



# **“Accused by the place and face of the other”:<sup>1</sup> negotiations with complicity in the work of Antjie Krog and Yvonne Vera**

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## **Abstract**

### **“Accused by the place and face of the other”: negotiations with complicity in the work of Antjie Krog and Yvonne Vera**

*This article examines how Antjie Krog and Yvonne Vera use literature to explore the issue of complicity in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Both societies have histories that are characterised by violence and trauma and neither society has engaged with these past abuses in a comprehensive way. Krog and Vera’s work reveal their awareness that a failure to deal with the pain of others in a responsible manner renders societies vulnerable to a repetition of past abuses. Any responsible engagement with the pain of others must involve acknowledging one’s own complicity in those abuses, regardless of how indirect one’s involvement may have been. By reading selected extracts of Krog and Vera’s work in terms of Mark Sanders’ theory of complicity, I illustrate how these authors facilitate a responsible engagement with the pain of their characters. The article will pay particular attention to how these authors expose broad complicity in the pain of individuals – individuals who are located at the intersections between racial and gender oppression.*

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1 This quotation is taken from Geoffrey Hartman’s *The fateful question of culture* (1998:119). He argues that “interpretative attempts” to deal with the Holocaust need to move beyond the search for “ideological closure” to considerations of “the quintessentially moral moment of being called into question, accused by the place and face of the other”.

## Opsomming

### “Beskuldig deur die plek en aangesig van die ander”: onderhandelings met medepligtigheid in die werk van Antjie Krog en Yvonne Vera

*Hierdie artikel ondersoek die wyse waarop Antjie Krog en Yvonne Vera literatuur gebruik vir ’n verkenning van die kwesie van medepligtigheid in Suid-Afrika en Zimbabwe. Die geskiedenis van albei samelewings word gekenmerk deur geweld en trauma en nie een van hierdie samelewings het op ’n omvattende wyse met historiese misbruike gehandel nie. Die werk van sowel Krog as Vera bewys dat hulle daarvan bewus is dat die versuim om die pyn van ander te hanteer samelewings kwesbaar kan maak vir ’n herhaling van die misbruike van die verlede. Enige verantwoordelike omgaan met die pyn van ander behoort ook ’n erkenning in te sluit dat ’n mens self medepligtig aan daardie misbruike was, ongeag hoe indirek sulke betrokkenheid ook al was. Deur geselekteerde uittreksels van Krog en Vera se werk te lees in die lig van Mark Sanders se teorie van medepligtigheid, demonstreer ek hoe hierdie skrywers ’n verantwoordelike omgaan met die pyn van hulle karakters moontlik maak. Die artikel sal in besonder aandag skenk aan die wyse waarop hierdie outeurs medepligtigheid aan die pyn van individue blootlê – individue wat hulself by die sny punte van ras- en genderonderdrukking bevind.*

As a generator of otherness in language and of the self, the literary work, understood broadly, emerged as the place where intellectuals grappled imaginatively with complicity. Autobiographical and testimonial narrative of various kinds formed a hinge between history and fiction as its authors figured the greater complicity or foldedness in human being that stands as the condition of possibility for any opposition to a system that constantly denies it. (Sanders, 2002:x.)

## 1. Introduction

In this article I explore how Antjie Krog and Yvonne Vera engage with the issue of complicity in traumatic abuses that were perpetrated in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Both authors deal with responsibility and complicity and the rhetorical strategies they use in their literary engagement with these issues are shaped by the specificities of their South African and Zimbabwean socio-political contexts as well as by their racial, cultural, gender and linguistic identity. Krog (2005:103) has stated that the “whole point of writing is to interact with the ‘you’” and that she regards it as “imperative

that we imagine ourselves the other” (Krog, 2005:104). Though both authors create work that “calls upon a reader to assume responsibility for an other in the name of a generalized foldedness in human-being” (Sanders, 2002:17), they do so from very different positions. This article will show how, in an apparently paradoxical manoeuvre, Krog and Vera go about interrogating or unfolding rigidly constructed notions of racial, cultural and gender identity in their attempt to assert the broader foldedness that complicity implies.

Sanders (2002:215) conceptualises complicity as more than a mere “acting together” in that he extends the term to include that which “establishes the horizon of judgment for that acting”. It “is the orientation and scope of complicity in the latter sense” that, according to Sanders (2002:216), “most deeply occupies the intellectual”. Sanders draws a distinction between “acting-in-complicity” and “responsibility-in-complicity” where the former refers to actions for which the subject can be held accountable while the latter constitutes “the place occupied by the other before whom the ‘little perpetrator’ is responsible” (Sanders, 2002:11). The “little perpetrator” needs to be distinguished from the “exceptional perpetrator” (Sanders, 2002:3) whose explicit acts of abuse are more easily available for scrutiny and accountability. The “little perpetrator”, on the other hand, resides in each of us and contains the potential to commit the acts of which the “exceptional perpetrator” is guilty. By acknowledging the existence of the “little perpetrator” within, one is able to develop a sense of responsibility that would ultimately lead to a “heightening of personal responsibility, which, paradoxically, would mean not washing one’s hands but actively affirming a complicity, or potential complicity, in the ‘outrageous deeds’ of others” (Sanders, 2002:3). It is such a “cultivated” sense of responsibility that “would, in the best of possible worlds, make one act to stop or prevent those deeds” (Sanders, 2002:3-4).

