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'Telling Stories Not to Die of Life':
Myth, Responsibility and Reinvention
in *The Smell of Apples* and *Country of My Skull*

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Declaration

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature:

Date: 7 August 2002

Signed by candidate

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Abstract

It is part of the human condition to continually develop and redevelop narrative structures through which identities are portrayed. As Daniel Schwarz explains: "we make sense of our lives by ordering [them] and giving [them] shape. [...] Each of us is continually writing and rewriting the text of our life [...] To the degree that we are self-conscious, we live in our narratives –our discourse –about our actions, thoughts and feelings"(Schwarz, 1991, 108). Narrative and the identity created and maintained through it does not exist exclusively in the space of the individual, but is influenced by the cultural and socio-political context in which the individual operates as part of a group, be it a community, society or nation. There is therefore a complex relation between individual and collective identities, where each should ideally shape and reshape the other.

Myths are defined as collective narratives of identity that give a group a sense of coherence and unity of origin. It is easy for myths to become fixed and oppressive, so that the reciprocal relation between the formation of individual and collective identity is broken down and individual senses of identity become, to a large extent, determined by the collective narrative. An example of a such an oppressive narrative is the myth of the Afrikaner group in South Africa.

This paper aims to examine the contrasts between entrapment within this Afrikaner myth and escape from it, between the dictatorial nature of the old Afrikaner myth and possibilities for new and more dynamic myths to appear, as explored in contemporary South African literature. Specifically it looks at two Afrikaans writers whose texts explore the nature of Afrikaans myths of identity in post-apartheid South Africa. Mark Behr's The Smell of Apples evokes the silence and shame of those inextricably tied to the Afrikaner myth. Behr indicates, through his novel and through a personal confession, that he is unable, or perhaps even unwilling, to break free of the

Afrikaner myth. In contrast, Antjie Krog's Country of My Skull indicates a desire to reconstruct the Afrikaner myth. While Behr exhibits a sense of shame, Krog experiences a sense of guilt and responsibility as an Afrikaner that ties her to the actions committed by others in her group. This sense of guilt is known as metaphysical guilt, which "is not based on a narrow construal of what one does, but rather on the wider concept of *who one chooses to be*" (May, 1991, 241, my emphasis). Krog chooses to be integrated into post-apartheid South Africa, but this does not mean that she leaves her sense of being Afrikaans behind. Instead, she individually reinvents herself as an Afrikaner in the 'new' South Africa. Her individual reinvention also has implications for the collectivity: "[by individuals reshaping themselves], they might be reshaping what it means for others to consider themselves as members of that group" (May, 1991, 252).

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Introduction

In the 1995 publication The Healing of a Nation? which discussed the possible effects of the pending Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, the poet, writer and journalist Antjie Krog explained the effects of apartheid on all South Africans in a thought-provoking manner. Krog states that

apartheid divided us so successfully that practically no South African can claim memories other than those forged in isolated vacuums. People lived out their lives unaware that horrific actions sanctioned by apartheid policies were taking place in buildings next to them. Every one of us has half a memory. Therefore every one of us has a malformed identity which is unsure of how to deal with the reality as it now opens to us. (Krog, 1995, 115)

The image of the malformed identity which has to face up to reality in this quotation is an apt way to describe the destructive impact of the apartheid narrative, and the manner in which a political and social process of change, spear-headed by the TRC, can question or undermine the force of such a narrative. The fact that narrative can become opposed to 'reality', as happened in the South Africa of the apartheid era, is a troubling point that reflects the ease with which individuals and communities embrace delusions that comfort rather than acknowledge or take responsibility for a reality that threatens. A powerful narrative of group identity is the cause of distortions such as the ones that were held in apartheid-era South Africa.

In Country of My Skull (1998), Krog's seminal text on the TRC proceedings and their impact on South Africa, she calls such distorted narratives 'myths'. Presumably following on the work of theorists such as Roland Barthes in the field of mythology¹, Krog explains that "the function of a myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction. The myth proves that things have always been like this, that things will never change" (Krog, 1998, 190). George Schöpflin defines the myth as "a set of beliefs, usually put forth as a narrative, held by a community about itself" (Schöpflin, 1997, 19). He adds that "myth is about perceptions rather than historically validated truths [...], about the ways in which communities regard certain propositions as normal and natural and others as perverse and alien" (1997, 19). To the extent that people take their identity from the collective, "myth [...] is a key element in the creation of closures and in the constitution of collectivities" (Schöpflin, 1997, 20).

¹ see Roland Barthes, Mythologies, London, Toronto, Sydney, New York: Grananda, 1973

Myths of origin and identity are present in the minds of most collectivities and can adapt and change as societies and nations alter: "myths are historical phenomena [that] originate in specific circumstances as a product of specific interests, and [...] change with the changing interests of successive generations and successive regimes" (Thompson, 1985, 8). Keeping this in mind, I will provide brief examples of the development of the narrative of Afrikaner identity, from its origins as an oppositional narrative to that of the English in the nineteenth century, to its development into an oppressive narrative in the apartheid era, to its confused and diffuse characteristics at the time of political transition and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. How will the narrative of the Afrikaner reconfigure itself after these political changes? Is a reinvention of identity possible? This paper makes no claims to answer these questions definitively, and would be wrong to attempt to do so, since this narrative of identity is constantly changing and adapting. The aim in this instance is rather to examine the moment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the impact that this had on the Afrikaners' sense of themselves, without suggesting that Afrikaners were not to some extent involved in the shaping of the TRC.

Rather than maintaining a purely historical or sociological approach to the issue of the mythological narrative, this paper aims to examine examples of South African literature that reflect, deconstruct or grapple with this mythical narrative and its destructive consequences for the country and its people. Why use literature? André Brink speaks up for the importance of literature in his essay "Stories of history: reimagining the past in post-apartheid narrative". The essay maintains that our understanding of history is an understanding of an event that is out of reach and always already mediated to us through language. The distance between ourselves and history is breached and perhaps also enforced through narrative: "the best we can do is to fabricate metaphors –that is, tell stories –in which, not history, but imaginings of history are invented" (Brink, 1998, 42). In a similar fashion the philosopher Johan Degenaar emphasises the importance of "the role of literature and the art of story-telling in giving direction to a society in a process of change [...] Events in the past have to be interpreted in an imaginative way. Story-telling is the most appropriate way of doing this. Stories about the past enable us to create and share a common future"(Degenaar, 1992, 54). Brink in turn views the role of literature as a vital one for the enterprise of understanding history and our place in it, especially within the context of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission: "Unless the enquiries of the TRC are extended, complicated and intensified in the imaginings of literature, society cannot sufficiently come to terms with its past to face its future" (Brink, 1998, 30).

The two selected novels are instances of such a grappling with the past by Afrikaner writers. This paper will make use of Mark Behr's novel Die Reuk van Appels (translated into English in 1995 as The Smell of Apples) to investigate the character of the apartheid narrative, as well as the effects it had on those indoctrinated by it. Behr's novel reflects the era of the 1970's, when the Afrikaner myth and the apartheid regime were at the height of their power. Although the novel casts its sights back into the time of the previous dispensation, I will argue that it is a novel which is extremely relevant to South Africa today. Special attention will be given to the claim in Behr's novel that it is possible for individuals to be 'caught' within the collective mythical narrative, and not to be able to escape from it. Such a claim has serious implications for questions of individual and collective responsibility within the current South African context and with particular reference to the position of Afrikaners. Questions of responsibility raised by Behr's novel become complicated by the author's announcement at an academic conference in 1996 that he served the apartheid system as a government informer during his 'liberal' student days.

While The Smell of Apples provides the reader with a fictional version of the reality of apartheid, Krog's text could not be labelled a novel. In Country of My Skull, excerpts of actual testimony heard at the TRC are mingled with poetry, discussions and imagined situations to form "a patchwork [...] woven together to create a powerful docu-drama of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission"(Ross, 1998, 4). Krog's book is partly a personal response to the TRC, which publicly heard selected stories from victims and perpetrators of the apartheid regime in 1996-1998. The monolith of the Afrikaner myth and of a specific version of history was put into question by the stories of pain and suffering witnessed specifically at the Human Rights Violation hearings. During the apartheid years the Afrikaner myth had dominated South Africa as the official discourse of identity, attempting to prescribe social roles for those within its boundaries and for those who were constructed as Other, specifically black and coloured South Africans. The TRC's public hearings were a formal staging of the moment when the "Others" entered a public space where they, as representatives of the black and coloured South African communities, were able to give witness to the effects the apartheid system had on them. In effect, the TRC provided the opportunity for many testimonies that 'talked back' to the apartheid discourse and questioned the rationality and morality of such a system.

Krog considered the fact that the Human Rights Violation hearings provided television and radio audiences with stories from those previously relegated to the category of Other to be a major

breakthrough, since it meant that no one could deny the cruelties committed in the name of the apartheid regime any longer. The TRC Report echoes her sentiments:

"Many people who witnessed the accounts of victims were confronted, for the first time, with the human face of unknown or silenced victims from the conflicts of the past. The public victim hearings vividly portrayed the fact that not only were international or domestic laws broken, not only was there a disrespect of human rights in the abstract, but the very dignity and 'personhood' of individual human beings were centrally violated" (TRC Report, 1998, 128).

The dramatic emphasis given to the stories told at the Human Rights hearings in Country of My Skull as revelations of humanity is not meant to suggest that no Afrikaners had been aware of the ravages of apartheid. Certainly there were Afrikaners who did not support apartheid because they were aware of the system's immorality and some, like Krog, who actively tried to fight against and undermine the system. The point to be made is rather that the stories of the victims/testifiers at the TRC hearings brought about a public questioning of the nature of the apartheid system and the mythical narrative from which it originated. The shock of many Afrikaners at the stories told at the TRC that implicate their group is due to the fact that denial, repression and silence had been such a vital part of Afrikaner culture in the apartheid time. No public revelation of the real nature of apartheid that involved the testimonies of so many oppressed South Africans had ever happened before.

Krog's book is a moving account of her horror and helplessness in the face of so many stories implicating her culture and her people, the Afrikaners. She is frustrated by the narrative of the perpetrators, in many cases Afrikaners, who manipulate their stories and often lie at the Commission hearings in order to get amnesty.² Caught between the categories of the victim and the perpetrator as set out by the TRC, Krog embraces her feelings of guilt and complicity and begins the long process of reshaping not only her identity as an Afrikaner but also giving redefinition to what *Afrikanerdom* means to her.

² The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act no 34 of 1995, the precursor to the formation of the Commission, stated that "perpetrators were required to make full disclosure of their crimes in order to qualify for amnesty [...] [and that] the amnesty provisions required applicants to declare the nature of their offences –effectively acknowledging their culpability" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, Volume 1, 119). It became clear at the amnesty hearings that many of the amnesty

Origins of the myth of the Afrikaner tribe

In order to grasp precisely the nature of the collective mythical narrative of the Afrikaner group that Krog and Behr discuss, use and undermine in their respective novels, it would be useful to provide a brief history of the origins of this narrative.

How did the Dutch and later French settlers at the Cape, many of whom were farmers, come to feel that they were part of a collectivity called the Boers (literally 'the farmers')? Scholars attribute their strong group feeling to factors ranging from their opposition to the English colonialists, who took over control of the Cape, and their Calvinistic religious background. Various scholars give different interpretations of when exactly an invention of *Afrikanerdom* began.

According to Leonard Thompson, the establishment of an Afrikaner mythology began in the later decades of the nineteenth century in the Cape, when the Boers began reacting in earnest to "the cultural domination [of] the British colonial regime"(1985, 30), especially as far as the education of their children was concerned. Residents of the Boland town of Paarl made attempts to establish an official and recognised record of the history of the Afrikaner by publishing *Die Geskiedenis van Ons Land in die Taal van Ons Volk* (The history of Our Country in the Language of Our People) in 1877. (Thompson, 1985, 30). According to Thompson, Afrikaner mythology thus started off as an oppositional narrative to that of the British who were in power at the time.

In "The Myth of Divine Election and Afrikaner Ethnogenesis", Bruce Cauthen examines the history of the narrative of divine election, which made the Boers believe that they were the people chosen by God to rule over the southern tip of Africa. He seems to think that the narrative of divine election might have emerged from the religious zeal of the Boer farmers during the Great Trek (in the 1830's), when a section of the Boer population moved away from British rule in the Cape colony into the interior of the continent. In Cauthen's opinion the collective myth of Afrikaner superiority started with their religious identity: "when the cause of a people is conceived to be the very will of God, *the collectivity is infused with a powerful sense of purpose*" (Cauthen, 1994, 107, my emphasis). The Boers effectively interpreted their trek into the interior

applicants did not provide full accounts of their deeds. The question of culpability was also often a complicated one, as will be discussed later in this paper.

as being modelled on the wanderings of the Israelites, the chosen people of God, in the Old Testament of the Bible. The patriarchal mythology of the Israelites was also echoed in the patriarchal structure of the Boer group. The collective narrative of 'the chosen people' was a mechanism that pressurised those involved in it to conform to its expectations of identity and general behaviour, as Cauthen explains: "[The chosen people's mission] is a calling to which all members of the community must respond. Failure to realise the collective vocation may incur the wrath of the Deity, lead to the dismemberment of the people, and –for its individual members – the prospect of eternal damnation."(1994, 107). In general, it is certainly the case that religion and the sense of unity it created continued to be an important factor in the development of the Afrikaner group.

One of the other major factors that led to the invention of the Afrikaner as a group is examined by Antjie Krog where she writes in her capacity as a journalist in the newspaper the Weekly Mail and Guardian. In an article anticipating the commemoration of the centenary of the South African Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)³, Krog focuses on the impact this war had on the Afrikaner psyche, and on how the Afrikaners turned their experiences of the war into a "myth of exclusion" (Krog, 1999, 3). She states that

the war was the ultimate measurement, lodestone, guideline, for the Afrikaner. It taught us a few things:

The world can and will turn against you.

You are on your own for your own survival.

Most importantly: you often have to do something regarded by the outside world as ghastly and impossible (such as fighting a mighty empire, shooting Christians in the back or compiling and enforcing racist laws) to safeguard your survival.

None of these ever formed part of any official narrative, but all of these informed the Afrikaner consciousness.

(Krog, 1999, 4)

This is in line with an argument Krog made in 1995 before the start of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa when she stated that the mythical narratives perpetuated by the Afrikaner experiences of the Boer War were a major factor in forming the psyche that would later design and implement the laws of apartheid: "More than 26 000 women

³ The Anglo-Boer War was fought between the British and the Boers over the disputed territories of the two Boer republics, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. Initially the Boer soldiers, with their

and children died in British concentration camps and elsewhere during the Anglo-Boer War as opposed to 6000 Boer men. [...] British abuses against women and children were recorded by the Afrikaners but never officially acknowledged or condemned by the British. Thus the tales of the war did not become part of an ethos relating to how people should behave towards one another. Rather, they became a folklore supporting the notion of Afrikaners as a threatened group and a belief that any behaviour, however outrageous, was acceptable if it fostered their survival." (Krog, 1995, 114-115). Krog argues here, and in her later newspaper article, that the Afrikaner mythical narrative was influenced considerably not only by the experiences of the Anglo-Boer War, but also by the way in which these experiences were taken up into the official Afrikaner history: "what is notable about most Afrikaner Anglo-Boer War information is that the sacrifice and the bravery formed part of an official history written by Afrikaners, while the betrayal, the failures, the exceptions, the real gruesome testimony often formed part only of the oral history, or of other neglected sources of information" (Krog, 1999, 2).

It is certainly the case that the aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War, which brought poverty and hardship to most Afrikaners, also strengthened their resolve to form themselves into a secure group that could face future challenges together: "coercive diplomacy, military conquest, concentration camps, and bureaucratic reconstruction gave Afrikaner nationalism a powerful stimulus"(Thompson, 2000, 145). Anne McClintock notes that the centenary celebration of the Great Trek in 1938, known as *Die Tweede Trek* (the Second Trek) was one such major promotion of Afrikaner unity that would ultimately lead to the formation of an Afrikaner nationalist government. The *Tweede Trek* "invented white nationalist traditions and celebrated unity where none had existed before, creating the illusion of a collective identity through the political staging of vicarious spectacle" (McClintock, 1995, 373).

Leonard Thompson concurs that "the most dramatic event in the upsurge of Afrikaner nationalism was the symbolic ox-wagon trek of 1938 [where] eight wagons [...] traversed South Africa by different routes [...] before they converged on a prominent hill overlooking Pretoria" (Thompson, 1985, 39). The wagons bore the names of Voortrekker⁴ heroes who, as legend had it, had fearlessly entered the interior of the country and bravely fought off the onslaught of the tribes who dominated this territory. The wagons transported Afrikaners dressed in full Voortrekker regalia: "men grew beards, women wore Voortrekker dress, for the occasion"

guerrilla tactics and knowledge of the terrain looked set to dominate the large British army. The tables were turned as the war progressed and ultimately the Boers surrendered to the British.

⁴ The name given to the Boers who participated in the real Great Trek in the 1830's, literally meaning "those who trek in front".

(Thompson, 1985, 39). On arrival in Pretoria on 16 December 1938, a huge crowd of about 100 000 people (Thompson, 1985, 184) celebrated the commemoration of the Battle of Blood River, a battle in which the Boers had defeated a section of the Zulu tribe a hundred years earlier.

