

## Shaping the Jewish South African Story: Imprints of Memories, Shadows and Silences

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Storytelling is the thread connecting history, memory and imagination, piecing together alternate truths, unravelling forgotten memories, and making meaning for the teller and her audience. This paper examines the relationship between theory, history and imagination and their combined influence on this writer's work of fiction.

I was born into the South African Jewish community, a homogenous group that migrated from Lithuania around the turn of the twentieth century to seek an alternative to growing antisemitism and poverty, only to find themselves enmeshed in another form of oppression – apartheid – but this time embedded on the side of the oppressor.

Antisemitism, the Holocaust, and apartheid permeated the psyche of all Jews in South Africa, and yet the imprints of shadows and silences exhibited themselves in contrasting responses to oppression – ranging from those who supported and benefited from apartheid to opponents and activists who fought the system from within and without.

This article is based on the unexpected outcomes of my PhD which comprised two components: a novel and accompanying dissertation. What I found was that the two streams – creative and academic – fed and nurtured one another to bring to the surface stories that had been generated by academic reading, personal, collective and submerged memories of a diasporic community, and imagination.

### Brief overview of the Jewish migration

Modern South African society was built on a stratified structure of ethnic segmentation. The Cape was first colonised by the Dutch in 1652, and thereafter by settlers from the Netherlands, Britain, France, Germany and Portugal. In addition, slaves and indentured labourers were brought from Indonesia, India, Ceylon, Madagascar and Mozambique. They were classified as non-whites and led segregated lives. Below them on the scale in terms of recognition and entitlement were the local indigenous people and the Africans.

The first Jews arrived soon after white settlement began, but migration reached its peak between the 1880s and 1930s with the arrival of 40,000 'Russian Jews', a group of impoverished, working class Lithuanians who were fleeing antisemitism in Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Classification of these Eastern European Jews was slightly more complicated: they were rejected by the Europeans for appearing to be not entirely white or Western European and were depicted as dishonest, cunning and 'the devious knave' in antisemitic stories and cartoons that appeared in both English and Afrikaans

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Virtual Jewish History Tour: South Africa,' *Jewish Virtual Library*, ed. Rebecca Weiner, 2006, Chevy Chase, Maryland, 14 May 2006, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org>

newspapers from the 1870s.<sup>2</sup> However, the Lithuanians prided themselves on their intellectualism, having been strongly influenced by the eighteenth century scholar-sage, the Gaon of Vilna (1720-1797); contribution to society, concern for the community, philanthropy and charity were parts of their tradition. Religion and the synagogue were also central. Thus the majority initially clustered together and developed their own, cohesive, separate Jewish identity, but soon followed the tradition, set by earlier Jews, 'of rapid adaptation to the South African way of life in language, in social aspiration, in economic and civil integration'.<sup>3</sup>

In the early years of the twentieth century, the transformation of South Africa from a rural to an industrial nation began, based on the country's wealth of natural resources and cheap labour. The Jewish community was part of this surge: by working hard they took advantage of the economic opportunities and eventually claimed as their just reward a position at the forefront of commerce, trade and manufacturing, as well as in as professions such as medicine, accounting and law, and in civic, cultural and intellectual endeavours. W.B. Humphreys, M.P., addressed Parliament in 1930: 'I maintain that the Jews are an asset to the country. ... if it were not for that section of the community, this country today would still be cattle farming on the site where Johannesburg stands'.<sup>4</sup>

The South African Jewish community was struck by a dilemma: while endeavouring to conform and improve their personal circumstances, they faced a government that was overtly antisemitic and supported racism. By the mid-1930s the undercurrents of formalised antisemitism had strengthened, with the National Party's support of Nazi ideology becoming more vocal, resulting in fear and vulnerability that would remain among the Jews for decades.

Regardless of the political backdrop, the Jewish community was established and thriving by the end of the 1940s. The response of the majority of migrants had been 'fleeing isolation and the stigma of difference by conspicuously embracing the political and racial assumptions of white South Africa'.<sup>5</sup> When the National Party won the 1948 election, it sent a 'tremor of fear' down the spines of Jewish adults, the majority of whom had not forgotten their escape from pogroms. But they sought safety through silence and connivance, and sought good relations with the new government.<sup>6</sup>

After the election, Prime Minister Malan met with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the community's representative body, and promised there would

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<sup>2</sup> Milton Shain, *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa*, (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Gustav Saron, 'The Making of South African Jewry,' *South African Jewry: a survey of the Jewish community, its contributions to South Africa, directory of communal institutions, and who's who of leading personalities*, ed. Leon Feldberg, (Fieldhill Publishing, 1965) 23.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Shain 139.

