contrasts the corporate struggle for survival in Rwanda with the isolation which, he suggests, is characteristic of the West. As each of these narratives explores instances of trauma which disrupt entire communities, they also show that possibilities for recovery must be re-framed in view of the way in which selfhood is formed and sustained in relation to others. Conventional psychoanalytic methods such as working-through and the talking-cure may appear irrelevant and inappropriate ways to address such an expansive view of trauma. Thus alternative means of recovery need to be developed. This perspective is articulated in *I Saw Ramallah*, where Barghouti stresses that his individual return to Palestine is insufficient, but needs to be followed by the return of other Palestinians. In this text, like several others in this thesis, there is a sense in which collective trauma must be treated at the level of the community, through some kind of collective regeneration.

Secondly, it is evident that there are certain key kinds of trauma which recur in postcolonial contexts. These are often of a similar nature to so-called 'western' traumas,



such as those experienced during the Holocaust. However, despite this overlap, postcolonial experiences have not been sufficiently addressed for their traumatic nature. In Chapters 1 and 3, I explored instances of dislocation, dispossession or forced migration which provoked an identity crisis or collapse. Each of the six narratives in these chapters suggests that postcolonial identity is bound up in issues of land and national identity. These authors underline the struggle to maintain a coherent sense of identity when the relationship between individuals and the land is destroyed or irrevocably altered. Instances of involuntary dislocation are numerous and varied in the postcolonial context;<sup>2</sup> in fact, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin claim that '[a] major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place.'<sup>3</sup> However, Trauma Studies as conventionally understood has failed to give adequate attention to the impact of this disruption. In fact, Trauma Studies, with its predominantly western methodology, is not yet equipped to address the trauma sometimes entailed upon issues of national identity, home, and the land in the postcolonial context, particularly in contexts such as the Indian subcontinent where, following Partition, many people were affected. In her exploration of the Partition of India, *The Other Side of Silence*, Urvashi Butalia describes how this history has been considered a religious conflict, leaving 'hidden histories' which neither western

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<sup>2</sup> They include, for example, the forced removal of Aboriginal children in Australia between 1900 and 1972; the creation of *Bantustans*, or homelands, in South Africa for the black population during Apartheid; the ongoing displacement of Palestinians from Israeli occupied land; wars of Independence during decolonization in Africa and Asia following the Second World War; and land partitions in India, Ireland, Palestine, instigated by colonial powers in the hope of bringing about peace between different religious or national groups.

<sup>3</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 8-9. In his recent introduction to postcolonialism, Young suggests that postcolonial experiences of dislocation or dispossession effect may even stimulate creativity:

Refugee: you are unsettled, uprooted. You have been translated. Who translated you? Who broke your links with the land? You have been forcibly moved off, or you have fled war or famine. [...] Your life has been fractured, your family fragmented. The lovely dull familiar stabilities of ordinary everyday life and local social existence that you have known have passed. [...] You encounter a new world, a new culture to which you have to adapt while trying to preserve your own recognizable forms of identity. Putting the two together is an experience of pain. [...] Everything that happens in this raw, painful experience of disruption, dislocation, and dis-remembering paradoxically fuels the cruel but creative crucible of the postcolonial.

Young, 11-12.

historiography nor other critical disciplines have effectively uncovered because of the problems incurred in amassing such a range of experiences.<sup>4</sup>

Another trauma highlighted in this thesis is the trauma of postcolonial genocide, which I explored in Chapters 2 and 4. Trauma Studies has traditionally failed to address these postcolonial contexts of genocide and war—although this is beginning to change.<sup>5</sup> However, several of the narratives in this thesis indicate the benefits of viewing these contexts comparatively. An example can be found in the final chapter of *Left To Tell*. Here, Ilibagiza describes how her testimony has helped others recover from their experiences of the Holocaust, using the example of a woman who approached her following a talk she gave:

She told me that her parents had been killed in the Nazi Holocaust when she was a baby: “My heart has been full of anger my entire life ... I’ve suffered and cried over my parents for so many years. But hearing your story about what you lived through and were able to forgive has inspired me. I’ve been trying all my life to forgive the people who killed my parents, and now I think I can do it. I can let go of my anger and be happy.” (210)

In this passage, Ilibagiza shows how different instances of genocide can be considered together, to achieve a positive result. Her use of the phrase ‘Nazi Holocaust’ highlights this event as one of many holocausts, rather than that of the ‘definitive’ genocide. Furthermore, she implies that her experiences of the Rwandan genocide may expand how we respond to, and configure, the European Holocaust of 1939-1945. In this way, she encourages dialogue and reconciliation through connecting different instances of genocide. This kind of approach supplies a deficiency within Trauma Studies, by

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<sup>4</sup> Butalia, 235-6 and 275-281.

<sup>5</sup> See Robert Eaglestone’s essay “‘You would not add to my suffering if you knew what I have seen’: Holocaust Testimony and Contemporary African Trauma Literature,” *Studies in the Novel*, 40: 1&2, (2008) 72-85, for a discussion of the development of comparative research between the Holocaust and other contexts of genocide. See also the work of A. Dirk Moses, ‘*The Holocaust and Genocide*,’ in Stone (ed.), 533 - 555 (533).

drawing together instances of trauma which have conventionally been viewed separately.

However, Ilibagiza's comparison of the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide also highlights the danger that comparative analysis of postcolonial contexts may represent a form of cultural imperialism. For, in *Left To Tell*, the tendency—in the peritext and the epitexts—to associate the Rwandan genocide with the Holocaust of 1939-1945 indicates an attempt to gain recognition and acknowledgment for Rwandan suffering. This highlights the problematic role the West has come to play in affirming or validating non-western instances of genocide, and is the third way in which the narratives in this thesis can be seen to challenge established ideas about trauma. Conventional Trauma Studies has emphasized the role of the listener figure to affirm and validate an individual's experience of trauma.<sup>6</sup> In the context of literature or film, this role is played by the reader or viewer. However, in several of the narratives in this thesis, the relationship between a postcolonial narrative and its audience is problematic. This is perhaps most evident in chapters 2 and 4, where I explored the role of external influences in shaping the production of the final narrative. However, insofar as each of these narratives is addressed to a predominantly western audience, they can be seen to confer authority on a western audience to validate traumatic experience. Whitehead uses Bracken's research in *Rethinking the Trauma of War* to argue that this is symptomatic of the way in which Trauma Studies has developed in the West:

the emergence of a professionalized trauma discourse has tended towards the handing over of memory to experts to pronounce on its meaning and its significance. The assumption that the West represents the center of expertise, which is exported to non-western war zones, risks ignoring local concepts of suffering, misfortune, and illness and eliding those

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<sup>6</sup> Herman writes that '[r]ecovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation.' Herman, 133. Gilmore writes similarly that 'trauma, it is claimed, does not exist until it can be articulated and heard by a sympathetic listener. This view swings to the other extreme to claim that without language, experience is nothing.' Gilmore, 6.

discourses of loss and bereavement that may fulfill the role for the local community that in western cultures is provided by trauma discourse.<sup>7</sup>

The tendency to 'translate' trauma discourse from the West to other contexts is problematic because it potentially represents another form of cultural imperialism which is being exported to non-western contexts; it perpetuates the notion that western critical disciplines are necessary to confer authority on non-western experiences and thus supports the subordination felt by those living outside the West. I have highlighted the way in which this tendency manifests itself in the mediation of genres like the testimonio and suggest that this is an issue which requires further attention within Postcolonial Studies.