Numerous speeches were made by those organising the Second Trek as the wagons travelled over the length and breadth of South Africa. Henning Johannes Klopper, the main leader of the Trek, made a speech which was taken up into the official book of the Second Trek, published in 1940. Klopper's speech addressed its listeners as "the Afrikaner nation" (Klopper, 1940, 9) and the whole address continues in this vein, emphasising the need for unity and singleness of purpose to make the ideal of the nation become a reality.

A sense of freedom is a gift from God. It is the first birthright of every person and people. No one is born to be someone's slave, not personally, politically, economically, spiritually or in any other sense. The Afrikaner does not wish to be and will not become anyone's slave. The rock from which we are chiselled, the well from which we are dug, will never allow the ideal of a separate nationhood with everything that this brings with it in every aspect and in the fullest meaning of the word to be lost to us.

[...]

Afrikanerhood, you have a wonderful future. Victory is yours. God has given South Africa to you. No one shall wrench it from your hand, and as soon as you can come together and stand together, you will be able to take this legacy into your possession. Your future is assured. The ideals of the Voortrekkers still live on, burning. [...] Up ahead in the wagon route a light is burning. The light of nationhood. Follow it, and you shall live and prosper, because God lives and God rules!

(Klopper, 1940, 9-11, my translation)

The emphasis in Klopper's speech is still on the formation of the Afrikaner nation itself, and, in a sense, this is still a narrative of opposition, a myth that emphasises the ethnic identity of Afrikaners by placing them in opposition to the English. There is no mention made of the position of the country's many black and coloured people who by this stage certainly did not enjoy the freedom that Klopper insists is "the first birthright of every people". The emphasis on the opposition between Afrikaners and the English was about to change, however. After the Afrikaner National Party came to power and prepared to rule the country in 1948, "the anti-imperial and ethnic elements in the Afrikaner nationalist mythology became far less relevant than the racial element" (Thompson, 1985, 40). The word 'apartheid' had been the main slogan of the National Party in the 1948 election, and after their victory, this conception of South African society was put into action, "supplant[ing] the earlier English term 'segregation'" (McClintock

and Nixon, 1986, 141). The myth of the Afrikaner was thus changed and altered to suit the purposes of those who used it in a certain era. It became a racialised narrative in the context of "[the] perceived threat of communism and the rise of African nationalism during the period of decolonization"(Norval, 1996, 170). Thiven Reddy examines the shifting support for the National Party from the beginning of its rule in 1948, and notes that more and more English South Africans voted for this Afrikaner party ⁵, "which suggests that 'white community' interests began to take precedence over the particular ethnic interests of English and Afrikaner voters- [...] the Nationalist Party has transformed itself into the party of 'white South Africa'" (Reddy, 2000, 123). The concerns of the ruling Afrikaner political party thus spread from being focused primarily on their own community, to attempting to organise and categorise the whole South African society.

The philosopher Jacques Derrida describes the term 'apartheid' as an "untranslatable idiom"(Derrida, 1985, 292) and goes on to explain that no other nation or language group has ever translated the word 'apartheid' into their own tongue, "as if all languages of the world were defending themselves"(Derrida, 1985, 292). This statement highlights the manner in which other nations deferred any responsibility they might carry for similar racist practices to the one being practised so overtly in South Africa, which is one of the main points that Derrida makes in the article "Racism's Last Word". His statement also connects the term 'apartheid', its untranslatability and all its political connotations to Afrikaans as a language.

Anne McClintock reminds readers that in the previous centuries "Afrikaners had no monolithic identity [...], no common historic purpose and no single unifying language. They were a disunited, scattered people, speaking a medley of High Dutch and local dialects, with smatterings of the slave, Nguni and Khoisan languages [...] Afrikaners therefore had, quite literally, to invent themselves"(McClintock, 1995, 368-369). They also had to invent a unified language, and it is through this language that the myth of Afrikaner superiority and natural ownership of the land was spread. Afrikaans then seems to be inextricably linked to the identity of the Afrikaner group as perpetuated through the apartheid system. Derrida notes that "There's no racism without a language. The point is not that acts of racial violence are only words but rather that they have to have a word. Even though it offers the excuse of blood, colour, birth – or rather, because it

⁵ "Election results indicate that white South Africans increasingly supported the former government and its apartheid policies from 1948 onwards. In 1977, one year after the Soweto uprising, support for the NP regime was at its peak –67% of all white votes went to the NP that year. White opposition to the apartheid system was confined to a small minority" (Theissen and Hamber, 1998, 1).

uses this naturalist and sometimes creationist discourse –racism always betrays the perversions of a man, the 'talking animal'. It institutes, declares, writes, inscribes, prescribes"(Derrida, 1985, 292).

The language that the Afrikaners declared their own⁶ thus developed into a language of violence, humiliation and separation in many South Africans' eyes. Rita Barnard explains that it would be possible to say that "apartheid, linked as it has been with the Afrikaners' struggle for political power, has rendered the entire Afrikaans language mythic"(Barnard, 1998, 131).

As the National Party developed its political objectives in South Africa, it also developed its language, modulating the term 'apartheid' into the notion of "separate development" and later into "[the] rhetoric of multinationalism" (McClintock and Nixon, 1986, 143). This careful and stealthy construction of language tools that were designed to remove the overt racism of the term 'apartheid' never managed to erase the inhumanity of the National Party's political plan. Derrida says of the above-mentioned terms that they are merely "all the substitutes and pseudonyms, the periphrases and metonymies that the official discourse in Pretoria keeps coming up with: the tireless ruse of propaganda, the indefatigable but vain rhetoric of dissimulation"(Derrida, 1986, 159). The use and manipulation of language proved to be a vital part of the formation of the apartheid-era mythical narrative of the Afrikaner.

In order to explore issues of representation and identity within the mythical narrative of the Afrikaner more closely, it seems fitting to commence with a discussion of a novel that interrogates this narrative in a subtle yet disturbing manner. I will be making use of the translation of Mark Behr's Die Reuk van Appels for the purposes of this paper. The Smell of Apples sketches a story set mostly in the Afrikaner community of Cape Town in 1973, where events are narrated by an eleven-year-old boy, Marnus Erasmus. His narrative is interspersed by fragments of the narrative of an older Marnus, now fighting in the border war in Angola in 1988. The focus on the young and naïve child narrator works powerfully in this novel. Behr plays on the readers' expectations of Marnus as being an innocent and trusting boy-narrator, while

4 Afrikaans as a language was not spoken exclusively by the group of white Afrikaners at any time in South African history. A substantial 'coloured' community, which consists of people of mixed racial origins, also spoke, and still speak, Afrikaans as their mother tongue. The Afrikaners' attempts to have exclusive rights on Afrikaans meant that they invested their own version of Afrikaans with official status, whilst the Afrikaans spoken by coloured communities on the Cape Flats, for example, was only given the status of an inferior dialect. Franklin Sonn mentions the shared language as part of "the cultural affinity which Afrikaners shared with Coloureds"(Sonn, 2001) and confesses that he experienced apartheid "spiritually and emotionally particularly hurtful because it was presented mainly in my mother tongue Afrikaans" (Sonn, 2001).

simultaneously constructing his narrative to indicate how he reflects the ideas and perceptions of the adults in his thoughts and actions. In effect, Marnus' narrative reflects the myths of Afrikaner identity, solidarity and superiority –to devastating effect. Most of the perceptions of the adults are channelled to the young boy through his father, a general in the South African Defence Force and his mother, a retired singer and now dutiful wife and house-maker. The novel highlights the twisted logic of the Afrikaner myth in the contradictions in Marnus' narrative and in the anxious and confused way in which he tries to construct the Other, be they Blacks, Coloureds, Jews or the English.

A version of History

History books of the era of Afrikaner Nationalist rule in South Africa (1948-1990) would often commence their account of the history of the country by describing the settlement of the Cape under Dutch rule from 1652 onwards (see Thompson, 2000, 1). Dr S.F.N. Gie, who wrote a collection of history books entitled *Die Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika* (The History of South Africa) in 1955, explains that his conception of history is the European history of South Africa, since "the unlettered and barbaric people of the world are the scientific field of ethnographers [...]; the historian in distinction to this focuses on the civilised nations"(Gie, 1955, i, my translation). Although there was a long period of precolonial southern African history, many Afrikaner historians also invested in the myth of the empty land, stating that the interior of the country was uninhabited at the time of the settlers' arrival. Many convoluted arguments had the actual indigenous tribes arriving in southern Africa at the exact same time as the settlers, thus depriving the former of any rights to ownership of the land.

The Afrikaner myth thus has much to do with a certain manipulation of history, as Behr's novel illustrates. In this version of history, the Afrikaner is given pride of place and others are blamed for wrongdoing. When Marnus' friend Frikkie tells him about his great grandfather who used to hunt Bushmen on his farm and the boys repeat the story in class, it is refuted by their teacher: "Miss Engelbrecht said it wasn't true. It wasn't the Boers that killed off all the Bushmen, it was the Xhosas. She said the Xhosas are a terrible nation and that it was them that used to rob and terrorise the farmers on the eastern frontier, long before the Zulus in Natal so cruelly murdered Boer women and little children."(Behr, 1996a, 8). Later in an essay Marnus writes about the National Museum in Cape Town, he regurgitates all the old clichés about the history of the Afrikaner (see Behr, 1996a, 159). He concludes his essay, which was published in the annual

school magazine that year, by saying that "open eyes are the gateways to an open mind" (Behr, 1996a, 160). The irony is obvious.

Roland Barthes mentions that "the very principle of myth is that "it transforms history into nature"(Barthes, 1973, 129) and that this is why "myth is experienced as innocent speech: not because its intentions are hidden [...] but because they are naturalised." (Barthes, 1973, 131). It is Marnus' father who tells him about the myth of South Africa as the empty land as they stand looking over the length of False Bay. His father says: "And this country was empty before our people arrived. Everything, everything you see, we built up from nothing. This is our place, given to us by God and we will look after it. Whatever the cost."(Behr, 1996a, 124). Marnus' father makes it seem a natural phenomenon that the Afrikaner is in the position of the ruler in South Africa, as the organiser and owner of what had been empty space and the guardian of order in the face of potential (black) chaos.

His words to his son that recall the Afrikaner version of the history of the country are an indication that the legacy of this myth of supremacy will be passed down from the present to the new generation. Marnus' father is undoubtedly a huge influence on his son's life, but at the same time he is also the source of most of the stereotypes and flawed arguments that Marnus encounters. He says of his father that "without him even having to finish his sentence we know what he means. At times, Dad only has to start a sentence and we already know what he would have said. Dad always says a quick mind requires only half an explanation." (Behr, 1996a, 162). Although Marnus makes this statement with the intention of showing that he is very much in tune with his father, it seems to me that his words could also be interpreted as an unwitting reference to the amount of indoctrination that he has received from his father. Marnus, effectively, can fill in the blanks of his father's stereotyped and biased discourse.

The paper's next two sections examine how the Afrikaner myth imposed artificial boundaries between the Afrikaner group and those South Africans who were different from the Afrikaners and thus constructed as "Other" by their discourse. The Afrikaner narrative did not only lead to simplified and often perverse constructions of identity for those outside its imposed boundaries. Afrikaners themselves were also implicated in these constructions, as will be illustrated by further discussion of The Smell of Apples.

Problems of Representation: Constructing Others in 'The Smell of Apples'

In "The Role of Myth" Joanna Overing explains that "myths of identity are equally myths of alterity, or significant otherness, for to state identity is also to speak of difference." (1994, 16). Myths therefore serve not only as instruments of self-definition that create "the illusion of community" (see Schopflin, 1994, 22), but also as narratives that construct those outside the boundary of the community in a certain way. Cynthia Cockburn makes the connection between the Self and Other on an individual and a collective level when she states that "if you lack a secure self, are caught up in inner conflict, you are likely to disown the hated or feared parts of yourself and project them onto the unknown 'other'. This is well recognised in the individual, and an analogous process goes on at the level of the collectivity"(Cockburn, 1998, 215).

Cockburn's statement reflects the common contemporary conception of disciplines such as psychology, postcolonial theory and contemporary studies of colonial discourse that the Self (or the coloniser) needs the representation of the Other (or the colonised) in order to stabilise his/her own identity. Stuart Hall's examination of the process of modernity in Enlightenment Europe is an example of such a study. Hall examines the ways in which European explorers, who set out to discover 'new worlds' during this period, represented the peoples and societies they encountered upon their travels. In naming his chapter "The West and the Rest" Hall seems to be constructing a binary opposition between Europe and the nations it conquered, but in actual fact Hall's writing shows that 'the Rest' and its representation in the minds and literature of the West was vital for the formation of the Western Enlightenment. He concludes that "without the Rest, the West would not have been able to recognise and represent itself as the summit of human history"(Hall, 1992, 314). There therefore is an inextricable connection between the subjective identity of those within a powerful communal narrative and the way in which the Other is constructed by that narrative. According to Melissa Steyn "the notion of race [...] interlocked black and white psyches into an interdependence. The unequal nature of the relationship allowed whites to fix the meaning of self and other through projections, exclusions, denials and repression."(Steyn, 1997, 10-11).

"We've been taught that unless we have something good to say about someone, we shouldn't say anything at all"(Behr, 1996a, 16), says Marnus. It seems at times that the boy has received a solid moral grounding from his parents, yet the text abounds with examples of his parents' underlying prejudice. Marnus acknowledges that "we aren't allowed to use words like 'kaffir' or 'hotnot' or 'houtkop', because they're also human, and Dad says we should treat them like human

beings."(Behr, 1996a, 54). According to Roland Barthes. "myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact."(Barthes, 1973, 143). Once again, Marnus echoes his father's words: "[Dad says] of all the nations in the world, those with black skins across their butts also have the smallest brains. Even if you can get a black out of the bush, you can't ever get the bush out of the black."(Behr, 1996a, 38).

The seeming layer of decency that Marnus has been taught by his elders contains stronger underlying currents of hate, anxiety and fear, as far as the treatment of people 'different' from themselves is concerned. The patriarchal nature of the Afrikaner myth meant that the patronisation of those who were different started within the Afrikaner community and was directed towards Afrikaner women. This contempt for difference is also apparent in the construction of those outside the Afrikaner circle as "Other". Anne McClintock explains that "from the outset [...] Afrikaner nationalism was dependent not only on powerful constructions of racial difference but also on powerful constructions of gender difference" (McClintock, 1995, 377). This construction of gender within Afrikaner society led to men and women being given different types of social roles: "white men were seen to embody the political and economic agency of the 'volk', while women were the (unpaid) keepers of tradition and the volk's moral and spiritual mission"(McClintock, 1995, 377).

In The Smell of Apples Marnus' mother, Leonore, reflects the woman's expected social role as the guardian of the home and family structure. She is determined to pass along this role to her headstrong daughter Ilse, who as a teenager is starting to question the authority of the Afrikaner society. Leonore warns her that "all these talents God has blessed you with –they'll all be wasted if you can't learn to do what society expects from you. It amounts to the same thing as hiding your candle under a bushel. Regardless of how well you do at everything, once people start to dislike you, it all becomes useless" (Behr, 1996a, 148). Ironically, the novel shows that Leonore has given up a promising career and wasted her singing talent, becoming instead a housewife and mother, as her husband and the larger community expected of her. Literally, her singing voice is silenced, and on a more symbolic level, Leonore is depicted as a voiceless character with very little sway or authority in the Afrikaner community. Leonore seems to embrace the position given to her and does not allow her repressed circumstances to lead to a growing awareness of her own position within the community. In this sense she contrasts sharply with her sister Karla, whose awareness of and rebellion against the inferior position of many women within the

Afrikaner community is the starting point for the development of a political awareness that leads her to reject apartheid and ultimately, to leave South Africa altogether.

Leonore plays her role as the guardian of the new Afrikaner generation very effectively in the novel, being the character who most clearly gives vent to her anxiety about 'the blacks' in South Africa. She sees them as a potent and potentially overwhelming force that should be controlled since they threaten the future of the white population's way of life. Marnus recalls his mother's warning after she catches him walking around the streets instead of doing his homework: "She said the day all those blacks got better marks than me, I might as well give up on ever getting into university, or even finding a job. [...] And there are millions waiting where those millions came from; they breed like rats. You'll see how hard it's going to get in future for any white who's not worth his salt"(Behr, 1996a, 88). Leonore's oppressed position within Afrikaner patriarchy in no way halts her support for the Afrikaner myth and its perverse manifestations in the apartheid narrative. Anne McClintock argues that the many women who were involved in the upholding of the mythical narrative should not be absolved from their responsibility in perpetuating this narrative because they were at the same time oppressed as women: "white women were not the weeping bystanders of apartheid history but active, if decidedly disempowered, participants in the invention of Afrikaner identity"(McClintock, 1995, 379).

Leonore's declaration about the threatening nature of the 'blacks' to the future of her children seems to be proof that the stereotyped representation by Afrikaners of the majority of the South African population as stupid and incompetent is simply not accurate and that real people are slipping through the boundaries of such limited representations. The presence of the stereotype in the divided apartheid society indicates the attempt to stabilise the construction of the Other, to keep people 'in their place' at the level of language. No South African group was exempt from stereotyping. Afrikaners, for instance, were known as 'rockspiders' or 'hairy backs'; the British as 'rooinekke' (literally 'rednecks'); the coloured people as 'hotnots' and the black people as "kaffers". Although the use of such language is now actively discouraged in South Africa, remnants of these patterns of labelling remain.