<sup>5</sup> James Campbell, 'Beyond the Pale: Jewish Immigration and the South African Left', *Memories, Realities and Dreams: Aspects of the South African Jewish Experience*, eds. Milton Shain and Richard Mendelsohn, (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2000) 160.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Pogrund, 'Why SA's Jews Feared the Nats,' *Mail & Guardian* April 4-10 1997.

be no antisemitic legislation or behaviour on the part of his government. At that time the world was reeling from the shock of the Holocaust, and Malan, sympathetic towards Jewish nationalism, paid a visit to the fledgling State of Israel. There was a real shift away from blatant antisemitism: the National Government wanted to unite all whites in their fight against the perceived African threat and even allowed Jews to join their Party in 1951.

The Board of Deputies worked hard at demonstrating its loyalty to the new government and trying to win its approval, but at the same time the community maintained its distance and seclusion, still feeling threatened by the potential risk of antisemitism. Saron reinforced this notion when he wrote in 1965 about how the Jews had succeeded in striking roots and making great contributions to the development of the country, but had successfully managed to transplant their religious and cultural heritage, adapting and thriving in the new conditions.<sup>7</sup>

Not all Jews accepted or supported apartheid. While overall white resistance to apartheid was small, a disproportionately large number of the activists was Jewish, even though the Jewish population never exceeded much more than four per cent of the white population.<sup>8</sup> Opposition ranged from liberals and civil libertarians – particularly as strong supporters of the Progressive Party – to those who risked life and livelihood by fighting to overthrow the regime through membership of the South African Communist Party and the African National Congress. At the Treason Trial (1956–1961), 156 activists were found not guilty of plotting to overthrow the government; of the 23 whites, 15 were Jewish, as was the leader of their defence team, Issie Maisels. In 1963 Nelson Mandela was arrested at Rivonia with, among others, five whites who were all Jewish. Percy Yutar, the senior public prosecutor who sentenced him to life imprisonment, was also Jewish. Others chose to leave South Africa rather than stay and acquiesce to apartheid: between 1970 and 1992, more than 39,000 Jews left the country.

The source of this political awareness was the General Jewish Labour Union of Lithuania, Poland and Russia Bund, a working class movement of Jewish socialist organisations founded in Lithuania in 1897. A number of Bundists emigrated to South Africa where they formed similar organisations. The Bundists were responsible, along with British anarchists, for bringing communism to South Africa. This, together with black nationalism, was the starting point for the black liberation struggle.<sup>9</sup>

Suttner has documented how Jews who fought apartheid had been significantly influenced by their Jewish identity.<sup>10</sup> In memoirs and interviews they have commented that the Holocaust made a lasting impression on them and that they were keenly aware of the links between the National Party and the Nazi Party.

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<sup>7</sup> Saron 29.

<sup>8</sup> Gideon Shimoni, *Community and Conscience: The Jews in Apartheid South Africa*, (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 2003) 2.

<sup>9</sup> Veronica Belling, *The Price They Paid: A Bibliographical Survey of the Memoirs of the Jews in the Struggle for Democracy and Human Rights in South Africa*, eds. Joan Biella and Elana Gensler (37th Annual Convention of the Association of Jewish Libraries, June 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Immanuel Suttner, *Cutting through the Mountain: Interviews with South African Jewish Activists*, (Johannesburg: Viking Penguin, 1997) 1-2.

However, when they joined the resistance movements, few of them voiced these concerns as Jews, submerging their Jewish identities into their political lives. Suttner calls them ‘non-Jewish Jews’ because they acted as Jews and had their activism rooted in perspectives and qualities that were uniquely Jewish, but they did not identify with the Jewish community and its values.<sup>11</sup>

Those who identified most strongly as Jews remained within the community and openly disapproved of the opponents of apartheid – they were written off and written out of Jewish consciousness during the apartheid years.