There is significant public appetite for addressing these issues. This is discernible in the recent surge of interest in postcolonial trauma novels, which is evident in the publication of a special edition of *Studies in the Novel* on Postcolonial Trauma Novels for Spring/Summer 2008. It is also indicated in the recent proliferation of testimonial narratives such as Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone*, and films addressing postcolonial contexts of trauma (including, but not limited to, the films in this study). These narratives show that postcolonial trauma may be represented in a variety of different formats, and invite us to consider directions for future study, for example, the role played by performative arts, such as theatre, poetry, and dance. A 2007 production of Peter Weiss' play *The Investigation* (which dramatizes the Frankfurt-Auschwitz trials) by the Rwandan theatre group, *Urwindore*, implies that cross-cultural engagement with trauma is already taking place in this arena. Furthermore, interest is growing into the immediate and pervasive nature of digital media, such as the weblog. This mode presents new ways of representing experience, and promises to raise different concerns

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<sup>7</sup> Anne Whitehead, 'Journeying Through Hell: Wole Soyinka, Trauma and Postcolonial Nigeria,' *Studies in the Novel*, 40: 1&2 (2008), 13-30 (14).

about the ways in which traumatic experiences are mediated to, and consumed by, public audiences. Finally, further study is needed to address other kinds of trauma which recur in colonial and postcolonial contexts. These include an examination of the guilt and anxiety experienced by those perpetrating acts of violence and aggression. This position has been exposed in the recent publication of *Breaking the Silence*, an anthology of testimonies from soldiers who served in the Israeli army since September 2000. This account highlights the suffering experienced by individuals who might not be considered conventional victims, but who are forced to carry out colonial crimes which have a deep effect within them and their communities.

Postcolonial trauma has yet to gain sufficient recognition in the field of Trauma Studies. Whilst this imbalance may begin to be rectified as interest in this area grows, it is also likely that the 'selective amnesia' I have noted in relation to postcolonial experiences of trauma may simply be replicated to other contexts. In an anecdote from Gregory's *The Colonial Present* Gregory highlights the problematic tendency to elevate western experiences of trauma over non-western ones. One month after 11th September 2001, Prince Alwaleed bin Talal of the Saudi royal family travelled to New York to present Mayor Rudolph Guiliani with a \$10 million cheque for the Twin Towers Fund, which had been established to support the families of fire-fighters and other rescue service-men and service-women who had lost their lives. Gregory writes that:

The prince fiercely criticized Osama Bin Laden and unreservedly condemned "all forms of terror"; but in an accompanying press release he also drew attention to [Israeli Prime Minister] Sharon's diversionary tactics and the way in which Israel had intensified its aggression towards Palestinians. "While the United Nations passed clear resolutions numbered 242 and 338 calling for the Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip decades ago," he noted, "our Palestinian brethren continue to be slaughtered at the hands of Israelis while the world turns the other cheek." Giuliani was incensed at any

attempt to diminish the singularity of 9-11. He refused any linkage between the attacks on New York City and Washington and events in Gaza and the West Bank, and promptly returned the check. “There is no moral equivalent to this attack. Not only are those statements wrong,” he declared, ‘they are part of the problem.’”<sup>8</sup>

As this anecdote demonstrates, current responses to trauma are far from the vision held by Caruth and Kaplan (and others) of a cross-cultural and transnational engagement, which draws different peoples together. This is largely because of the way in which a society’s willingness (or unwillingness) to address the past is politically motivated. Remembrance of past traumas is too often contingent upon events serving some kind of ulterior motive in affirming national identity or current, established views on the nation. As I have shown, the field of Trauma Studies plays an important role in addressing these issues, despite its own limitations. The narratives explored in this thesis demonstrate that it is possible—and important—to engage effectively with postcolonial trauma. They indicate the prevalence of traumatic experience within postcolonial contexts, and my examination of them demonstrates the value of drawing these two disciplines together to enhance understanding of experiences which have all too often been ignored in critical studies. By refusing to overlook the frequency with which colonialism has left a traumatic legacy, these narratives draw attention to marginalized histories. In so doing, they address some of the key questions of the modern era, and highlight the western tendency to overlook, or ignore, postcolonial trauma.

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<sup>8</sup> Gregory, 109.

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## Filmography

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