The character of the stereotype is such that the more 'fixed' the representations of the Other become, the more often the reputedly known nature of the Other needs to be repeated in the discourse. According to Homi Bhabha "the stereotype, [the major discursive strategy of colonial discourse] is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated...as if the essential

duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved" (Bhabha, 1994, 66). There is no authenticity in the stereotype, but rather an anxiety to repeat and settle the definition of Self and Other that it offers. Rita Barnard calls this mode of the necessarily repetitive nature of the stereotype " a sign of its theoretical and logical impotence" (Barnard, 2000, 215).

Leonore's stereotyped images of the 'Other' in the South African context become even more complex when they are related to the coloured people.⁷ Historically, it is clear that the coloureds are in many ways part of a larger and undefined Afrikaans culture –they share the same language as the Afrikaner and many of them are closely related to the white Afrikaners, the proliferation of Afrikaans surnames that are shared by the white and coloured Afrikaans communities being evidence for this. Marnus, for example, is surprised to learn that their maid, whom the Erasmus family knows only by her first name, Doreen, has the Afrikaans surname Malan : "I never knew there were also Coloured Malans"(Behr, 1996a, 188) says the boy. Perhaps because of the coloureds' closeness to the Afrikaner group in terms of language use and, to some extent, religion, the Afrikaner disavowal of coloureds as Other has been all the more vehement. In The Smell of Apples, the family gardener Chrisjan disappears after thirty years of loyal service and some fishing rods go missing from the garage at the same time. Leonore has no hesitation in connecting the two events in a bizarre semi-logical argument: Chrisjan has stolen the fishing rods because he is a coloured man and like all the coloureds he is dishonest. Marnus recalls the event in the following way: "Because Chrisjan liked fishing, Mum knew immediately that he must have stolen our stuff. Mum says that's exactly the way Coloureds are. You can never trust them. After all the years of supplying them with a job and a decent income, they simply turn around and stab you in the back" (Behr, 1996a, 20).

The representation of black and coloured people as the Other in the Afrikaner myth is a complex process that never succeeds in erecting a permanent boundary between the Afrikaner and those they construct as Other. In The Smell of Apples the assault on Doreen's son Little-Neville and Marnus' reaction to it provides an example of the way in which Self and Other are intertwined, rather than opposed to each other. Little-Neville had been caught stealing coal for a family member at a railway yard and the ten-year old was brutally punished for this crime by some white railroad workers: "They took off his clothes and rubbed lard or something all over his

⁷ I have chosen to use the term 'coloured' without capitalisation in this essay, while the translation of Behr's novel uses 'Coloured'. The continuing use of racial categories such as 'coloured' as methods of identification in post-apartheid South Africa indicates the considerable impact that the apartheid discourse has had and continues to have on all South Africans.

back. And then...they held him up in front of the locomotive furnace"(Behr, 1996a, 130-131). Marnus and his mom and sister go to visit the injured boy in hospital. The experience of seeing the severely burnt boy is something that remains with Marnus subconsciously, in his dreams. After the visit to the hospital Marnus dreams " "the dream of me and Frikkie galloping along Muizenberg Beach. We're in uniform and the horses are right up against the water. [...] I laugh and turn to look at Frikkie. But it's not Frikkie on the horse next to me. It's Little-Neville" (Behr, 1996a, 199). The adult Marnus still has this dream while engaged in the war in Angola (see Behr, 1996a, 63). It is possible to interpret the significance of these dreams by turning towards Marnus' complex reactions to Little-Neville's violation, making use of some of the ideas of Homi Bhabha.

In his book The Location of Culture Homi Bhabha speaks of "the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority" (Bhabha, 1995, 112) as a process of "disavowal"(Bhabha, 1995, 112). The Afrikaner mythical narrative's construction of black and coloured people as Other would be an instance of disavowal. The assumption of this process of disavowal is that it constructs and differentiates the Other in such a way that boundaries are laid down between the dominant Self and the inferior Other, boundaries never to be crossed. Yet Bhabha's point is that, in colonial discourse, the boundary between Self and Other *is* constantly being crossed, to the extent that to maintain that a boundary exists at all would be a mistake. The artificial separations between Self and Other are often crossed in such a way that the effects of this colonial disavowal is reversed, "so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of authority"(Bhabha, 1995, 114). Bhabha calls the intricacies and problematics of the intertwining of Self and Other that causes the strategic reversal of disavowal the "hybridity" of colonial representation.

In the case of Marnus witnessing Little-Neville's suffering in hospital, Marnus tries to construct the injured boy as a distanced Other, just a coloured youth, one of those who "all look the same" (Behr, 1996a, 190). Yet he also knows that Little-Neville is Doreen's youngest son, a boy of his own age who has undergone extremes of pain at the hands of white violators. Marnus' acceptance of the disavowal of the Afrikaner myth in constructing a discriminatory identity for Doreen's son is complicated by his sense that what was done to Little-Neville was not acceptable: "Whether Little-Neville's a Coloured or not, it doesn't matter, you shouldn't do things like that to someone, specially not to a child" (Behr, 1996a, 138). Marnus even tries to imagine Little-Neville's pain (see Behr, 1996a, 139). The realisation that dawns on Marnus that Little-Neville is a human being who has been wronged by his own (Marnus') people is an example of

the strategic reversal of the construction of discriminatory identities. This does not lead to an immediate acceptance on Marnus' part that the Afrikaner myth is biased and immoral. He has internalised too much of this myth throughout his life to reject it outright. Rather, the disparity between the apartheid narrative's construction of identities and the reality becomes part of Marnus' uneasy subconscious.

Little-Neville's presence as Marnus' closest companion in his dreams indicates the inextricable connections between those constructed as Self and Other. Homi Bhabha explains that "[the representative figure of the 'colonial space'] is the image of post-Enlightenment man *tethered to, not confronted by*, his dark reflection, the shadow of the colonised man, that splits his presence, distorts his outline, breaches his boundaries, repeats his actions at a distance, disturbs and divides the very time of his being." (Bhabha, 1990b, 187, my emphasis). Marnus and Little-Neville are not opposed, but rather, "tethered" to each other.

Constructing Self within the collective

In keeping with Bhabha's sense of the construction of the Other inadvertently affecting the subject's sense of Self through moments of hybridisation, this paper now turns to the problematics of the constructions of the Self within the Afrikaner collectivity as portrayed in Behr's novel. At an early stage of the novel, Marnus proclaims that "Dad says you can say a lot of things about the Afrikaners, but no one can say we're dishonest. We don't hide our laws like the rest of the world"(Behr, 1996a, 66). Despite the portrayal of the Afrikaner group in this quotation as being a community where openness and blunt honesty are prevalent, The Smell of Apples is a novel filled with secrecy and the obfuscation of the truth. Examples range from less serious personal secrets such as Marnus' mother who listens to jazz music in her car despite being forbidden to do so by her husband, to secrets with more far-reaching implications such as Marnus' father playing host to the general from Chile who the Erasmus family have to pretend is Mr Smith from New York. Marnus' mother states that "we all have our little secrets" (Behr, 1996a, 102), which seems to indicate that these secrets provide a temporary relief from the rigidity of the boundaries set on people's identities within this society. Afrikaner society in this novel is typified by the expectations placed on people to conform to pre-set identities, or social roles, within every facet of life. This seems to affect men and women within the system differently. It is the women whose frustrations within such a controlling and overtly patriarchal system is touched upon with more emphasis during the course of the novel. In contrast, the

frustrations of the patriarch within the patriarchal system is revealed only near the end of the novel, in the form of Marnus' father's dreadful secret.

Both Ilse and Marnus are pressurised to excel at school, although ultimately their achievements are assessed differently in terms of their gender. Ilse is a total over-achiever, academically as well as on the sports fields, but whether she is actually expanding her horizons is doubtful, as all these activities are managed under the watchful eyes of her father. When his daughter has to argue in a debating competition on the topic that 'Separate Development is Morally Justified', the general makes sure that she bases her argument on his own thoughts: "it ended with her [...] just sitting there writing exactly what Dad said" (Behr, 1996a, 142-143). Marnus in his turn tells proudly of his rugby career, his participation in that ultra-macho sport indicating his own emerging masculine potential. The fact that he is vice-captain of his team also indicates his budding talents as a leader to his father, who throughout the novel continually emphasises the fact that he would like Marnus to become head boy of the school in time. Pressure is being placed on Marnus and Ilse not only to excel, but also to conform to the expectations placed upon them. The Jan van Riebeeck school motto, 'Be Yourself', seems a contradiction in terms when set in the context of the Afrikaner youth that it is educating.

The best example of the gendered identity that Marnus is expected to assume under his father's orders comes from Marnus' seemingly innocent remark about his leaving the school choir: "I sang in the school choir when I was in Standard One, but Dad said I didn't have to sing if I didn't want to. Dad never makes us do anything we don't really want to. If I want to sing in the choir, I can, but it's just that I'm not as musical as Mum and Ilse." (Behr, 1996a, 103). Marnus immediately belies his own statement by then saying that "that same year, the music teacher entered me and Hanno Louw for solo singing in the eisteddfod" (Behr, 1996a, 103), which indicates that his lack of enthusiasm for singing was not due to a lack of talent. Instead, it seems that it was his father who had enough influence over his son to draw him into a type of pre-planned identity: "That was my first and last solo. From then on we called everyone who sang poofsters [...] [Mum] says you aren't a poofster just because you sing, but Dad just laughs and says he isn't so sure" (Behr, 1996a, 104).

Homosexuality is constructed as an abhorrent lifestyle by the patriarchal Afrikaner society, and in Behr's novel this condemnation of alternative lifestyles by the Afrikaner characters is also apparent. At the same time, however, *The Smell of Apples* indicates that the construction of rampant heterosexual manhood as the boy Marnus understands it, occurs through what can only

be described as homosocial bonding between him and his father. I refer here to the term 'homosocial' as used by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who defines it as " [the] social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with 'homosexual', and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'homosexual'" (Sedgwick, 1985, 1). Sedgwick argues that there is a general category of homosocial bonds between people of the same sex, of which homosexual bonds make up only a part. In a patriarchal society, it seems that the continuum between homosocial and homosexual is disrupted and an opposition is formed between specifically defined acceptable heterosexual and unacceptable homosexual activity. While this binary construction is present in Behr's novel, there are also indications that this opposition will be deconstructed. The actual overlapping that occurs between the two apparently separate categories is particularly apparent in the exclusively male activities that Marnus and his father share.

Erasmus and his son's bonding activities include showering together and swimming naked in the ocean. While the swimming in the ocean is a silent activity, their showers together are filled with conversation and banter. Erasmus is particularly interested in what Marnus and his friend Frikkie do in their spare time, and, seemingly, in his son's physical development: "So tell Dad, does that little man of yours stand up yet in the mornings?" (Behr, 1996a, 63). Erasmus' rape of Frikkie "cast[s] a darker implication on these interchanges" (Heyns, 1996, 93). In the same way Marnus' idyllic swimming sessions with his father also gains a darker meaning when his father starts insisting that a reluctant Frikkie join in their naked swim (Behr, 1996a, 51). Lurking behind the rugged heterosexual masculinity of the father is a predatory nature, that causes him to express a homosexual facet of his identity in an unacceptable way, through raping Frikkie. In this way the opposition between heterosexual and homosexual, which has been so carefully cultivated in the Afrikaner mythology, is exploded. Homosexuality, ostensibly seen as unacceptable in the Afrikaner community, becomes, ironically, one of the main ways in which Marnus' father, as a representative of the Afrikaner patriarchy, maintains his feeling of power.

Frikkie is depicted in the novel as a boy on the verge of the dissident period of adolescence. He is both physically more developed, more world-wise and more sexually aware than his friend Marnus. Erasmus, probably aware of Frikkie's potency and tendency to rebellion, might be using the rape as a method to curb the boy. Perhaps Erasmus is envious of Frikkie's tendency to break the rules and transgress regulations, something which Erasmus' social role as a military officer does not allow him to do. Symbolically, Frikkie as the developing, potential man, must be 'put in his place' by the elder generation. The violation is a disturbing comment on the nature of the

power-play underlying Afrikaner patriarchy. The connections or bonds between the older and younger generation of men in this society are concerned with the transmission of power along generational lines. The success of the patriarchal system can only be maintained if the younger generation concedes to the wishes and mouldings of the fathers. Often violence seems to be necessary to ensure that this shaping of the younger generation takes place successfully. On a symbolic level, then, the rape scene in The Smell of Apples symbolises the "generational violence" (Barnard, 2000, 208) inherent to the maintenance of the Afrikaner patriarchy.

Although Marnus exudes pre-adolescent naivety for the majority of the novel, his witnessing of the rape signals his own entry into the realm of manhood. Initially he is confused and shocked at having seen his father in the position of the perpetrator, and although not able to confront his father about the rape, he wants to have nothing more to do with Erasmus. Marnus says that he "hates [his] dad" (Behr, 1996a, 194) and wants to "reject his father" (Heyns, 1996, 93). It is at this point that he is coerced into the patriarchal system through both violence *and* tenderness from his father. This occurs when the family opens the Chilean general's parting gifts after his departure. "Mister Smith" has left Marnus his military epaulettes and his family encourage him to put them on: "It's Ilse who suggests that I put on my camouflage suit so that we can fit the epaulettes on to the shoulders. I shake my head and say that I don't feel like getting changed. But now Dad also says I should go and change into the camouflage suit. He'll help me fasten the epaulettes with their little screws. I look at Mum, but she also says I should go"(Behr, 1996a, 195).

Marnus' initial refusal to comply with his father's bestowal of the epaulettes is a mini-rebellion against the identity of the manly soldier that his father is planning for him. Just as Frikkie's adolescent dissidence is punished through violence so Marnus is also punished for this rebellion with a beating. But Erasmus cannot see the punishment through, and starts crying: "He hugs me and holds me tightly against his chest, until I feel his tears through the shirt of the camouflage suit. I put my arms around his head and we both cry, holding on to each other. We stay like that for a long time, Dad and me together, with him kneeling on the bathroom floor" (Behr, 1996a, 197). The father also apologises for his actions: "He's trying to say something through his tears. I hear him say he's sorry for beating me" (Behr, 1996a, 197). The violence Erasmus has perpetrated on the younger generation through the individual acts of rape and the beating might be a reminder to him that he achieved his own powerful position in the patriarchal system through a loss of innocence and the experience of violence. By apologising to Marnus

specifically for the beating, and indirectly for Frikkie's rape, Erasmus is also trying to apologise for the violence inherent to the transfer of patriarchal power.

Erasmus' vulnerability when apologising lasts only a few moments. Then he returns himself and his son to the accepted site of interchange for their relationship within Afrikaner masculinity when he says: "What's up with all this crying? Bulls don't cry" (Behr, 1996a, 197). The moments of vulnerability are enough, however, to return Marnus to his father's world. As Heyns argues, the moment of weakness and crying on Erasmus' side is also the moment of greatest strength over his son, because "the young boy cannot withstand an appeal made in the name of love" (Heyns, 1996, 97). So much of Marnus' sense of self has been moulded through his love and admiration for his father that he is not able to reject his father when he displays his weaknesses. This is an intensely manipulative moment, where "tears and gentleness achieve what brute force could not, and the boy succumbs to the father's wish" (Heyns, 1996, 94).

The masculine world and the role of soldier

By donning his child-size camouflage suit and allowing his father to fix the military epaulettes on his shoulders, Marnus becomes a "little man", an initiate into the world of the patriarch, as well as a "little soldier", mimicking the actions of his father the general until he too, one day, can fight for the preservation of his society and his culture. Entering the realm of patriarchy also means entering into relationships of secrecy, as Marnus' continuing silence about his witnessing of the rape designates a type of "complicity with his father in the rape of his best friend" (Heyns, 1996, 95). It is clear that he has undergone a symbolic transformation of identity when he and his father step back into the room where his mother and Ilse are opening the gifts: "now [Mum's] just standing there looking at me. She looks at me the way you'd look at someone you're seeing for the first time, in a place where you never expected to find them" (Behr, 1996a, 197).

The scene of symbolic transformation of Marnus into the 'little soldier' links to the 'flash forwards' that depict the adult Marnus fighting in the Angolan border war.⁸ In many ways, the

⁸ The SADF (South African Defence Force) had been involved in the Angolan civil war since 1975 when they invaded that country. After the initial invasion they retracted and started supporting the UNITA movement (the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) as an "effective weapon of destabilisation" (Grest, 1989, 116) against the government of the MPLA (The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola). The South African government was concerned about the MPLA's international Communist ties and thus tried to "place in power a regime more favourably disposed to Pretoria and the West" (Grest, 1989, 116).

support the SADF gave to UNITA in Angola was a manipulative intervention, and also a secretive one. Battles fought between UNITA and the MPLA, ostensibly being part of an Angolan civil war, often involved covert SADF participation on the side of UNITA. There were cases of military leaders trying to convince the South African public that their sons were not involved in the Angolan war while they were actually fighting there. The Smell of Apples uses a fictionalised example of this lie, illustrating the deceptive nature of the respectable public post that Marnus' father inhabits – he must lie about the whereabouts of thousands of young South African men, including the location of his own son. Marnus says "I remember Xangongo, New Year '84. We were two hundred kilometres inside Angola, listening to the voice of America. Then Dad's voice came over the airwaves, and everyone looked at me. He was telling the world that there wasn't a single South African soldier inside Angola"(Behr, 1996a, 83). The troops' reaction to this comment is initially laughter, but the text provides clues indicating that scepticism about the regime and its figures of authority will eventually settle in the soldiers' minds. Since the major battle at Cuito Cuanavale, in which the SADF lost the initiative and had to flee the area, "everyone has become less self assured" (Behr, 1996a, 28) and "no one knows what to believe any longer" (Behr, 1996a, 12). Marnus is painfully aware of the aftermath of this war and the destruction it has wreaked on the people of Angola. The atrocities of the war seem to be a literal and figurative eye-opener: "we see it all"(Behr, 1996a, 30), says Marnus.