Ironically many Jews who lived in South Africa never considered themselves as immigrants or as a group that held the promise of permanence. Jews on both sides of the divide saw themselves as unwilling bystanders and outsiders. Lynn Freed, a South African-born writer, sees her Jewish family as temporary sojourners in Africa and says she felt displaced and always would.<sup>12</sup>

In his book *White Scars*, Denis Hirson, the son of a Jewish activist who was imprisoned during the apartheid era, suggests new term – the ‘unsettled’ – to describe those who came, or whose ancestors came, to a new country or place, especially in the colonial era, yet who refuse to settle into colonial comfort, preferring to maintain a restless stance which needles local settlers and more particularly those in power: an uncolonist.<sup>13</sup> He writes that his family never contemplated themselves as immigrant or any other category that held the promise of permanence:

Settling was something we did not do. If I try to think of my father’s parents in these terms ... then I see them as stuck rather than settled. .... My father, deeply committed to the cause of struggle in apartheid South Africa, was about as settled as the sticks of dynamite which his group of saboteurs planted under pylons outside Johannesburg.

... Sensitivity to injustice came to us out of an awareness of what was happening to blacks under apartheid, but also out of our Jewish background, the one we had some difficulty bringing to the foreground. My four grandparents had left behind them the shtetls and pogroms of Russia and Latvia. My mother’s mother had lost much of her immediate family to a combination of Germans and antisemitic Russians. Somewhere between the backs and fronts of our minds, the shadows of these events went sliding, all the more substantial since they remained unspoken, dumb heralds of the wider field of Jewish history.

When it came to this history, and the notion of planting ourselves anywhere, could it ultimately be denied that we were of the Hebrews, a word which according to one interpretation means ‘those who cross over’? Were we not crossers of borders, nomads in the way station of the suburbs?<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Suttner 601.

<sup>12</sup> Lynn Freed, *Reading, Writing, and Leaving Home*, (Melbourne: Scribe, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Denis Hirson, *White Scars*, (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2006) 118.

<sup>14</sup> Hirson 119.

### Exploring memory, history and fiction

Hayden White is one of the academics who changed the way the world viewed history: in *Metahistory* (1973) he writes of history as the telling of a story, a representation and interpretation of the past, utilising language to help people make meaning for their world.<sup>15</sup> He introduces the notion that the power to shape history has been removed from the hands of the historians and placed with the people who lived through the event – the silenced victims, the defeated – and their descendants. Pierre Nora calls this ‘ideological decolonisation’, that is, the reunification of liberated peoples with their long-term memories which had been confiscated, destroyed or manipulated by dictatorial and/or colonial regimes.<sup>16</sup>

Nora provides an overview of the contemporary perspective on history, the upsurge of memory and its relationship with history. He writes of stockpiling, the recovery the past by reconstructing it in monumental detail with the aid of documents and archives including museums, heritage sites, historical novels and films and academic history texts, which invite us to enter into an empathetic relationship with people of the past: to imagine their experiences and feelings, mourn their suffering and deaths, and celebrate their triumphs.<sup>17</sup> He also refers to the flood of ‘memorial concerns’ establishing strong links between respect for the past and a sense of belonging, the collective consciousness and individual self-awareness, memory and identity.<sup>18</sup>

Thus the demand for a truth more ‘truthful’ than a single view of history has evolved and, to be so, it must incorporate the truth of personal experience and individual memory.<sup>19</sup> As Michael Godby says, ‘history is not simply what happened, but a particular view of what happened’.<sup>20</sup> This is where Tessa Morris-Suzuki’s notion of open-ended historical truthfulness comes in. She maintains that we are shaped by the past, and suggests that knowing the past and making sense of it is essential to knowing ourselves.<sup>21</sup>

The connections between history and fiction have also been honed through postmodern analysis. Writings – memoirs, articles, essays and creative writing – have become a legitimate means for exposing and exploring memories. Taylor notes how Andreas Huyssen claims our notion of history is dependent on what stories are told, how they are told and the memories constructed around them.<sup>22</sup> Brink explains how

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<sup>15</sup> Hayden White, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,' *On Narrative*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Nora, 'Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory,' *Eurozine* (2004) 24 April 2006 <http://www.eurozine.com>.

<sup>17</sup> Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *The Past within Us: Media, Memory, History* (London: Verso, 2005) 22-23.

<sup>18</sup> Nora.

<sup>19</sup> Nora.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Godby, 'Memory and History in William Kentridge's *History of the Main Complaint*,' *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*, eds. Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee, (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2002) 106.

<sup>21</sup> Morris-Suzuki 238.

<sup>22</sup> Affrica Taylor, "'The Sun Always Shines in Perth": A Post-Colonial Geography of Identity, Memory and Place,' *Australian Geographical Studies* 38(1) (2000).

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White articulates perfectly the intersection of the three crucial 'moments' in story-telling:

The representations of history repeat, in almost every detail, the processes of fiction. ... History, memory, and language intersect so precisely as to be almost indistinguishable: the 'origins' of history, as recovered through memory, are encoded in language, and each of these three moments becomes a condition for the others.<sup>23</sup>

Fiction writers have embraced Haydon White's treatment as a means of demythologising history and granting a voice to those who had previously been silenced and suppressed.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, just as memory is important, so is what David Brooks calls 'wild imagining'.<sup>25</sup> The writer can increase the chances of getting around the mind's barricades by listening to a voice within that might not otherwise be heard. Things which have been forgotten, possibly intentionally, can come out in imaginings.

### **After apartheid**

One of the major outcomes from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1995-1998) is that it has provided a medium for historical truthfulness in South Africa. The final report prepared by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 1997 was the beginning of a new 'national memory', whereby the historic memory of the nation is transformed to incorporate the group memories of those who had been subverted and silenced. Literature, storytelling and *ubuntu* (the African humanist ethic of reciprocity or traditional hospitality) were also enriched by the TRC.

In the final report, Tutu made the important distinction between perpetrators of apartheid and victims on the one hand, and beneficiaries and victims on the other.<sup>26</sup> Morris-Suzuki uses the term 'historical beneficiaries' to define groups of later generations who are connected to the past because they benefited from historical acts of violence or oppression, even though they were not responsible for those actions, as 'accessories after the fact'.<sup>27</sup>

Wilhelm Verwoerd, a researcher at the TRC, writes that the silence of the apartheid beneficiaries is deafening. He adds white South Africans have a choice about what they do with the benefits they attained and could alleviate in some way the ongoing suffering of the previously disadvantaged. He uses the term 'response-ability' as the means by which beneficiaries may regain control of their response to their past. He ties identity with the acceptance or rejection of the burden of being an apartheid beneficiary: 'Reconciliation requires a commitment, especially by those who have

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<sup>23</sup> Andre Brink, 'Stories of History: Reimagining the Past in Post-Apartheid Narrative,' *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*, eds. Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee, (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2002) 32.

<sup>24</sup> Tim Woods, *Beginning Postmodernism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) 54.

<sup>25</sup> David Brooks, 'Literature and Forgetting,' *Southerly* 3 (1991) 39.

<sup>26</sup> Desmond Tutu, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Summary and Final Report* (Cape Town: 1997).

<sup>27</sup> Morris-Suzuki 26.

benefited and continue to benefit from past discrimination, to the transformation of unjust inequalities and dehumanising poverty.... It is not only about money, land, education, it is about who I am and who we want to be in the new dispensation'.<sup>28</sup>

The perpetrators and victims who participated in the TRC were a small number of individuals, but the Commission focused on this minority, so that the majority of victims and beneficiaries still needed to be accommodated in a later process of healing and reconciliation. South African anthropologist Steve Robins argues that beneficiaries could use the TRC as a valid starting point to examine their personal apartheid narrative and to use it as the constructive impetus for moving forward.<sup>29</sup> For Verwoerd, this notion has the potential to 'be a doorway to one's homecoming in post-apartheid South Africa'<sup>30</sup> and implies integrity and accepting obligation and 'response-ability'.

There is a quest among many groups to seek out their communal memories, and to examine their behaviour and search for personal or communal forgiveness. Claudia Braude writes that the unrecorded, censored or subverted past must be remembered and reconstructed, so as to contribute towards a more positive and open future.<sup>31</sup>

### **Crossing over**

I am aware of recurring themes in my short stories around the guilt and shame I felt growing up in South Africa's Jewish community, and through the writing I was able to uncover hidden memories and the associated feelings. This was part of my motivation for writing a novel set in the apartheid years. In the early stages characters and events emerged from my imagination and memories. At the same time I began reading broadly for my thesis in subjects including antisemitism and the Holocaust, the splintered response of the South African Jewish community to apartheid, and issues of identity, truth, marginality and Otherness. I researched the discourse around fiction, history and memory. Within this context, the pertinence of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission became clear.