Marnus' mature narrating self is not simply the automaton soldier, fighting for his country and his beliefs. His awareness of the scepticism of the troops under his command indicates his own developing disbelief in the Afrikaner, and by extension, white South African ideological system. Speaking of the new recruits, he mentions "a dull shadow of irony already lying across the young faces –long before the war had done its dirty job; a shadow you notice only when you know what you're looking for" (Behr, 1996a, 29). As the leader of an increasingly disillusioned group of soldiers, it is expected of Marnus to try and uphold their morale: "We've been instructed," he says, "not to divulge the enemy's logistical and numerical superiority to our troops"(Behr, 1996a, 82). However, at certain moments it seems instead that Marnus wishes to reveal their hopeless position to those under his command. He is especially interested in the reactions of one of his section-leaders, who is a black man, one of only two under Marnus' command. When another commander's troops are under attack by the enemy and a call for assistance is made on the radio, Marnus not only refuses to help them (see Behr, 1996a, 42) but also leaves the radio turned on so that the black section-leader can hear the desperation and fear of the other commander: "While [the black section-leader] is staring at me, it is again as if nothing up here seems to matter, and I

leave the radio volume turned up, making sure he can hear Van Schoor's hoarse voice calling to the Colonel for help"(Behr, 1996a, 42).

Marnus' interest in and relation to the black section-leader can be explained with the help of Bhabha's theory, as was the case with the relation between the child narrator and Little-Neville. Bhabha states that there is no original split between the Self and Other, and that they are always already part of the same system of signification and thus refer to and feed off each other. He describes the interaction between the construction of the Other and the subjectivity of the Self in the following way: "[the identification of the subject] is constituted through the locus of the Other which suggests both that the object of identification is ambivalent, and, more significantly, that the agency of identification is never pure or holistic but always constituted in a process of substitution, displacement or projection" (Bhabha, 1990a, 313).

Marnus is intrigued by the reactions of the black soldier because he does not really understand why this man, as a black South African, would be fighting in a war "against his own freedom". (Behr, 1996a, 119). When Marnus asks the black man why he is fighting in the war, his answer is surprising: "To make war, Captain. We are not like the Cubans who take women to fight. It's men who must make war"(Behr, 1996a, 120). The section-leader's response implies that the conception of the black man, constructed as the Other in Marnus' childhood narrative, needs to be redefined. His answer unsettles Marnus' sense of identity –as an Afrikaner soldier with all the connotations of masculinity and inherent superiority over Others that this implies – by reflecting similarities between the Self and the Other. In many ways, they are part of an inclusive masculinity in the context of warfare, as Marnus admits: "Our faces are all blackened and [...] bullets don't know the meaning of discrimination"(Behr, 1996a, 42). The bush is the site of warfare and is also acknowledged, in Afrikaner mythology, to be the site of the wild and the primitive: "you can take the black out of the bush, but you can never take the bush out of the black". Thus the soldiers, whether white or black, are all participating in the savage act of warfare. This rather disconcerting inclusive masculinity, with its implication of all men being equally barbaric and bloodthirsty, is a phenomenon with which Marnus cannot feel completely integrated. Although as an adult he has doubts about the validity of the Afrikaner myth, Marnus seems to be formed by it to such an extent that a total rejection of it is not possible.

The following example from the text will be used to indicate that, symbolically, Marnus cannot totally reject the construction of the Other as perpetuated by the Afrikaner myth. After Angolan soldiers attack Marnus' camp, he leaves his troops to fend for themselves and flees blindly into

the bush. After many hours of solitary running Marnus, who is nearing exhaustion, senses through small noises around him that he is being tracked by the enemy. It soon appears that his enemies have him trapped: "Behind me the bush is alive. Voices are shouting, but they're drowned by the noise in my head. [...] From the corner of my eye I catch the movement of someone almost next to me" (Behr, 1996a, 166-167). As it turns out, Marnus had been running from his own troops, whom he thought were the enemy. It was the black section-leader who had been calling out to him to stop running (see Behr, 1996a, 178), but because the black man had shouted out in Xhosa, which Marnus presumably does not speak, he had thought it was the language of the enemy: "[he had called out] in a language often heard but never understood"(Behr, 1996a, 166-167).

Marnus' growing disillusionment with the act of war and the role of the soldier indicates that his knowledge now stretches far beyond the ideological beliefs that his father taught him. Despite this awareness of the fact that there are spaces and identities beyond those stipulated by Afrikaner mythology, this does not imply, in *The Smell of Apples*, that a total escape from the mythical narrative and the social role he inhabits within this system is possible for Marnus. He is a member of the Permanent Force in Angola, which means that he is in the war by choice, not by conscription. In a letter written to her son while he is in Angola Leonore pleads with Marnus to leave the war behind and return home: "When you were here during December I asked you so nicely not to go back to the bush, but you wouldn't listen to me" (Behr, 1996a, 133). The bush as the site of warfare is a space where Marnus engages with the masculine and soldierly identity that his father had ordained for him many years earlier. His choice to return to the war indicates his inextricable love/hate relationship with his father, implying that the connection he has with Erasmus is not something that can merely be ended. In Angola, Marnus finds himself wondering how his father would react to his death – a way of both fantasising about his father's concern for him, and of punishing his father by removing himself: "[...] Dad knows I'm here. I wonder, if anything should happen to me, how long will it be before they tell him? Probably at once. And how will he tell Mum?" (Behr, 1996a, 100).

Although he had gained an awareness and knowledge of the limitations of Afrikaner ideology, Marnus nevertheless remains in the mythological narrative's grip. The novel dramatically illustrates that his only escape from the myth and the influence of his father is into the realm of death: "Death brings its own freedom, and it is for the living that one should mourn, for in life there is no escape from history" (Behr, 1996a, 198).

The Smell of Apples provides an interesting terrain for the application of Barthes' understanding of the myth. The stifling nature of the mythical narrative seems of utmost relevance to the character of Marnus, who is depicted as not being able to reinvent himself as anything other than what his father, and by extension the Afrikaner patriarchy, imagines and wishes him to be. Barthes examines what he terms the stifling nature of the myth in Mythologies:

For the very end of myths is to immobilise the world: they must suggest and mimic a universal order which has fixated once and for all the hierarchy of possessions. Thus, every day and everywhere, man is stopped by myths, referred by them to this motionless prototype which lives in his place, stifles him in the manner of a huge internal parasite and assigns to his activity the narrow limits within which he is allowed to suffer without upsetting the world. (Barthes, 1973, 155)

Barthes' view is thus that the goal of the myth is achieved when it prevents individuals from understanding themselves in ways that differentiate them from the collective. In accordance with and expanding on Barthes' notion that myth is "a prohibition for man against inventing himself"(Barthes, 1973, 155)⁹, this paper will make use of the term 'reinvention' to indicate attempts of individuals to create a new subjectivity for themselves.

This notion of the myth as a stifling and limiting narrative needs to be further interrogated, however. It is important to question Barthes' conception of the possibly oppressive and "parasitic" nature of the mythical narrative by asking whether individuals have the ability to distance themselves from these myths. Where does the responsibility lie? Is 'man' inadvertently caught up in the mythical narratives perpetuated in society or can a choice be made by the individual to disentangle him or herself from a problematic collective narrative? The Smell of Apples has been shown to echo some of Barthes' definitions of the myth. What is the motive behind Mark Behr structuring his text in this way and representing Afrikaner identity as being formed within such a rigid system?

In a paper delivered at the academic 'Fault Lines' conference in Cape Town in 1996, Behr introduced his paper by stating that "as an act of creation The Smell of Apples represents, for me, the beginnings of a showdown with myself for my support of a system like apartheid"(quoted in Heyns, 2000, 42). However, this is a 'showdown' that Behr himself carefully constructed to show the Marnus character's entrapment within the Afrikaner

⁹ Roland Barthes' conception of the myth and its stifling properties are also related to a South African context in Rita Barnard's article "The final safari: on nature, myth and the literature of the Emergency"

mythological narrative. And it appears that Behr wishes to draw parallels between the complexities of Marnus' position and his own in his conference paper. The main body of the conference paper dealt with Behr's confession that he was an undercover agent for the previous government: "It is with the profoundest imaginable regret that I acknowledge that as a university student I worked as an agent of the South African security establishment. From the end of 1986 to 1990 I received money for reporting mostly on the activities of the student organisation, NUSAS, at the university of Stellenbosch" (Behr, 1996b, 2). The Smell of Apples indicates how the boundary between "unconscious complicity and deliberate collaboration [within a system]" (Heyns, 2000, 53) can easily be dissolved through an individual's immersion in the apartheid narrative. Behr's conference paper also combines this notion of being "caught" within the mythical narrative with his own sense of culpability in allowing himself to play a role within the apartheid system.

Behr's paper acknowledges the complexities of individual and collective responsibility: "In speaking about systems like colonialism, slavery, nazism, the holocaust or apartheid, we frequently speak as though events have a velocity of their own: we look back in horror and disbelief. While it is true that systems and events can grow into aberrations that take immense human effort to halt, all schemes [...] are implemented and underpinned by human beings and human agency" (Behr, 1996b, 4). He further states that "I must accept responsibility. Ultimately I did not have what hundreds of thousands of South Africans did: the strength to refuse to offer my body and mind in the service of that system. I did, willingly, support a system that not only denied people's most basic rights and freedoms, but a system which divided, tortured, murdered and assassinated human beings, backed by precisely the security system I was involved in." (Behr, 1996b, 3). This combination of acknowledging individual culpability whilst also reminding listeners/readers of the background formed by the apartheid narrative is, on first reading, quite persuasive, as Behr does not attempt to simplify a complex matter and appears honest about his own involvement. However, the connection that Behr himself makes in his conference paper between the position of entrapment that the Marnus character experiences and his own position should also be noted. In the novel and in the conference paper, there seems to be a partial evasion of responsibility through the use of the notion of entrapment within the mythical narrative. Nic Borain, who was involved in liberal political organisations in the 1980's and employed Behr during this period, has publicly questioned the sincerity of Behr's confession: "Behr's confession is a number of things. It is also an audacious attempt at seduction [...]. Behr

(1998) where the focus is on the role of literature at the time of the State of Emergency in 1980's South Africa.

claims to be the victim of propaganda, of Christian National Education, of his family, of history, of fate, of his own moral weakness. [...] Ten minutes listening to the truth commission will clear the heads of anyone seduced into believing that Behr is the tragic hero at the centre of our national drama"(Borain, 1996).

As Borain has noted with disdain, in his confession Behr faces up to his complicity with the apartheid system by emphasising his inextricable bond to apartheid. As was the case with the representation of the adult Marnus in The Smell of Apples, he emphasises in his conference paper that a growing awareness of apartheid's problems during his time as a police informer was not enough motivation for taking responsibility for his position, or attempting to change his social role: "Backed by the power of the state I lacked both the moral courage and the will that would compel me to find the words to admit to what I was involved in"(Behr, 1996b, 3). Although I initially found Behr's honest look at his own cowardice and conformity moving, the structure of the 'Fault Lines' paper as a whole did not come across as a heart-felt confession. Borain in his response to Behr's paper mentions his irritation with the fact that Behr and his sense of shame was the centre of concern in his own confession: " a number of things are missing from the text. He never mentions the arm of the state he spied for, who his handler was, how much he was paid or what information he passed on. If Behr really wanted to redress some of the harms he did –a crucial aspect of confession and forgiveness –then these were the questions he should have answered" (Borain, 1996).

Behr's admission that he continued as a police informer even when he knew what he was doing was wrong because "[he] still wanted the money"(Behr, 1996b, 3) is a purposefully banal comment from a writer who in other sections of the conference paper is able to emote intricate definitions of his own fractured identity. Behr's confession is a slick, complex treatise on his own uncertainty regarding his past motives and his future prospects: "I am unsure to what extent I'm doing it all merely to protect myself; I am uncertain of what comes after this" (Behr, 1996b, 5). In his confession Behr is telling a story, or weaving a constructed fiction around his own personality. Behr as the master storyteller seems to construct and self-consciously arrange his confession, portraying himself as a flawed character trapped in his social role by greed and fear. He admits in the concluding section of the paper that: "memory and motive play their own games in deciding testimony. The process of telling a story, of creating a history [...] is one of selection, of deciding on formulation and medium, and on choosing words"(Behr, 1996b, 5). Behr's construction of his own story as one filled with the uncertainty of his motives leaves the reader with the responsibility of interpreting the text, and of judging Behr.

One of Behr's former lecturers, Guillermo O' Donnell, sets Behr's timing of the confession in the general context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the changing political dispensation in the country, implying that the confession was carefully performed so as to coincide with this particular moment in South African history. O' Donnell notes that Behr, always good at playing roles, has now donned another mask:

I suspect in somebody so well trained in wearing masks that when you say that your text is 'part confession', you do not really mean what a first reading of your text would suggest, i.e. that the 'confession' is part of a whole complemented by the 'part therapy' and 'part catharsis' that you say you also perform in this text. Rather, it is a 'partial confession' because it avoids the core of the truth. It is also a 'partial catharsis' because it does not go beyond the narcissistic exhibition of a new mask, *adapted to the present circumstances of your country and yourself*. And certainly it is not a 'partial therapy'; it is the repetition of the syndrome of deceitful presentation of yourself.

(O'Donnell, 1996, my emphasis)

Although confessions of complicity with the apartheid system, or any other oppressive system should be encouraged, a confession such as the one made by Behr seems to be at least a partial evasion of responsibility. By focusing on his connections to the apartheid narrative and constructing himself, through his writing, as a tragic perpetrator, Behr certainly grabbed the attention of South African academics and to a certain extent, the public. The question that now becomes pertinent, however, is how Behr plans to develop himself in the post-apartheid, post-TRC South African environment. Behr and others who have emphasised their connection to the Afrikaner mythological narrative might have to make attempts at reinventing their sense of identity in order to remain relevant citizens of a changing South Africa, where new myths are emerging and new social roles are being constructed.

It is in the context of the question of how such reinventions of identity can be made that this paper now turns to a discussion of Antjie Krog's Country of my Skull. Krog's book will be used as a contrast to Behr's novel and confession which emphasises the notion of entrapment within the Afrikaner mythical narrative. For Krog, the possibility of an escape from the static and oppressive identities provided by the Afrikaner myth is all-important. Without the possibility of reinvention, Krog fears that the Afrikaner group will become an anachronism in a new South African context. Her feeling that she too, despite being a so-called "liberal" Afrikaner, was involved in and benefited from the privilege of being white during the time of apartheid, is an admission of guilt that she feels she has to grapple with in order to take her place in a new

political and social era. While Behr's shame seems to tie him inextricably to the old mythical narrative, Krog's sense of guilt makes reinvention of identity a possibility.

Her closeness to and experience of the mythological narrative of Afrikaner identity as an Afrikaner woman means that she is aware of the twisted logic of apartheid and of what it does not only to those who fall victim to its perverse representations and categorisations, but also to those who benefit from such a system. She has an ambivalent attitude towards the perpetrators telling their stories at the amnesty hearings of the TRC, and an ambivalent attitude towards Afrikaans as language. As a poet, she loves the language, but she also concedes that it is the same "language of [her] heart" (Krog, 1998, 238), which was also the language that carried the destructive myths of the Afrikaner and apartheid through the country. For many people in the country, it is a language without humanity: "How do I live with the fact that all the words used to humiliate, all the orders given to kill, belonged to the language of my heart?" (Krog, 1998, 238). In the following sections the discussion will focus on Krog's ambiguous relationship with the perpetrators 'of her race' and with Afrikaans as language. I will argue that Krog's stance of admitting complicity and guilt makes reinvention a possibility, and will examine how she does this specifically through her poetry.

Placing responsibility elsewhere: the 'second narrative'

The TRC started its public hearings in April 1996 with Gross Human Rights Violation hearings in the city of East London. Antjie Krog, reporting under the name of Antjie Samuels, was present in her capacity as a SABC radio journalist. For the purposes of this section of the paper, it will suffice to draw attention to her excitement, sadness and awe at the nature of these first hearings, where victims of apartheid human rights violations testified in public. Krog is especially struck by the ordinariness of the people coming to testify and the immense pain and suffering inherent in their narratives: "It is not so much the deaths, and the names of the dead, but the web of infinite sorrow woven around them. It keeps on coming and coming" (Krog, 1998, 32). For a period of approximately six months, the victims' hearings continued around the country. Krog waits expectantly for the start of the perpetrator hearings as a balance to the victims' tales: "[...] something is amiss. We prick up our ears. Waiting for the Other. The Counter. The Perpetrator. More and more we want the second narrative" (Krog, 1998, 56).