I observed how, after reading widely on a subject, the material would percolate into the creative process, resulting in characters and stories which, while imagined, were enriched because they were grounded in fact and theory. While reviewing the completed dissertation and novel, I was struck by numerous instances where the cross-over between the research and the creative components was clearly visible. Some examples are outlined below.

### **Palimpsest narrative**

In producing his animated films, South African artist William Kentridge uses a method of drawing in charcoal, photographing the image and then rubbing out lines to

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<sup>28</sup> Verwoerd 4.

<sup>29</sup> Steven Robins, 'The Truth Shall Make You Free? Reflections on the TRC,' *Southern Africa Report* 13.4 (1998) 9-13.

<sup>30</sup> Verwoerd 4.

<sup>31</sup> Eve D'Aeth, 'Review of Claudia Bathsheba Braude, *Contemporary Jewish Writing in South Africa: An Anthology* (2003), H-SAfrica, H-Net Reviews, 24 April 2006, <http://h-net.muse.edu>.

redraw the next frame.<sup>32</sup> This erasure leaves shadows which intrigued me, as I found them reminiscent of palimpsest, the reworking of a manuscript, papyrus or parchment upon which text, or social memories, are recorded, erased or overwritten. Ashraf Rushdy proposed the notion of palimpsest narrative to describe narratives that show the profound relationship between the past and the present, between horrific events in history and the immense impact they have on the people who survived and their descendants. Palimpsest narrative aligns with the psychological concept of the transgenerational transmission of trauma that emerged from work with Holocaust survivors, but Rushdy has related the idea to literature, particularly pertaining to the descendants of American slaves.<sup>33</sup> He explains how fiction can be used to expose and resolve the memories of traumas that have been submerged but nonetheless passed down through generations. He defines palimpsest narrative as the transmission of the memories of dark family secrets and unspoken taboos through the generations of those who have been the victims of history. He says fiction can be the vehicle that takes the reader to a different time and place, to the writer's version of what happened and what it might mean.

In 2004 I presented a paper on palimpsest narrative at a conference called *Palimpsests: Transforming Communities*, relating how this concept resonated with me in the South African context. By digging beneath the surface, academically and creatively, I was able to expose what lay below for me, someone who had grown up in the state of apartheid. It was then I recognised a palimpsest narrative in my own work.

Early in the creative writing process I wanted to find out how the character of the Jewish grandfather may have felt about surviving the Holocaust, having emigrated to the safety of South Africa before the war. I began by writing a letter from him to a cousin whom he discovered had survived. This letter transformed into a scene and the introduction of, Shmuel, a shadow who transformed into a major character. His emergence tied in with the issues of marginality and the Other, a recurring theme in much of the literature of, and research into, South African Jewry. His appearance was, I strongly believe, a result of my research, my reading on the history of the period, the reawakening of my memories and palimpsest narrative.

I was born well after the Holocaust which I believed had bypassed my immediate family. The arrival of Shmuel posed the question: is it possible that a palimpsest narrative about the Holocaust had been passed on to me? I believe it was: recently, my mother mentioned the arrival of a relative in similar circumstances. No doubt she had told me this story before, but I hadn't consciously remembered it. In a conversation about this with a cousin she said he reminded her of her uncle whom I had forgotten: he too bore strong traces of Shmuel.

### **Behind the curtain or beyond the hedge: The Group Areas Act**

One of the themes identified in Braude's anthology of South African writing is the master servant relationship. The nurturing interpersonal relationship between servant and child is a strong one, significantly affecting both parties. Reef, in a review of

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<sup>32</sup> For examples, see *David Krut Projects: William Kentridge*, 4 November, 2009 <http://www.davidkrut.com/works.php?id=4262&ed=1>

<sup>33</sup> Ashraf Rushdy, 'Remembering Generations,' University of North Carolina Press (Spring 2001), 15 September 2004 <http://uncpress.unc.edu>.

Braude's book, states 'the power relationship of employer/servant is more ethically complex when Jews, who are supposed to be "a light unto the nations", are involved'.<sup>34</sup> Kentridge also speaks about this irony:

Our Passover ceremony every year commemorates the Jews as slaves in Egypt. ... yet in the present we are certainly not slaves. This contradiction does not change the fact that Jews had a historical context to understand the desire to be free of fetters.<sup>35</sup>

It is central to my novel and earlier short stories. From the age of two until I was in my twenties, my family employed the same domestic worker, with whom I was very close. I remember going to visit her friends, tied to her back with a blanket, via their back yards. When with my mother, we would enter their homes through the front door.