She notes the eventual advent of the amnesty hearings with a mixture of relief at its coming and frustration at its character: "at last the second narrative breaks into relief from its background of silence – unfocused, splintered in intention and degrees of desperation. But it is there. And it is

white. And male” (Krog, 1998, 56). At the amnesty hearing of the five main commanders of Vlakplaas, the farm outside Pretoria that was used as a base for police hit squads, Krog recognises the ‘Vlakplaas Five’ by their body language and by their particular brand of Afrikaans. Their presence jolts her into a re-awareness of the existence of the Afrikaner patriarchy. She says of their presence: “I go cold with recognition. [...] The manne. More specifically: the Afrikaner manne. Those who call their sons ‘pa se ou rammetjie’ or ‘my ou bul’ (Dad’s little ram or my old bull)”(Krog, 1998, 90). These terms echo those used by Marnus in the first sentence of The Smell of Apples when he introduces himself to the reader through the nick-names that his father has given him, thus indicating their importance to his sense of self: “My name is really Marnus, but when Dad speaks to me he mostly says ‘my son’ or ‘my little bull’ (Behr, 1996a, 1). Krog, intrigued and disturbed by these Afrikaner perpetrators, decides to do a radio show broadcasting profiles of each of the Vlakplaas Five in order to establish some underlying reasons for the actions they committed. She finds that these five men come from a background that is echoed in The Smell of Apples: “shared characteristics are their devotion to the Church and the National Party and the roles their fathers had in their lives. [Two of the men] do not talk of their fathers as ‘Pa’: they prefer the Old Testament ‘Vader’ –in Afrikaans a term reserved only for God”(Krog, 1998, 94). Krog notes with something akin to horror that upon interviewing them, she slipped back into the role established for the female within their society, into the role of someone who is inextricably part of their group: “When I spoke to them I did use all the codes I grew up with and have been fighting against for a lifetime”(Krog, 1998, 92).”

The perpetrators who testified before the Amnesty Committee often reminded listeners that the context in which their crimes were committed should be taken into account. Krog notes the words of a former SADF colonel, who reminds people that the social, political and ideological context of the perpetrators’ world are important factors to consider before a judgement is made. He says “what is of utmost importance is to examine the backgrounds in which we grew up. I mean that’s where we were moulded. I’m not accusing anybody, but people were placed on a pedestal...not, I think, by intent, but it was carried over from the family conversations” (Krog, 1998, 72). As is the case in Behr’s novel, indoctrination seems to have occurred subtly within the borders of the home and family. Indications are that some of the men applying for amnesty will be using their professed belief in the mythical narrative of the Afrikaner as a device to justify their past actions, or at the very least to contextualise their actions. As one amnesty applicant put it, “we believed black people were not human; they were a threat, they were going to kill us all, and then waste away the country until it was nothing but another African disaster area” (Krog, 1998, 93).

Norman Fairclough has noted in his book Discourse and Social Change that institutional practices and discourses are infused with ideology and that these institutions construct subject positions for their users: "discourse contributes [...] to the construction of what are variously referred to as 'social identities' and 'subject positions'" (Fairclough, 1992, 64). By means of the apartheid narrative, specific social identities were allotted to apartheid beneficiaries, as well as to those it constructed as "Other". By the time the TRC commenced in South Africa in 1996, however, new discourses had made their appearance, supporting political ideals such as democracy and transformation. The period of political transition of which the TRC was a part thus introduced new subject positions and social roles into the South African environment. The old social roles, infused as they are with the ideology of older South African discourses, are not that easily dismissed. Some of the Amnesty hearings at the TRC and a section of the Afrikaner group's response to the TRC indicates that reinvention of identity is often not considered to be an option for members of this group.

The public process of the Amnesty hearings spread what Gerrit Olivier has termed the "diffuse, confused and bewildered" (Olivier, 1998, 224) narratives of the perpetrators through South Africa. According to Olivier their testimonies were told in a "moral vacuum" (1998, 224), since they committed their deeds in the name of a discourse and ideology which is no longer authoritative in the South African context of the TRC. An example of a perpetrator testimony that attempts to avoid the "moral vacuum" of the perpetrators' position and build a new and relevant social role for its speaker is that of Jeffrey Benzien. Characteristics of his testimony will be briefly discussed as an example of the way in which a reinvention of identity is attempted through narrative. At the same time, I will argue that due to the intervention of Benzien's former victims in the construction of his narrative at the Amnesty hearing, his narrative 'betrays' him as someone still connected to apartheid discourse and his old social role.

Benzien was a Security Branch operative who apprehended and tortured Umkhonto weSizwe¹⁰ members in the Western Cape area in the 1980's. His preferred method of torture was repeatedly bringing a detainee to the brink of suffocation with a wet bag, a method for which he was notorious throughout the Cape. Benzien was involved in the controversial shooting of MK cadre Ashley Kriel and tortured numerous others.

¹⁰ The armed wing of the African National Congress, also known as MK, was founded in 1961 and unbanned in 1990.

At the beginning of the Amnesty hearing, Benzien read out his prepared statement to the committee and the public. This prepared statement was a tightly compacted and controlled narrative that sketched the barest details of his activities at the Security Branch, named none of the higher authorities under whom he operated, and stated that the wet blanket torture method was the only one he used. The introduction of the statement emphasises the difference between the political and ideological context of the past and that of the present. Benzien asks that his actions, however unorthodox, be understood in the past context. He says "I believed bona fide that due to my expeditious and unorthodox conduct, we made a big difference in the combatting of terror"; "[I wanted] to fight for the continued existence and preservation of what I saw as a normal Western democratic lifestyle [...], to fight for the right of myself, my family and the general public to continue to live in South Africa in the way that our forefathers lived, with special reference to our heritage, background, culture and political lifestyle".¹¹ Benzien attempts, through the delivery of this statement and his initial courteous behaviour at the hearing to depict himself as a reasonable man with respect for the new system, who is willing to make amends for past mistakes.

Benzien's former victims, who were present at the hearing and unhappy with the way in which he was presenting his past to the Commission, obtained permission from the Amnesty Committee to cross-examine Benzien one by one. This hearing thus became, along with the St James Church massacre hearing, quite unique in that the perpetrator and the victims were to be heard at the same public event, and could enter into dialogue with one another about the events of the past. The presence of the victims as cross-examiners put the condensed tale that Benzien had been telling into perspective. According to one newspaper article, "if the [...] guerrillas [Benzien] had tortured had not been there to question him, his evidence that he was a dedicated policeman who used 'unconventional methods', condoned by his superiors, to extract from trained terrorists information that would save innocent lives and prevent the overthrow of the state might have remained largely intact" (Davis, 1997). The presence of both the torturer and the tortured at the same hearing was sensational news: those who had been tortured could now face their former torturer from a more powerful and morally superior position. Another newspaper article concerned with the Benzien hearing blared out that the tables had turned: "Torturer Benzien faces another day on the rack" (Yuval, 1997, 3). Yet the inversion of positions this implies was

¹¹ Transcript of Benzien's testimony available at <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc>

not so simple in reality, as the tussle for narrative control between Benzien and his victims became more and more complicated as the hearing progressed.

The MK members who had been tortured remembered events differently from the way their torturer did, and in cross-examination demanded that he elaborate on his prepared statement. Tony Yengeni, at present an ANC parliamentarian, was one of the men who fell into Benzien's hands in the 1980's. The following excerpt from his cross-examination of Benzien shows the attempts made by the victims to gather information, and Benzien's subtle refusal to comply with their demands. In this excerpt, Yengeni is attempting to uncover the details of his arrest and detention:

Mr Yengeni [...] Now, when we got to Culemborg police station, do you remember then what happened?

Mr Benzien I know that I interrogated you and I placed the wet bag over your head and I smothered you.

Mr Yengeni Before you put the wet bag on me, do you remember what else happened Mr Benzien, other than the wet bag? Do you remember my being molested by yourself and Liebenberg and other policemen?

Mr Benzien That may have happened, yes, but I was under the impression that I was interviewing the other gentleman, but if you say that I assaulted you that day, I will concede that I did it.

Other similar allegations from those tortured that electric shocks were administered, that victims were often naked and that other Security Branch members were involved in the torture sessions, were all met with the same reply –that Benzien does not remember, but that he is "willing to concede" that it might have happened.

As his victims' questioning became more penetrating, Benzien's testimony began to present him as a victim. He alleges, for example, that he was used by the security establishment to do their dirty work for them: "today in a new South Africa I can sit here and tell you in all honesty, that I was used by the then Security Branch. [...] When it came down to getting the job done, I was the person who did it. Maybe I was too patriotic, too naïve or anything else that you would want to call it." He also mentions the hardships that his children encountered as the offspring of an infamous man: "for weeks my children could not play in the normal ambit of other children. Because of my work with the Security Branch, they could not play on the playground with the other children." Benzien's psychologist was also called in to testify, and she suggested that Benzien's memory loss was a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder. It seems, however, that in actual fact his amnesia was selective, as he could remember small details with astonishing

precision (see Krog, 1998, 74). It seemed more likely then that Benzien was attempting to evade responsibility for his past actions by not remembering fully what he did.

The hard-hitting questions of his victims not only revealed the gaps in Benzien's narrative, but also put him on the defensive and made him revert, on a psychological level, to the role of the torturer. His selective amnesia's main function in the testimony is to act as a defense-mechanism when the integrity of his narrative is put in doubt. In however a subtle or passive way it is done, by forgetting or professing to forget what he had done to his victims and by "conceding" that certain acts might have happened but not openly admitting to having done them, Benzien is questioning the accuracy of the victims' version of events. In a sense, Benzien's amnesia and uncertainty is attempting to deny the testifiers their right to tell the story from their perspective. At various points of the three-day long testimony, Benzien also staged verbal attacks on his former victims, reminding them of how soon they buckled under his torture and betrayed the whereabouts of their comrades to him. An article in the Weekly Mail and Guardian states that "although [Benzien] sprinkled his testimony with 'sincere apologies' and at one point wept, he could still psychologically assault his former victims, by revealing information he'd forced out of them which led to the arrest and torture of comrades, by implying they had broken quickly –or simply by failing to remember what he had done to them" (Davis, 1997). His implicit wish to silence the testifiers and to re-enact the humiliation of his former victims places Benzien back in the role of the torturer, and connects him to the discourse of apartheid. As is the case with the apartheid narrative generally, Benzien's narrative aims to be the only official and authorised tale, which does not allow the other side of the story to be told.

Wilhelm Verwoerd explains that "our response to past violations and privileging has the ability to harm or to heal, to cause or prevent further violations, to humiliate or to humanise"(Verwoerd, 2000). Benzien's professed wish to engage actively with the 'new South Africa' (" I out of my own free will have approached this Commission to see if we can't build, and forget about the hardships") is undermined by the presence in his narrative of the same perverse sense of power that he employed as a torturer in the old political context.

Antjie Krog witnessed Benzien's hearing personally and reports on it in Country of My Skull under the heading "Shame strangles the remembrance of you" (Krog, 1998, 73). This title is a reference to Benzien's main method of torture, as well as pointing to his selective memory loss during the course of the hearing. Krog is particularly concerned with Benzien's amnesia and whether it might signify an evasion of responsibility. Her highlighting of the notion of 'shame' in

the title to the Benzien interlude in her book might point to additional ways in which his loss of memory connects him to the role he fulfilled in the 'old' South Africa. In the course of Country of My Skull Krog examines the phenomenon of a 'culture of shame' as opposed to a 'culture of guilt'. While guilt has to do with a sense of responsibility carried by an individual in terms of a certain conception of morality, "the essence of shame is the honour of a group"(Krog, 1998, 262). It is hopefully clear through the explorations that have gone into the question of Afrikaner identity in this piece of writing that Afrikaners operated (and in some cases still operate) in a culture where the conception of the group and its honour and integrity are of the utmost importance. It might then be possible, in applying this understanding of identity to Benzien's testimony, to state that Benzien's selective amnesia is a mechanism by which he is protecting the rest of an enclosed circle of 1980's Security Branch operatives. By emphasising, for example, that he always extracted information from detainees on his own –a claim which his victims dispute –Benzien masochistically constructs himself as a scapegoat who bears all the responsibility while not betraying anyone else in 'the group'. This sense of the honour of the group that must be maintained, serves to put Benzien back into his old role, showing that he still answers to the type of authority manifested in the 'old' South Africa, although attempting at the amnesty hearing to relate to the 'new' South Africa. His attempts at reinvention are not entirely successful, an occurrence that can be attributed partly to his sense of identity being connected with the sense of coherence of the Afrikaner group. As Larry May explains: "Given the importance of communities in shaping a person's moral character, as soon as the individual feels overwhelmingly determined by group affiliations, significant options for moral and social change are cut off" (May, 1991, 252). Benzien's testimony seems to indicate that he is inadvertently tied to the Afrikaner group, and his inability to construct a convincing social role for himself in the new political context reflects the sense of disorder and uncertainty experienced by members of the Afrikaner group at the time of the TRC.

As was the case with her treatment of the Benzien case, Krog's general response to the tales of the perpetrators is such that on the one hand she deplores the actions these men took and the type of perverse social morality that upheld such actions, but on the other hand has to admit that she feels connected to these men:

"Aversion. I want to distance myself.

They are nothing to me.

I am not of them.

I find myself overcome with anger. Anger for being caught up in their mess” (Krog, 1998, 90).

She also acknowledges the difficulties the perpetrators will have in justifying their actions *individually* in the changed political context and within the structure of the TRC: “the norms you are used to follow no longer apply and you, *alone*, are now called upon to explain your actions within a totally different framework...[The amnesty applicants] are no longer buffered by an Afrikaner culture in power” (Krog, 1998, 93, my emphasis).

The structure of the TRC focused the attention of the nation on individual perpetrators. Testifiers at the Commission were divided into victims and perpetrators, and were heard by different Committees. Consequently the focus of the TRC was on individual cases of human rights violation that reflected something of the extreme cases of violation under apartheid, and not on the system of apartheid itself. Discussing this issue, Gerrit Olivier mentions that “what the political scientist would call ‘structural violence’ –the pass laws, forced removals, and similar measures became obscured by the dramatic symbols of individually perpetrated acts: the bullet, the necklace, the grave in the veld” (Olivier, 1998, 224). This means that, in the case of both the victim and the perpetrator hearings, “individual cases were selected to represent ‘national patterns’ (Posel, 1999, 15). The fact that “the commission’s version of truth was established through narrow lenses”(Du Preez, 2001, 13) has significant implications for the involvement of the majority of the people of South Africa, who do not fall into either the category of ‘victim’ or (direct) perpetrator. Many people lived and suffered daily indignities under the repressive apartheid laws, but would not receive reparation or even official recognition as victims under the TRC’s rulings. A thought-provoking example of the daily drudgery of the apartheid lifestyle that slowly but surely eroded the oppressed’s identity is recalled by Krog when she remembers “how in South Africa’s first democratic elections [in 1994] a number of women were found to have no fingerprints –their hands had been worked into smooth blanks”(Krog, 1998, 209). Just as these women cannot be classified as ‘victims’, so many of those who lived within and drew benefit, directly or indirectly, from the apartheid system cannot be placed in the category of ‘perpetrator’. The narrow confines of the definition of the perpetrator at the TRC hearings leaves vital questions about individual and collective responsibility unanswered: who is the perpetrator really, and where do the ever-spreading circles of responsibility end? Can individuals be held fully accountable for their actions, or should the system in which they performed, the commanders who gave orders to kill and torture as well as the leaders spreading the mythical narrative of Afrikaner identity also be taken into account?

In the TRC's Report, published in 1998 after the conclusion of the Gross Human Rights Violation hearings¹², there is an acknowledgement of the complexity of the notion of 'responsibility', and an admission that "individual and shared moral responsibility cannot be adequately addressed by legislation or this Commission"(TRC Report, Volume 1, 131). The report continues by saying that "what is required is that individuals and the community as a whole must recognise that the abdication of responsibility, the unquestioning obeying of commands (simply doing one's job), submitting to the fear of punishment, moral indifference, the closing of one's eyes to events or permitting oneself to be intoxicated, seduced or bought with personal advantages are all essential parts of the many-layered spiral of responsibility which makes large-scale, systematic human rights violations possible in modern states"(TRC Report, Volume 1, 131). The official report thus acknowledges its own shortcomings, but those involved in the TRC process agree that it is the public hearings, where the focus was on the individual victims and perpetrators, which had a more general impact and will remain in the public memory. Max du Preez states that "there is a very strong case to be made that the greatest value of the truth commission was not in its written report, but in the very public process"(Du Preez, 2001,13).

The public process of the Amnesty hearings in particular emphasised the fact that there were no leaders in Afrikaner circles who were willing to bear some form of responsibility for the past, and that perpetrators at the hearings thus had little support. In Country of My Skull Krog records a heated discussion between her and F.W. de Klerk, erstwhile president of South Africa and still the leader of the National Party at the time of the TRC. Krog, in a reference to his status and position among the National Party Afrikaners, calls him 'the Leader'. She becomes irritated by his non-committal attitude towards the fate of the perpetrators such as the Vlakplaas Five and confronts him about it: "I spoke to them all. They were all members of your party. They all say they did the dirty work for you and for me. And all of us are trying to deal with that, with the responsibility of that, with the guilt of such a claim....and where are you?" (Krog, 1998, 97-98). It has become clear to her that the National Party, for so many years the shapers and distributors of versions of the Afrikaner's myth, is not willing to bear responsibility for actions based on this ideology. The Leader's response is an effort to place the narrator outside the boundary of Afrikanerhood, and to dismiss her as someone gullible enough to be led down the wrong path by a competing ideology to that of the Afrikaner. He tells her that "you have fallen hook, line and sinker for the ANC's attempts to put the blame on the Afrikaner. And I am sorry – I will not take

the blame for people who acted like barbarians, who ignored the parameters of their duties. They are criminals and ought to be punished" (Krog, 1998, 98).

De Klerk is effectively busy with his own reinvention of history here in this personal conversation with the narrator. He does much the same in public when he handles the National Party's submission to the TRC. It is a version of the past in which responsibility is explicitly placed elsewhere. Claudia Braude comments that "rather than accepting responsibility for acts of violence and abuse perpetrated in the name of apartheid, [De Klerk] persisted with the old propaganda line that the NP government was concerned with 'promoting a peaceful solution to the complex problems that confronted us' [...]"(Braude, 1996, 57). She notes that "elsewhere, De Klerk and the NP claimed credit for democratising South Africa"(Braude, 1996, 57). De Klerk is also prone to manipulating the TRC's emphasis on reconciliation and forgiveness into an excuse for general amnesia about the past: "The best way [to reconcile] would be to say: Let's close the book of the past, let's really forgive and let's now start looking at the future"(Braude, 1996, 56).

Krog is dismayed by De Klerk's political submission on the behalf of the National Party which takes no responsibility for the past and provides no guidance for the Afrikaner group: " Whence will words now come? For us. We who hang quivering and ill from this soundless space of Afrikaner past? What does one say? What the hell does one do with this load of decrowned skeletons, origins, shame and ash?" (Krog, 1998, 128). The answers to these questions are not meant to be simple or clear, nor will possible solutions be identical for different people. Country of My Skull emphasises at various intervals that the TRC process will not provide "[a] grand release –every individual will have to devise his or her own personal method of coming to terms with what happened" (Krog, 1998, 129). Krog's own way of dealing with the atrocities of the past and her complicity in them, is to write about them. It is the perspective of the victims, whose stories puts the Afrikaner mythical narrative and their version of history into dispute, that challenges her writing and reporting to investigate new possibilities of identity and belonging.

The space between 'victim' and 'perpetrator'

In Country of My Skull, Krog brings her impressions of the first hearings of the Gross Human Rights Violation section of the TRC to the reader as fragments of the victim's narratives. These excerpts of testimony are unmediated by comments from the narrator and are not streamlined

¹² Some perpetrator hearings were only concluded in 2001-2002.

typographically into a single neat paragraph (see particularly Krog, 1998, 27-29 for examples). Critics have admitted to their uneasiness with what they perceive as Krog's appropriation of the voices and the suffering of others. It seems to them that Krog is faced with the general dilemma of white postcolonial writers, who "while striving to narrativise the lost or silenced (hi)stories of the oppressed (black) Other, [...] risk assuming the authoritative stance they seek to challenge"(Payner, 2000, 67). Sarah Ruden, for instance, is of the opinion that both the TRC process as a whole and Country of My Skull as a comment on that process have taken the victims' tales from their true context to use them for political or personal purposes. "These stories," Ruden says of the fragmented tales, "are not 'true' stories because they have no background or beginnings or endings [...] In a disrupted society, human rights abusers reduce their victims to entities out of time and space, with no past, no attachments and no future except insofar as these can be useful to the abuser's immediate needs. *In a sense, both the TRC and Krog have extended the abuses of apartheid...*"(Ruden, 1999, 169-170, my emphasis). This is a very strong accusation to make. Ruden's implicit claim that stories which have a coherent beginning and ending are necessarily *true* stories, is problematic. Neatly constructed tales do not necessarily ring true. Fragmentation might be an especially successful way in which to represent tales of traumatic experiences, such as those told at the Human Rights Violation hearings.

As far as Ruden's claim that the TRC has extended the abuses of apartheid is concerned, it is certainly the case that the TRC as a process was occupied with forming a coherent narrative out of the reported testimonies for the official TRC Report. The TRC often had to use specific testimonies and selected sections from testimonies as representative of many others due to financial and time constraints on the Commission. The TRC Report acknowledges that "the Commission has tried, through a range of detailed 'window cases' and selections from the testimonies of many victims, to capture some part of the individual accounts heard before it" (TRC Report, Volume 1, 129). Although the TRC thus shaped their narrative of South Africa's history from its own selections of testimony, this does not automatically signify a manipulation of tales/voices on the level of the perverse apartheid narrative.

Ruden has more support for her accusation that Krog is manipulating the tales of others for her own gain, however. One of the victims whose testimony was used in Country of My Skull (see Krog, 1998, 52-55) ¹³ has written an article questioning the right of Krog, as well as several

¹³ Yazir Henry, a former MK member, who testified in the Human Rights Violation section of the TRC hearings in 1996 told a tale of abduction and severe torture by the security police, which led him to give the police information concerning other MK members' whereabouts. Krog interprets this as a narrative of

newspaper journalists, to use his tale and to effectively provide their own interpretations of it. Yazir Henry states that "I do not only question the intention of these authors, I also draw attention to the context within which my story has been told – and the serious personal consequences that this has had for me" (Henry, 2000, 167). He laments the fact that it is "the reported story with which I am obliged to live, although in reality my story is more nuanced and complex"(Henry, 2000, 168). Henry makes this point poignantly in his article, and certainly one has to take account of his right to his own 'story'. At the same time, however, Henry chose to testify at a public hearing, an event covered extensively by the media, where the rights to interpret the tale can not be merely said to rest with the testifier any more.

Krog's use of others' voices is certainly not without problems. Ruden and Meira Cook (2001, 79) provide a whole list of her misdemeanours in Country of My Skull. Their individual attempts to portray the author as perpetrator, as the one who abuses her power, is overwrought however. Krog is and remains the author –it is not a power she can abdicate without losing the structure and the meaning of what it means to write a book. Her perspective, or 'truth', is the focal point from which the country's story is told, "not [...] in any opportunistic sense, but in the sense that the teller necessarily shapes the tale"(Heyns, 2000, 44). My opinion is that Krog has a respect and deep sympathy for the victims whom she represents in her book, without wishing to identify with them too emphatically, and that her integrity should not be put in doubt. She herself is not always certain of the right she has as a writer, journalist and poet to appropriate the voices of the testifiers. While taking a short break from reporting on TRC hearings, she tells of how she sits around her house, "stunned by the knowledge of the price people have paid for their words." (Krog, 1998, 49). And to this she adds her dilemma as a writer witnessing personal pain and wanting to explore the implications of such pain: " No poetry should come forth from this. [...] If I write this, I exploit and betray. If I don't, I die" (Krog, 1998, 49). It is therefore not without trepidation that she takes on the role of writer and poet, a role in which the story is "seen from [her] perspective, shaped by [her] state of mind at the time"(Krog, 1998, 171), and her uncertainty continues throughout the book.

In a conversation towards the end of Country of My Skull, Krog and a discussant have a conversation about the problems of writing poetry, as a lyrical form of address, in a time of suffering and atrocities. How does one connect the transcendent impulse of poetry to the reality of apartheid South Africa? Paul Celan's "*Todesfuge*" ("Death Fugue"), a complex and stirring

betrayal in Country of My Skull, whilst it seems to me that Henry meant the telling of his tale to be an affirmation or a strengthening of himself and his position in society.

poem about a Holocaust experience, is discussed as a problematic example: "The reception of the poem was ambivalent. Isn't the poem too lyrical? Just a bit too beautiful? Is the horror not too inaccessible? In the end Celan himself felt his ambivalence and asked anthologists to remove the poem from their books" (Krog, 1998, 237). Krog and the discussant consider the role of the writer from different angles in the course of their conversation. Opinions are raised supporting the notion that "maybe writers in South Africa should shut up for a while" (Krog, 1998, 127) and "give up [their] privileged position [to] let the space belong to those who deserve it" (Krog, 1998, 238). In opposition to this, however, the importance of literature and the role it plays in imagining the past is also raised. Writers not rising to the challenges posed by political and social upheaval might negatively influence how future generations view history, their nation, and themselves: "German artists could not find a *form* in which to deal with Auschwitz. They refused to take possession of their own history" (Krog, 1998, 238). These different opinions that come to the fore in the guise of an imagined dialogue are important to keep in mind before criticising Krog for not considering the implications of using others' voices in her writing. She is certainly aware of the implications. In an interesting article on Krog, Country of My Skull and the TRC, Mark Sanders notes that "as formulated by Krog, the question of poetry, or literature, after apartheid concerns less an excess of lyricism or beauty, from which its creator stands back, than a writer's facilitation of the utterance of others" (Sanders, 2000, 14).

In accordance with Sanders' notion of Krog 'hosting' the words of others in Country of My Skull, Saul Tobias also sees her use of fragments of testimony in a positive light. He explains the use of the fragment and of fragmentary writing in Krog's book as follows: "these fragments of testimony, some amounting to no more than two or three lines, are presented with no indication of context or authorship, and are neither commented on nor imbedded in encompassing narrative. Each stands alone, in and of itself" (Tobias, 1999, 11). Tobias interprets Krog's use of the fragment as a way of illustrating that she as author will not overtly mediate the voices of others but will let them speak for themselves, as far as this is possible. Those testifying all become the authors of their own stories and of the tales told of the deceased. The suggestion with Krog's use of the fragments of testimony is that the testifiers' stories are contributing to a re-narrativisation of South African history. This oral re-telling rejects the static, official and often repressive narrative of identity upheld by the National Party-led governments of the past. By using fragments of testimony in Country of My Skull, Krog emphasises that 'truth' should no longer reside in one dominant narrative, but should be dispersed and adapted into localised narratives to suit the different people of South Africa.

Krog's use of the fragment in Country of My Skull can also be explained by pointing towards her difficulty with the notion of 'truth' as it manifests itself in the name of the Commission. Often during the course of the hearings there are different versions of an event in the past that emerge, as different 'truths' are told by different people (Krog, 1998, 82). Krog wonders how these tales are going to be integrated by the TRC: "I compare versions of truth. Out of this must now be taken: The Truth?" (Krog, 1998, 89). Quoting journalist Michael Ignatieff, Krog makes a link between truth, narrative and identity: "what you believe to be true depends on who you believe yourself to be" (Krog, 1998, 99)¹⁴. Truth thus emerges as a relative concept, and it is in trying to give equal voice to the relative truths of the TRC testifiers that Krog employs the fragment.

The close connection between truth, narrative and identity problematises the search the narrator makes in the course of the book for her own truth. Where does her truth lie? In other words, who does she believe herself to be? Krog struggles with the role of the journalist that she must play in the context of the TRC: "I am not made to report on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission" (Krog, 1998, 36). It is problematic for her to attempt to be objective in the face of the emotionally draining testimonies and her own sense of involvement with the country's past. She recognises that the only way in which she would be able to come to terms with the TRC experience is by writing about it –the 'anarchic' space of writing gives her the freedom to explore different scenarios and possibilities: "neither truth nor reconciliation is part of my graphite when sitting in front of a blank page, rubber close at hand.[...] Something opens and something falls into this quiet space. A tone, an image, a line mobilizes completely. I become myself"(Krog, 1998, 36).

In contrast with the monolithic 'truth' of the apartheid era, defined by a collective mythical narrative, Krog states that in writing Country of My Skull she is busy with "my truth."(Krog, 1998, 171). The often harrowing experience of the TRC hearings has meant that Krog's truth, although individual, is at the same time " quilted together from hundreds of stories that we've experienced or heard in the last two years" (Krog, 1998, 171). The strength of the TRC lies in the fact that it allowed the narratives of the victims to be heard, narratives that affected the lives of those, like Krog, who chose to take them seriously: "perhaps these narratives alone are enough to justify the existence of the Truth Commission. Because of these narratives, people can no longer indulge in their separate dynasties of denial" (Krog, 1998, 89).

¹⁴ See Ignatieff, 1996, 110-112

One of the weaknesses of the TRC as far as Krog is concerned is that the Commission often seemed to generalise different perceptions of the 'truth'. The desire for everyone in the country to share the same idea of 'the truth' is clearly not a possibility: "it is asking too much that everyone should believe the Truth Commission's version of the Truth." (Krog, 1998, 89). Yet the Commission emphasises such a unifying wish, to the degree that Krog sometimes wonders whether the TRC is not forming a new mythical narrative of national consciousness, instead of providing a space in which all South Africans can begin to perceive each other as individuals: "Is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission then the equivalent of the symbolic Ossewa Trek of 1938 –a tool to create a particular nationalism rather than a new South African identity?" (Krog, 1998, 113). Other observers of the TRC process have also voiced this concern. Richard A. Wilson, for example, has noted that the TRC's narrative has a similar form to that of other nationalist narratives: "truth commissions are centrally involved in the narration of a shared non-ethnically marked nationalist history. Yet this constitutionalist historiography bears many formal attributes of other nationalist narratives" (Wilson, 1996, 15). In reacting against the national narrative of the past perpetuated by apartheid, it is perhaps inevitable that a counter-narrative be formed. Krog's concern lies with the way in which this new narrative is constructed, expressing the hope that, in distinction to the apartheid narrative, different 'truths', beliefs and perceptions will be welcomed.

As far as Krog is concerned, the closest one can get to a collective notion of 'truth' is by embracing as many different points of view as possible: "If [the Commission] sees truth as the widest possible compilation of people's perceptions, stories, *myths* and experiences, it will have chosen to restore memory and foster a new humanity, and perhaps that is justice in its deepest sense" (Krog, 1998, 16, my emphasis). It is significant that she does not support a total rejection of the past and its perceptions –rather Krog advocates knowledge and awareness of different points of view, as well as the acceptance of the myths of the past and their inherent danger –to ensure that such distorted myths of identity do not appear again.

Krog thus sees the emerging testimony as part of a dynamic and subtle process that tolerates differences and the varying perspectives of people's individual beliefs. Country of My Skull examines the sharp difference between the old and the new narratives of history later in the book, when the functioning of the mythical narrative of apartheid is contrasted with the way in which this myth is undermined by the poignancy and deep personal pain at the hearings. Krog tells of how, to take a break from the TRC hearings, she visits a childhood friend of hers who has a maid living in her back yard.

" 'Doesn't she miss her children?' [Krog] ask[s], thinking of the large families on the farm. 'Maids don't feel like other people about their children. They like to be rid of them'"(Krog, 1998, 190) is the response she gets from her friend.

This is a clear example of how easily aspects of the mythical narrative pervade ordinary people's lives. It is noteworthy that in the chapter immediately following on from this discussion, Krog should present the reader with the stories of the mothers of the 'Guguletu Seven' ¹⁵(see Krog, 1998, 191-194). Their powerful narratives of loss directly dispute the myth that 'maids don't miss their children' which was held as the truth by Krog's friend. Country of My Skull in this instance stages a contrast between the apartheid narrative of the past and the re-narrativisation made possible by TRC testimony.

Many of the intellectuals and academics writing about the effects of the victims' hearings have also emphasised the potential for reinvention and transformation, both on an individual and collective scale, that such tales could bring to a troubled country. Njabulo Ndebele, for instance, states that "the stories of the TRC seem poised to result in one major spin-off, among others: the restoration of narrative. In few countries in the contemporary world do we have a living example of people reinventing themselves through narrative" (Ndebele, 1998, 27). At the stage when she is witnessing many of the early victims' hearings, Krog seems to echo the positive nature of Ndebele's quote when she groups the fragments of victims' stories together under the title "To seize the surge of language by its soft, bare skull" (Krog, 1998, 27). The imagery of the birth of a new language suggests, rather jubilantly, that a new mode of expression has been brought into being, one not available before in South Africa, in which people previously relegated to the category of "Other" speak and are heard. She explains the silence of the past and the growth and development made possible by the tales told at the TRC hearings in this organic metaphor: "In the beginning it was seeing. Seeing for ages, filling the head with ash. No air. No tendril. Now to seeing, speaking is added and the eye plunges into the mouth. Present at the birth of this country's language itself" (Krog, 1998, 29).

¹⁵ The young men who were to become known as the 'Guguletu Seven' were approached and trained to resist the apartheid government by 'freedom fighters' who were in actual fact Security Branch spies. It seems that the Security Branch was attempting to infiltrate the resistance movement and to stem the tide of young fighters by eliminating them. Surprised by a Security Branch ambush in Guguletu, the young men were shot and killed although eyewitnesses insist that they had attempted to surrender. Most of the relatives of the men received the first news of their death when they saw the corpses of their loved ones on the television news that evening.

The stories told in this 'new language' have a considerable impact on the narrator, since witnessing narratives of trauma can have psychological implications for the listener. It seems that the witnesses have the tendency to become drawn into the act of testifying, and of sharing aspects of the pain and suffering of the victims. Dori Laub states that "the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event" (Laub, 1992, 57). This can be a disturbing experience, since "[the listener] comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels" (Laub, 1992, 58). The most extreme example of the effect that the narratives told at the TRC have on the witnesses is the stress developed by the translators at the hearings. Krog hears the following from a Tswana translator who is interviewed: "It is difficult to interpret victim hearings [...] because you use the first person all the time. I have no distance when I say 'I' ...it runs through me with I" (Krog, 1998, 129). In a sense, all of those listening to the testimony of the victims are translating the tales to themselves, being drawn into the experiences of the teller, but also making the testimony relevant to their own situation, their own life-story. Laub emphasises that "[the listener] does not become the victim –he preserves his own separate place, position and perspective: a battleground for forces raging inside himself [...]. The listener, therefore, has to be at the same time a witness to the trauma witness and a witness to himself"(Laub, 1992, 58). Krog, in writing *Country of My Skull*, is listening to the victims' tales from the perspective of an Afrikaner, and the book stages the 'battleground' for the realisations these stories provide for her.