Perhaps unsurprisingly my first successful short story was about a child's awakening to the reality beyond the hedge, and the absolute effectiveness of separate development, even in the domestic environment. Its impression on me as a child growing up in a privileged life was deep-seated.

During a creative writing workshop the class was asked to write about one of our childhood homes. I had grown up in one house; when I emigrated from South Africa in 1986 my parents were still living there. As I did the exercise I observed how completely safe my childhood had been. My memories were secure ones and yet I had grown up in the midst of apartheid, in a state of turmoil. I pondered the irony of this: fear and chaos were not reflected in my personal life, but rather in the world that began at the bottom of the driveway.

After the class I ruminated on my earliest memories of the apartheid system and decided it was my personal experience with the *Group Areas Act*. I grew up in a white suburb which contained a number of Malay quarters. Muslim slaves and political dissidents from the Malay Archipelago had been despatched to the Cape of Good Hope by the Dutch East India Company as early as 1654, two years after the establishment of the original refreshment station. There was a mosque on the Main Road and many of the traders and shopkeepers were Malay. In the 1960s the *Group Areas Act* was rolled out in the Cape and these long-established communities were relocated to distant townships. The houses were sold and renovated or demolished to make way for a shopping centre. I was a young child then, but I think this may be my earliest recollection of the impact of apartheid on my small world. So I wrote about this in my paper.

Many months later while developing the back story for my main character, I wrote a scene from her childhood. What emerged, unsought, was a story about a young girl riding around Claremont, a suburb of Cape Town, on her bicycle and encountering the clearances. I was delighted because not only did it bring this piece of history into my novel but it was a genuine example of the blending of historical

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<sup>34</sup> Anne M Reef, 'Apartheid's Apologists and Chroniclers,' *Patterns of Prejudice* 38 4 (2004) 413.

<sup>35</sup> Minna Raitmaa, *Point of View: William Kentridge*, 2001, 1 December 2006, <http://www.kiasma.fi/index.php?id=171&L=1>.

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research, my memories and my imagination into my work of fiction. In an interview about her book *The Spare Room*, Helen Garner refers to an incident saying: 'That scene is completely invented. But although I made it up, I feel that it's completely true to something in my real life'.<sup>36</sup>

### **The Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

In 2008, a conference on memory, narrative and forgiveness was held at the University of Cape Town to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the TRC. Delegates discussed how the TRC had given the nation the opportunity to begin remembering and rewriting the colonial and postcolonial history, from an African truth.

Turkish Cypriot psychiatrist Dr Mamik Volkan gave the keynote address at the TRC conference, in which he referred to the TRC as a memorial.<sup>37</sup> Memorials are topical in historiography, art and architecture, particularly pertaining to the Holocaust, but also in the South African context.<sup>38</sup>

Memory can provide the human dimension to recent history. Through creative writing, individual and collective memories can be unlocked to reveal submerged truths that can challenge current historical and personal viewpoints. This is fiction as memorial, honouring and remembering the past in a way that allows readers to bring their own interpretation to a historical incident and gain a new understanding, regardless of reference to time and place. In this way, the novel can be viewed as a memorial or a fictional marker.

Volkan also spoke of shared linking objects, items rich in memory which someone holds onto, having become memorials or memorialised. His example was a broken watch that a son might keep because it belonged to his late father: he does not repair it, just keeps it and looks at it on the anniversary of his father's death. Volkan compared this to a society that clings to an incident and continues mourning the event, unable to let go and move on.

Volkan's idea of shared linking objects is appealing for a number of reasons. The shared linking object is often the thread that runs through a story bringing it together in a unified manner – an object discovered unexpectedly which links characters through time.