The fact that the narrator, as a listener to these tales, becomes in a sense a fellow bearer of suffering, although not the victim, has both positive and negative consequences for her. On a positive note, Krog sees the TRC as having opened up new areas of contact between individuals, through the description and witnessing of pain. Krog seems especially drawn towards the testimony of the numerous women at the victims' hearings. A characteristic of the testimony heard at the TRC was the disproportionate amount of women who came to testify not about themselves, but of their sons, husbands and partners who had lost their lives in apartheid violence (see Ross, 1996, 6). This overflow of female testimony at the Human Rights hearings might well be a contributing factor to the profound effect that the tales have on the narrator. She tells one of her friends that "for me, it is a new beginning [...]. It is not about skin colour, culture, language, but about people. The personal pain puts an end to all stereotypes. Where we connect now has nothing to do with group or colour, we connect with our humanity" (Krog, 1998, 45). On the negative side, however, the impact of the day-by-day accumulation of stories of suffering soon starts taking its toll on her. The tales have a negative effect particularly on the Commissioners, journalists and translators working with the TRC on a daily basis, who unlike

the general public cannot switch off their televisions or radios when it becomes too much to bear:

"reporting on the Truth Commission indeed leaves most of us physically exhausted and mentally frayed. Because of language.

Week after week, from one faceless building to another, from one dusty, god-forsaken town to another, the arteries of our past bleed their own particular rhythm, tone and image. One cannot get rid of it. Ever. To have the voices of ordinary people dominate the news. To have no one escape the process."

(Krog, 1998, 37)

The connections, whether positive or negative, that the narrator feels she has with the sufferings of the victims, are complicated by the connections that she has as an Afrikaner to the culture that perpetrated many acts of violation. Upon hearing the names of the (often) Afrikaans perpetrators, she describes herself as "wordless, lost" (Krog, 1998, 44). The dedication of Country of My Skull reads that the book is "for every victim who had an Afrikaans surname on her lips". This re-emphasises the divide between the many female black and coloured testifiers at the victims' hearings, and the male, mostly white Afrikaans contingent at the perpetrator hearings. Krog herself cannot simply be classified as a 'victim' or a 'perpetrator'. As a white Afrikaans woman she partly inhabits both of these categories, although not belonging entirely to either one of them.

Creating a sense of self within the new collective

The manner in which Krog tackles her own sense of displacement between the major categories provided by the TRC indicates that Country of My Skull offers no easy solutions to the problems it poses. In the words of Wilhelm Verwoerd, philosophy professor, TRC researcher and grandson of the architect of apartheid ¹⁶, "in the past we had no choice but to live by simple white or black guidelines [...]. We must [now] try and make space for ambiguity"(Krog, 1998, 99). Krog's book plays around with the ambiguity of the narrator's position. Often during the course of the book, the narrator's opinions on issues related to her sense of self and her understanding of responsibility and guilt, for example, will be "unsettled and resituated, without being overwritten" (Spearey, 2000, 65). Krog's initial reaction to the first narrative, the narratives of

¹⁶ The Dutch-born Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd became the Minister of Native Affairs in 1950, and was Prime Minister from 1958 until 1966 when he was stabbed to death in Parliament by Dimitri Tsafendas. Leonard Thompson states that "during Verwoerd's premiership, apartheid became the most notorious form of racial domination that the postwar world has known" (Thompson, 2000, 189).

the victims, in this way becomes part of a much larger and longer process – one that chronicles her growing awareness of the complexities of identity and belonging.

Her frustration and anger at the nature of the amnesty hearings are because the perpetrators of the apartheid era do not, or can not depart from their mythical narratives, choosing to represent themselves through superficial 'reinventions' that, as I have attempted to show by using Benzien's testimony, were often not convincing. If the victims' hearings were instances of attempts at individual narrative invention, the confessions of the perpetrators could also be seen as attempts at reinvention, "in the sense that [their testimonies] strive to cast the perpetrators of innumerable brutalities as themselves victims, misled into unthinking allegiance to a political system which they now recognise as evil"(Heyns, 2000, 45).

It becomes clear to Krog that the TRC hearings dealing with the perpetrators have left gaps between individual and collective responsibility. She tackles this problem on a personal level in Country of My Skull as she tries to make sense of her response to the tales of the perpetrators. She decides that "what I have in common with them is a culture –and part of that culture over decades hatched the abominations for which they are responsible. In a sense it is not these men but a culture that is asking for amnesty"(Krog, 1998, 96).

Krog's attitude of collective complicity is met with negative responses from those who could be termed white apartheid beneficiaries. In Country of My Skull, she mentions that responses to her report on the TRC hearings and in particular her profiles on the 'Vlakplaas Five' are often from Afrikaners who want no part in the claims she makes during her reporting, or from English South Africans who claim that all the responsibility for the past should be placed on Afrikaners.¹⁷ Some Afrikaners merely deny having any knowledge of the deeds being committed in the name of their group and culture (see Krog, 1998, 97). Others confess their shame and repentance for what happened in the past, but do so through anonymous letters, indicating that the pressure of the group ethic is still at work and that they would not want the rest of their community to know what their real opinions are (see Krog, 1998, 46-47). And then there are those Afrikaners who attack Krog on a personal level as being a mouth-piece for the TRC, an organisation said to be out to undermine the Afrikaner culture. One letter reads: "The most important exponent of Boer-

¹⁷ A post-TRC survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation found that "the majority of white South Africans are unconvinced that they played a role in apartheid abuses [...] and over 40% of those surveyed think apartheid was a good idea, badly executed" (Theissen and Hamber, 1998).

hatred is that dissatisfied bush preacher of the Crying and Lying Commission [...]. Shame, the poor confused child. And she comes from such a good home" (Krog, 1998, 162). In a few words Krog the adult woman is reduced to an errant child who has strayed from the path to her father's house. A few pages later, Krog replicates another extract from a 'hate' letter that addresses her as "old Antjie Somers"¹⁸ (Krog, 1998, 164), suggesting that Krog is an unnatural and perverse character, who distorts the well-being of the Afrikaner through her political affiliations: "Are you still with your husband or have you found yourself a Hottentot, a weapon-bearer in your struggle against the National Party of which your father is/was such a loyal supporter?" (Krog, 1998, 164). Note that, in both these letters, Krog is defined in terms of men –her father, her husband, her 'Hottentot' lover. Clearly she is undermining the expectations that conservative Afrikaner society places on their women. The condescending tone of these letters reflects the hatred and underlying fear being projected on the narrator. By threatening the Afrikaners' myth of identity, which finds its expression in a lifestyle and a certain conception of the world, the narrator is constructed as an exile and an outcast by some members of the Afrikaner community.

Some of the reactions by critics to Krog's sense of complicity and guilt in Country of My Skull have also been to dismiss them. Three of the critics reviewing Krog's book have disparagingly noted Krog's feelings of guilt as a 'cloying', stifling emotion smacking of ego-centrism (see Ruden, 1999; Poyner, 2000 and Cook, 2001). Sarah Ruden has linked Krog's narrative stance of complicity with the perpetrators to the attitude of some South Africans who applied for amnesty for apathy (see Krog, 1998, 121), calling their feelings of guilt "[instances of] idleness and exhibitionism" (Ruden, 1999, 167). Jane Poyner states that "Krog's account expresses the self-aggrandising guilt of the Afrikaner liberal: the 'apologies' she submits for an inadvertent complicity in the apartheid regime [...] offer little in the way of progress towards a unified nation" (Poyner, 2000, 70). It is interesting to note their irritation with Krog's incessant emphasis on her own identity as an Afrikaner and the guilt that this produces. Ruden goes so far as to state that "Krog can approach a multi-racial matter only as an Afrikaner, not as a human being" (Ruden, 1999, 177).

In contrast to the gist of the three articles mentioned above, I would instead argue that guilt or a feeling of complicity can be the first step towards reinvention, and that the importance of the awareness of one's position as a white South African should not be dismissed so easily. Those who are willing to apply for amnesty for apathy, or who, like Krog, are willing to explore their

¹⁸ Antjie Somers was the name given to a figure from old Afrikaans folk tales. Somers' sex was reputedly male, but he often dressed in women's clothing and stole children who had misbehaved from their beds.

own sense of complicity, are not necessarily stepping into the exhibitionistic role of the guilty, but are paving the way for reinventions of identity that would not be possible otherwise. In an article entitled "The TRC and Apartheid Beneficiaries in a New Dispensation" Wilhelm Verwoerd has the following to say about white beneficiaries of the apartheid system admitting to their beneficiary status: "Perhaps we need to develop a different language of 'responsibility' to prevent understandable resistance [...] to being criminalised [...]. Perhaps we could speak of our 'response-ability' as beneficiaries, for what we do have control over is how we respond to the past" (Verwoerd, 2000). One of the striking features of Verwoerd's article, which echoes Krog's attitude in Country of My Skull, is his willingness to implicate himself in this search for 'response-ability' as he seeks to understand his own complicity: "ultimately the acceptance/rejection of the burden of being an apartheid beneficiary is for me a question of identity [...] it is about who I am and who we want to be in the new dispensation" (Verwoerd, 2000). Verwoerd emphasises that there is always an opportunity for reassessing and reshaping individual selves within a community or group. And it is also the case that an individual reassessment of identity can provide others in the group with the conviction and courage to also adapt their own identities. The following section will explore how Krog chooses to reinvent her sense of self and in so doing, how she also manages to develop the boundaries of what it means to be an Afrikaner.

Krog's poetic reinvention: the myth of the 'Country of her Skull'

Krog's book contains numerous poetic images and passages that display the narrator's mental wavering between a sense of despair and a sense of rejoicing at the problematic South African issues that the TRC has laid bare. Often these poetic images are concerned with the 'country of [her] skull'. When Krog is in despair about the future of the Afrikaners, for example, she says that "suddenly it is as if an undertow is taking me out...out...and out. And behind me sinks the country of my skull like a sheet in the dark"(Krog, 1998, 130-131). At a moment when she experiences an intense sense of belonging, and hope, in the future of South Africa, the imagery also conjures up the (physical) land of the country: "As I stand half-immersed in the grass [...] the voices from the town hall come drifting on the first winds blowing from the Malutis – the voices, all the voices of the land. The land belongs to the voices of those who live in it. My own bleak voice among them"(Krog, 1998, 210).

The poetic images and passages used in Country of My Skull seem to be a mechanism through which Krog is able to transcend and overcome the complexities of reality. Through poetic

imagery, she can explore extreme possibilities of hope and redemption, of belonging to a South African group that oversteps all barriers of race, as well as examining the proverbial worst-case scenarios, "of being trapped in an inherited identity [of the Afrikaners] and remaining subject to Biblical revenge"(Olivier, 1998, 223). The 'country of [her] skull' is part of the writer's transcending impulse –an intensely personal construction in which certain possibilities for the country's future are played out. For Krog the poet, the conception of the personally idealised country is a theme which had its beginnings in her 1969 poem called '*My Mooi Land*' ('My Beautiful Land'). This controversial piece, written by the then eighteen-year-old poet, criticised the apartheid government and advocated freedom of thought and action. Due to pressure from the government censors, the poem was not included in Krog's first poetry volume *Dogter van Jefta*.¹⁹ It is included here in full to illustrate the prevalence of the theme of the imagined/constructed country in Krog's writing.

my beautiful land

look, I build myself a land
where skin colour doesn't count
only the inner brand of self

where no goat face in parliament
can keep things permanently verkrampt

where I can love you
can lie beside you in the grass
without saying 'I do'

where we sing with guitars at night
where we bring gifts of white jasmine

where I don't have to poison you
when foreign doves coo in my hair

¹⁹ The poem did, however, reach the political prisoners being held by the apartheid government on Robben Island: "When the first political prisoners were released from Robben Island, Ahmed Kathrada read it to an audience of thousands at a mass rally in Soweto at the end of October 1989, mentioning the hope that words of an Afrikaans child had instilled among those held captive on the island"(Publisher's note, Krog, 2000b, 5).

where no court of law
will deaden the eyes of my children

where black and white hand in hand
can bring peace and love
in my beautiful land
(Krog, 2000b, 11)

Krog's construction of the idealised 'country' or community is an impulse which has been present in her work throughout its development. Speaking specifically of Country of My Skull, Johan Snyman notes that "her poetic images conjure up something analogous to Habermas' utopian (or regulative) notion of an ideal speech community, a society free to communicate and free from any kind of coercion" (Snyman, 1999, 294). In a review of Krog's book, Frederik van Zyl Slabbert calls the 'country of [her] skull' an "inaccessible moral pantomime"(van Zyl Slabbert, 1998, 31, my translation), implying that her projection of possibilities is irrelevant because it has no connection with reality. It seems to me, however, that Krog's internalised 'country' is an image through which she explores a kind of individual mythical narrative, and that this is an extremely relevant pursuit since it promises the construction of a new sense of identity, one from which other people can draw courage to elaborate their own sense of self. Len Bloom notes that "myths are our dramatised defences against our pasts, the present and the future [...]. [They] are far more than a retreat from reality: individually and collectively they are constructions of a dreamlike personal world that provides an alternative existence free of the dangers of the real world"(Bloom, 2000, 45). In the sense that Bloom explains it here, Krog's book and its transcending impulses do share characteristics with the distorted narrative of apartheid. In both instances the narratives suggest alternatives to the everyday reality. However, while the dysfunctional myths of Nazi Germany and apartheid South Africa nurtured "self-deception" (Bloom, 2000, 48) and problematic constructions of self on an individual and collective scale, Krog's narrative emphasises the need for new mythical narratives and identities that provide the means for South Africans to maintain a multi-faceted dialogue with each other. Such a dialogue would foster understanding and would "compromise, accommodate, provide, make space for"(Krog, 1998, 36) the voices, opinions and perspectives of others. Krog's myth of the 'country' is, then, providing an idealised space in which she herself, and other South Africans, can unquestionably belong to a South African collective, perhaps a space in which individual

narratives of identity, group identities and the collective mythical narrative can co-exist in harmony.

Krog is aware of the problematic position of Afrikaner culture after the ravages of the apartheid era. As a writer and poet, she is particularly conscious of the violence that was perpetrated in her language, Afrikaans. It was literally the language in which the orders for police atrocities were given, but on an ideological level, Afrikaans was also the main carrier of the apartheid discourse. Krog acknowledges the complicity of Afrikaner culture and its language in the wrongs of apartheid in an excerpt from the poem translated as 'Country of grief and grace':

*ons dra die dood die huis binne
en 'n taal sonder genade
alles ruik ineens na geweld*

we carry death into the houses
and a language without mercy
suddenly everything smells of violence

die dood klap sy beroulose kleppe in ons taal

death snaps its relentless valves in our
language

ja, die onverdroete deeglike dood

yes, indefatigable meticulous death

(Krog, 2000a, 39,)

(Krog, 2000b, 97)

It is interesting to compare the agendas of the German poet Paul Celan and Antjie Krog in this instance. Both of these writers are/were inextricably connected to their mother tongues as their means of poetic communication. Yet both these mother tongues, German and Afrikaans, were beset, in the poets' particular eras, by mythical narratives that rationalised inhumanity and violence. Paul Celan experienced the cruelty of the Nazi regime first hand – his parents were killed in a work camp and he barely escaped with his own life (Felman, 1992, 26). He spent most of the rest of his life outside the borders of Germany, yet he continued to write in his mother tongue, the language of "his own unique truth" (Felman, 1992, 26) which painfully provided him with "an indissoluble connection to the language of the murderers of his own parents" (Felman, 1992, 26-27). Celan's poetry explores ways to redefine German into a language that can carry the horrific weight of his 'truth': "the poems dislocate the language so as to remould it, to radically shift its semantic and grammatical assumptions and remake – creatively and critically – a new poetic language entirely Celan's own" (Felman, 1992, 27). It is my contention that Krog is also attempting, in her poetry, to bring redefinition to Afrikaans, the language of apartheid. While Celan's poetry turns 'inwards', making German into the poet's own personal language, Krog uses

her personal love for the language as a basis from which Afrikaans can be spread as the language of many different South Africans, not just white Afrikaners.