Penelope Lively's novel *The Photograph* (2004) is about the search for the truth based on the image of a dead woman in a photograph. In an interview, Lively states she was interested in how the past has the power to interfere with the present. She went on to say that the pleasure of writing fiction is that you are always spotting some new approach, an alternative way of telling a story. She said, 'There is never a single truth about any person, or about any sequence of events, but as many as there

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<sup>36</sup> Jason Steger, 'It's Fiction and That's a Fact,' *The Age* 29 March 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Mamik Volkan, 'The Next Chapter: Consequences of Societal Trauma', *Memory, Narrative, and Forgiveness: Perspectives on the Unfinished Journeys of the Past*. Eds. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela and Chris van der Merwe (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 2009)

<sup>38</sup> Neville Dubow, *Imaging the Unimaginable: Holocaust Memory in Art and Architecture* (Cape Town: Centre for Jewish Studies and Research - University of Cape Town, 2001).

were observers or participants.<sup>39</sup> And she uses the device of a shared linking object to tell that story.

The shared linking object is also used to stimulate the creative writing process. The writer takes an object, postcard, photo, painting, sometimes random, sometimes something selected for its significance, and uses all her senses to write about it. The object stimulates memories, ideas, connections, and a story is formed, either memory-work or fiction. This set me thinking about shared linking objects and memorials in my work, and specifically about the centrality of the cemetery in my novel. The Jewish cemetery where my maternal grandparents are buried was desecrated in 1994 and I wanted to include this in my writing. As well, during the 1990s I had visited a cemetery in Prague and had been very moved by the piles of broken tomb stones, a shocking reminder of the Holocaust. It was only through the reading, thinking and linking, that I saw how pivotal they were, how a graveyard could be another thread connecting my Jewish past, my reading and my novel.

At that time I was reading *The Lost* by Daniel Mendelsohn (2007). It is the story of how he traced his great uncle's family who had perished in the Holocaust. This is the final page of the book:

Then – since this is the tradition of the strange tribe to which, although parts of that tradition make no sense to me, I know I belong, because my grandfather once belonged to it – I groped around in the earth for a large stone, and when I found one, I put it in the crook where the branches of the tree met. This is their only monument, I thought, and so I'll leave a stone here. Then I turned and walked out of the garden, and soon after that we said goodbye and got into the car and left.<sup>40</sup>

I was stunned when I compared this with the epilogue to my novel:

It's windy on the headland. He's holding your arm, gently, protecting you from the wind but nudging you forward, toward the little gate in the cypress hedge.

You stand at the entrance and look across the neat stones that line up in front of the ocean. The earth is still unsettled, where the two labourers rest on their spades, then heave the dirt back into the hole. There are flowers, fresh bouquets and wreaths and a tiny white glove that lies forlorn on the footpath.

You kneel to pick it up. You hold it to your nose and sniff its cleanness. You clutch it as you move across to the Jewish section, where the stones are still jagged and slashed with paint. You pick up a handful of pebbles and press a few into Alex's hand. He watches you place them on three graves and bends down and leaves his next to yours.

Then you take his arm and look back to the Coloured section, separated by a track and a fence. You've never been here before but you know where to go.

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<sup>39</sup> 'Interview with Penelope Lively,' *Penguin Putnam* 2004, 31 August 2004  
<http://www.penguinputnam.com>.

<sup>40</sup> David Mendelsohn, *The Lost*, (Sydney: HarperCollins, 2007) 45.

There are fresh flowers here too, watered by a mother's tears. You drop the remaining stone from your hand and squeeze tightly on the little glove.<sup>41</sup>

Susan Griffin may be unaware of the Jewish custom of leaving a stone on a grave but this quote from her book *A Chorus of Stones* (1994), cited by Anne Schuster, is germane: 'Perhaps we are like stones; history and the history of the world embedded in us, we hold a story deep within and cannot weep until that history is sung.'<sup>42</sup>

All these leaps and links between facts, theory and creative thinking have amazed and thrilled me. They validated the cogent argument of this thesis, that a work of fiction can be a legitimate record of history. I grew up privileged in a beautiful city, in the 'the paradise time of apartheid'.<sup>43</sup> My childhood was pretty ordinary: nothing exciting or traumatic took place – on the surface. Through my work of fiction I have had the opportunity to use characters and narrative to render my version of the complexities and contradictions of the apartheid era, from the perspective of a Jew. I find it enthralling that I have been able to discover meanings, ideas and themes at so many levels – personal, academic and creative – that I may be able to pass on to others. That, I think, is the ultimate power of story-telling.

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<sup>41</sup> Phyllis Sakinofsky, 'Waternal,' diss., Macquarie University, 2009, 143.

<sup>42</sup> Anne Schuster, *Foolish Delusions*, (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2005) 13.

<sup>43</sup> Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000) 217.