The bleak vision of Afrikaans as the language of violence and death in 'Country of grief and grace' is countered by images that celebrate compassion and humanity, especially in terms of language. The following excerpt from the same poem indicates that the experiences of listening to the stories at the TRC have initiated the hope of a shared language and understanding between people. The excerpt addresses those testifying at the hearings:

<i>jy gee nie op nie</i>	you do not give up
<i>jy trap 'n voetpad oop met seer versigtige stappies</i>	you tread open a footpath with slow painful steps
<i>jy sny my los</i>	you cut me loose
<i>in lig in –liefliker, ligter en kraniger as lied</i>	into light- lovelier, lighter and braver than song
<i>mag ek jou vashou my suster</i>	may I hold you my sister
<i>in die brose oopvou van 'n nuwe, enkele medewoord</i>	in this fragile unfolding of a new, single shared word
(Krog, 2000a, 41, excerpt from poem)	(Krog, 2000b, 99, my translation)

It must be said that the impact of this poem is much more powerful in the Afrikaans version, partly because to read the poem in Afrikaans is to experience how Krog is redefining the language as one of shared humanity. The following example from the same poem will be used to illustrate the impact of the Afrikaans being used:

<i>'n punt</i>	a moment
<i>'n lyn wat sê: van hier af</i>	a line which says:
<i>van dié moment af</i>	from this point onwards
<i>gaan dit anders klink</i>	it is going to sound differently
<i>want al ons woorde lê naas mekaar op die tafel</i>	because all our words lie next to each other on the table now
<i>bibberend van die kleur van mens</i>	shivering in the colour of human

(Krog, 2000a, 43, excerpt from poem)

(Krog, 2000b, 100)

In the original Afrikaans version, Krog writes of all our words lying next to each other on the table "bibberend van die kleur van mens"(Krog, 2000a, 43). The reference to "die kleur van mens" ('the colour of human') is reminiscent of the Afrikaans word "menskleur" (literally: 'human colour'). The English equivalent for this term is 'flesh coloured'. Afrikaans children who grew up in the time of apartheid were taught that 'menskleur' was the descriptive name of a colour crayon that had a pinkish tone. It was expected that white people were to be drawn and 'coloured' by this specific colour crayon, indicating their status as 'humans'. Blacks and coloureds could not be drawn with this crayon, because they looked different, and thus their status as humans was affected in the minds of the children seemingly learning only about drawing and colouring. Afrikaans as the language of apartheid thus made the category of 'human' into one exclusively held by the whites. Krog's poem, in contrast, explodes the limiting meaning of 'menskleur' and constructs it instead as a way to prove the equality of all people: all our words are equal, lying scattered together on the table, and all these words are tinted in "die kleur van mens" ('the colour of human').

More examples of the way in which Krog attempts to expand the reach of Afrikaans can be seen in *Kleur Kom Nooit Alleen Nie* (literally: 'Colour never comes alone'), Krog's latest volume of Afrikaans poetry which was published two years after *Country of My Skull* in 2000. In the first section of *Kleur*, Krog's 'six narratives of the Richtersveld', tell the tales of the people of this arid northern region of South Africa and their relationship with the Great Gariep river, formerly known as the Orange River. Through the narratives of these Afrikaans-speaking farmers of Nama descent, Krog grows excited at the richness and complexity of an Afrikaans no longer tied to a specific white identity. In 'the Great Gariep' the narrator marvels: "'Dwyka-ys' is a name in my language/ and granite of the 'Violdrifsuite!'" (Krog, 2000a, 14, my translation). In 'narrative outside the park' Krog hosts the words of one Susara Domroch:

'nee Oupa Madela vir hom stem ek
hoekom is om Nama te wees vandag om iets te wees?

omdat ons nou ons eie woord is
onder die ou regerings was ons hulle woord

oor jarre is ons uitgedryf na die bar plekke

'no, Oupa Mandela, I vote for him

why is it that being a Nama today
means something?

because we are now our own word
under the old governments we were
their word

over the years we were driven out to
the barren places

Kleurling Reserves
ons was niks
maar vandag is ons iets'

(Krog, 2000a, 16)

Coloured Reserves
we were nothing
but today we are something'

(my translation)

The woman's words indicate the change that Afrikaans has undergone, from the official language of the apartheid discourse, which prescribed identities: "under the old government we were their word", to a language in which "[they] are now [their] own word". Krog aims, through her poetry, to structure Afrikaans into a language of dialogue and reciprocity. In her vision, Afrikaans must assume its rightful position as a language of Africa, and a language of a shared humanity.

She thus proposes a new narrative of identity for Afrikaners in the South African context by her elaboration of the nature of Afrikaans, implying that Afrikaners are Africans. In constructing her mythical narrative of the 'country' and specifically by describing a new type of belonging for Afrikaners in Africa, Krog turns her back on the European perspective and attitude towards the continent. Sarah Nuttall notes that "whiteness as a general category carries what [Krog] perceives to be a European inflection which she rejects, [...] thus reinstating a sense of ethnic difference and history into the term whiteness"(Nuttall, 2000, 12).

In Country of My Skull, Krog develops a dismissive attitude towards foreign journalists who enter South Africa to report on the TRC: "Perplexed, we listen to the sharp, haughty questions posed by foreign journalists –those who jet into the country [and] attend one day's hearings [...] nothing fits into their operating frameworks"(Krog, 1998, 33). As far as Krog is concerned, these foreigners do not understand enough of the context and long historical background that led to the development of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and therefore do not have the right to criticise or question the hearings. At a later stage of the book, Krog is asked to meet with a European interested in employing her to help expose some of the alleged 'dark dealings' of the Truth Commission, to reveal that "there is a deal between the ANC and the Truth Commission"(Krog, 1998, 223). He urges her to see the TRC from his (European) perspective, as a matter of distanced interest: "Do not always look at the Truth Commission as a whole, but focus on what is in it that makes it worthwhile to all of us"(Krog, 1998, 223-224). Krog is dismayed by his cynical attitude towards the TRC and his desire to undermine the process. She says "suddenly I want to go home. I have nothing to say to his 'all of us' [...]. He wants me to deal with the Truth Commission as if from the heart of a different life"(Krog, 1998, 223-224). In

this passage Krog distances herself from her ancestral European connections while maintaining her involvement with Africa. Another critical moment of awareness and identity development in Country of My Skull occurs when Krog attends a poetry festival on a former slave island off the coast of Senegal. Here both African and European poets share their poetic skills with the festival goers. Some of the European poets, specifically the Dutch, are depicted critically in Krog's book as ignorant of Africa and literally unsuited to its climate. One of the Dutch poets refuses to read his poetry unless he is wearing a freshly ironed suit, for example (see Krog, 1998, 221). When the poets from West Africa perform, the same Dutch poet is critical of their content: "Rubbish! Clichés! Nothing but clichés about blood and land!" (Krog, 1998, 221), he says. Krog notes that she is "uncomfortable with how easily Europeans write off our continent –never as 'different to', only as 'less than'" (Krog, 1998, 221). For her, as for many South Africans and Africans, the issue of 'blood and land' is not a cliché, but a historical problem that still manifests itself in politics and in everyday life. Through these experiences in Country of My Skull Krog comes to a deeper realisation of the complexities of her identity, the identity of her ethnic group and a possible way in which the group can relate to Africa.

Krog's reinvention of herself as an Afrikaner who is also an African has interesting implications for her understanding of relations between the different groups in South Africa. Just as she develops her new sense of self by rejecting her connections to Europe, Krog also "expresses strong animosity towards what she perceives to be some of the dominant traits of white English-speaking South Africa" (Nuttall, 2000, 12). Her use of Afrikaans terms for certain descriptions within the English text of Country of My Skull is one example of the way in which she veers towards a more Afrikaner-orientated subjectivity, even when writing in English. Krog also explains that "I wrote the text [of Country of My Skull] in Afrikaans and translated it myself into English, keeping the underlying structure and rhythm intact. In this way I came to feel completely integrated with the book" (Krog, 2000b, 3). Her wish to maintain the Afrikaans-base of the book in the South African edition of Country of My Skull through its generous use of that language's terminology has led to critics (such as Sarah Ruden) complaining about the inaccessibility of the text: "She is ungenerous in history, in the translation of Afrikaans, and in countless other kinds of accommodation. The glossary at the end is perfunctory..." (Ruden, 1999, 172).

Zoe Wicomb notes that in the new political era in South Africa, Afrikaner writers are involved in "textual strategies for refiguring Afrikanerhood in relation to whiteness" (Wicomb, 1998, 363). Since being an Afrikaner has become "a disgraced category" (Wicomb, 1998, 382) in the context

of the TRC, a rehabilitation/reinvention of the group seems urgent. In the time of Nationalist Party rule, white subjectivity comprised both Afrikaner and English identities, as both groups were constructed as superior in the mythical narrative of apartheid. "Whiteness" was the major indicator of identity in this era. In the new post-apartheid political context, Wicomb is interested to note that some of the Afrikaner intellectuals and writers, such as Krog, are disavowing this understanding of 'white subjectivity', and are more interested in being depicted in connection to and in terms of "alterity" (Wicomb, 1998, 365) and "blackness"(Wicomb, 1998, 377).

Wicomb mentions some complex examples in *Country of My Skull* that explore this 'rehabilitation of whiteness', and imply that Krog wants to "forge a link through suffering and victim status between black and Afrikaner"(Wicomb, 1998, 370). Although the forging of an African identity for the Afrikaner becomes one of *Country of my Skull's* themes as the book progresses, the importance of this theme only becomes clear when Krog's book is placed in the context of her poetic endeavours after 1998. I found the clearest example of the link between black and Afrikaner subjectivity being made not in the book, but in Krog's poetry volume *Kleur kom nooit alleen nie*. This volume contains a poem entitled "dagboeke uit die begin van die twintigste eeu" (diaries from the start of the twentieth century), and another entitled "dagboeke uit die laaste deel van die twintigste eeu" (diaries from the last part of the twentieth century). The first poem deals with the group of victims of the Anglo-Boer War in South Africa –the Afrikaner women and children who died in the British-ruled concentration camps. The following is an excerpt from the poem:

*swaar reëns val elke aand
en weer om middernag
snags is die plek 'n vloed*

heavy rains fall every night
and again at midnight
at night the place is a flood

*ons lê ons
probeer slaap
in 'n paar duim modder*

we lie we
try to sleep
in inches of mud

*die storm woed deurnag
die lykshuis se tent waai weg
die volgende oggend lê hulle daar*

the storm rages throughout the night
the mortuary tent blows away
the next morning they lie there

*rye en rye deurweekte lyke
hare wild*

rows and rows of drenched bodies
wild hair

oe en monde gesper teen die hittige son

eyes and mouths wrenched open against the warm

	sun
<i>ek kyk nie weer op nie</i>	I don't look up again
<i>jou roes vlegsels het ek vir 'n oomblik sien hang</i>	I saw your rusty plait hanging for a moment
 (Krog, 2000a, 29)	 (my translation)

The second poem, 'diaries from the last part of the twentieth century' deals with the victims of apartheid violence, who came to tell their stories at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings:

<i>ek sien my kind</i>	I see my child
<i>hy slaap tussen tyres</i>	he sleeps between tyres
<i>daar's skuim om sy mond</i>	there's foam around his mouth
<i>hy's miskien reeds dood</i>	he might already be dead
<i>hulle trek hom uit die bak</i>	they pull him out
<i>hulle gooi hom op die grond</i>	they throw him on the ground
<i>hulle weier dat ek hom vashou</i>	they forbid me to hold him
<i>my voordeursleutel val op die grond</i>	the key to my front door falls to the ground
 (Krog, 2000a, 33)	 (my translation)

Krog's poetry connects Afrikaner and black subjectivity by suggesting that both groups' women and children suffered in the context of South Africa's often brutal history. The connection staged between black and Afrikaner in this instance reflects Krog's wish for dialogue and reciprocity between the different groups in South Africa –she feels that these different communities do have something in common: a shared sense of suffering to be used as a foundation from which they can build a better relationship. While Wicomb in her article suggests that Krog sees mutual victim status as the *only* way in which Afrikaner and black subjectivity can meet on an equal footing, it does not seem to me that Krog indicates that this is the case. It is merely one way in which Afrikaners and blacks, and specifically the women of both groups, can attempt to relate to one another. Afrikaner and black men would need other ways to relate to each other, perhaps through the similar patriarchal structure of their different communities.

In "*Kleur Kom Nooit Alleen Nie*" it becomes clear that Krog is seeking a reinvention of identity for Afrikaners and all South Africans by attempting to define relations between herself as a

South African and the rest of the continent of Africa. The narrator's journey throughout this poetry volume, whether a physical or mental experience, is connected to the imagery of rivers. Starting off the volume are the poems on the Richtersveld and the Great Gariep River, which forms one of South Africa's natural boundaries to the north. The Orange River, as it was called in the apartheid era, was considered an important national symbol for the Afrikaner. It was renamed to the Great Gariep, the Nama term for the river, in the period after transition to a democratic South Africa. In Krog's poems about the Richtersveld, the narrator acknowledges the beauty of the river and its importance as a provider of water and life. At the same time, however, the Great Gariep is also depicted in one of the poems, "narratief van die parkboer" (narrative of the parkboer) as a river of blood, oozing from a wound:

*ek slaap op die wal van Die Rivier
die hele nag vloei dit stil en breed verby my

soos bloed
uit 'n wond – [...]*

(Krog, 2000a, 26, excerpt)

I sleep on the bank of The River
the whole night it flows quietly and
broadly past me
like blood
from a wound – [...]

(my translation)

It is interesting to note that the Great Gariep was the image that the academic and political analyst Neville Alexander suggested would best describe the new South African nation²⁰: "We dream of a South Africa which is like the Great Gariep, constituted by the confluence of many different tributaries, which have their origin in different catchment areas and which are constantly changing and being changed both by the formation of new tributaries and by the backwash effects from the mainstream, which flows majestically into the great ocean of humanity" (Alexander, 1996, 107). In the case of the poems in "*Kleur Kom Nooit Alleen Nie*", Krog is also using the idea of the Great Gariep as a symbol for the South African nation, but unlike Alexander does not immediately idealise the possibilities of belonging to a unified democratic country. Her image of the river as a flow of blood suggests that the destruction and pain inherent to South Africa's past is a wound that has yet to heal. Her solution to how the oppressive nature of South Africa's past can be overcome is made in the poetry in the form of images of the Niger river. Krog thus makes a connection between the Great Gariep and the Niger, between South African identity and African identity, in an attempt to formulate a solution

to how South Africans are going to overcome their past in order to secure their future. Her suggestion is that it is only through making meaningful connections with the broader context of Africa that South Africans are going to be able to construct lasting and non-oppressive identities for themselves. Krog's poetic imagery of the Niger river is a way to describe and explore a sense of collective narrative and identity that does not stultify or attempt to stabilise individuals within its boundaries, but instead allows for identities to be formed within a fluid and ever-changing environment. In a poem called "*rivier*" (river), Krog introduces the imagery of the Niger river:

<p><i>die Niger verwoes wie 'n enkele mond probeer vind</i></p> <p><i>want die Niger het vele monde</i></p> <p><i>die Niger gee asem</i></p> <p><i>die Niger smelt grense aan sy flanke</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;"><i>wat voortdreun as ondergrondse geheue</i></p> <p><i>as spleet van belofte</i></p> <p><i>nie van wees nie</i></p> <p><i>maar van word</i></p>	<p>the Niger destroys those who try to find a single mouth</p> <p>because the Niger has many mouths</p> <p>the Niger gives breath</p> <p>the Niger melts boundaries on his flanks</p> <p>that roar on as underground memory</p> <p>as fissure of promise</p> <p>not of being</p> <p>but of becoming</p>
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(Krog, 2000a, 97, excerpt)

(my translation)

The lines at the end of the above extract, "not of being /but becoming" signify the ideal of the dynamic nature of an African identity that the narrator, as a South African, could also inhabit. These lines are repeated in a poem called "*boot*" (boat), of which an excerpt follows below:

<p><i>die rivier ken geen grens nie</i></p> <p><i>die rivier raak altyd alle kante</i></p> <p><i>die rivier maak meer as een wees</i></p> <p><i>moontlik</i></p> <p><i>in hierdie breë skittering van water en lig</i></p> <p><i>maling en loom</i></p> <p><i>kom al die rowe in my los</i></p> <p><i>iets –nie van wees nie</i></p> <p><i>maar van word</i></p>	<p>the river knows no boundary</p> <p>the river always touches all sides</p> <p>the river makes to be more than one possible</p> <p>in this broad shimmering of water and light</p> <p>eddying and drowsiness</p> <p>all the scars in me are loosened</p> <p>something –not of being</p> <p>but of becoming</p>
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²⁰ | gratefully acknowledge Louise Viljoen's input in pointing out the importance of the river imagery in *Kleur Kom Nooit Alleen Nie* and specifically for referring me to Neville Alexander's article.

Through her often painful experiences at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recorded in Country of My Skull and through the poetry written as a result of this experience, Krog attempts to trace possibilities for herself, the Afrikaner people and all South Africans to be released from the legacy of the apartheid narrative, from what she terms "the tyranny of one" (Krog, 2000a, 100). Her wish is that white South Africans and Afrikaners in particular should move beyond the static and stifling identities constructed for them by the Afrikaner mythical narrative, and reinvent themselves as South Africans who are able to negotiate the artificial boundaries the myth established between themselves and other communities. Senses of belonging in the new South African context, as far as Krog is concerned, should not depend on a mythical narrative of identity that is built on other people's silence or deprivation. Rather, the river imagery of some of Krog's poems suggests that belonging to post-apartheid South Africa is a process of interaction and dynamic interchange, similar to the flowing waters of the Niger river, which also makes South Africans aware of their position in an African context.

As new myths and constructions of South African identity emerge in the country's public discourse, it would be good to remember Krog's narrative of potential belonging ("of becoming") that emphasises the importance of always developing identities that are able to include differing perspectives and other voices. Myths of collective identity have the tendency to easily develop into oppressive narratives. If the destructive potential of the oppressive myth of the past is not taken to heart, history has a habit of repeating itself.

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