The word *complicity* is derived from the Latin *complicare* which means “fold together” (Oxford English Dictionary, online edition). According to Sanders (2002:11), “foldedness or responsibility-in-complicity” is “the condition of possibility of all particular affiliations, loyalties and commitments”. “Foldedness or responsibility-in-complicity” allows for “the possibility of sympathetic identification” between the self and other and it is this recognition of identification that will prevent us from relegating “exceptional perpetrators” to the realm of aberrational others and ignoring the responsibility of the self (Sanders, 2002:3). I follow Sanders in positing literature as a terrain where authors can negotiate complicity while also creating a space

where readers are prompted to engage with the "little perpetrators" in themselves. Sanders (2002:16) is aware that "[o]ne might reasonably ask why, when it is a question of the intellectual and apartheid, I find myself concentrating, for the most part, on literary figures rather than, say, political theorists, lawyers, or even historians".<sup>2</sup>

While the aftermath of apartheid has been the topic of a great deal of journalistic coverage and academic analyses, it is the ability of literature to expose the foldedness of all human beings that makes it such a powerful tool for exploring complicity.<sup>3</sup> Literary fiction can enable a "complex network of sympathetic identification" (Sanders, 2002:3) where authors can create and readers can experience imaginary situations where they are the perpetrators or victims of abuse. The resultant confrontation with the "little perpetrator" and the potential victim in the self can work towards recognition of the "basic folded-together-ness of being, of human-being, of self and other" (Sanders, 2002:11).

Sanders (2002:16) explains that,

... [t]o the extent that it relies on the possibility of one determinate figure taking the place of another (much as one word or phrase substitutes for another), a possibility that nevertheless allows it to retain for itself a minimal identity across repeated instantiations (what Derrida terms *iterability* in 'Signature event context'), responsibility for the other is coextensive with what we imperfectly call the literary.

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2 A number of scholars argue for the value of literature in the articulation of trauma. Meining (2004:351) contends that "literature is particularly well-suited to portray the affective investments and those aspects of our view of the past which remain ungraspable. Trauma is the signature of this linkage and of the necessity of our ongoing engagement with it." Felman and Laub (1992:105) maintain that the failure to imagine trauma can only be remedied by an imaginative medium such as literature which can "gain an insight into [the] historical reality, as well as into the attested historicity of [the] unimaginability [of trauma]". For more on the representational difficulties posed by trauma, particularly political trauma such as the Holocaust, colonialism and apartheid, cf. Durrant (2004), Bennett (2005), Moore (2005), Kopp (2006), Anker (2008), Adetunji Osinubi (2008) and Oliver (2001).

3 In her argument for the significance of Vera's literary engagement with violence, Gagiano (2007:71) makes the following points, which can also be applied to Krog's work: "Histories and journalistic reports inevitably to some extent normalize war and wartime atrocities; what Vera does is to 'denormalize' it; to immerse us emphatically in its horrors."

It is, in other words, the literary that enables “the particular other to operate as, and substitute for, a figure for the generalized responsibility demanded of the implied reader” (Sanders, 2002:16).

## 2. Explorations of complicity in Krog’s work<sup>4</sup>

In the South African context, the notion of complicity has been forced to the forefront of public and scholarly debate by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The nature and dynamics of the Commission are explored in Krog’s first prose work, *Country of my skull*, which focused on her journalistic coverage of the Commission’s activities. Sanders (2002:2) contends that South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission “does not limit itself to establishing the culpability of specific agents, but seeks to produce an account of complicity that generalises ethico-political responsibility”. Such a broadening of responsibility is crucial since oppression in South Africa was so widespread that everyone was, either by acts of commission or omission, to some extent involved. In reflecting on the function of the TRC, Gobodo-Madikizela (2003:9) notes that “[t]he question is no longer *whether* victims can forgive ‘evildoers’ but whether we – our symbols, language, and politics, our legal, media, and academic institutions – are creating the conditions that encourage alternatives to revenge” (italisation in original). The focus must widen from individual perpetrators to everything from symbols to language and civil society institutions, because they all created the environment where apartheid’s abuses became possible. The vastness of the task facing the TRC and the concomitant difficulty of addressing both individual perpetrators and larger complicity are articulated by Sachs (1995:107):

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4 Many scholars have addressed how Krog’s work attempts to facilitate racial reconciliation and nation building in South Africa by bridging the distance between the self and the other. See, for example, Taljard (2006), Coullie (2007), West and Van Vuuren (2007) and Viljoen (2007). With this article I wish to show how Sanders’ work on complicity can be used as a theoretical lens through which Krog’s work can be read. Her concern with South Africa’s apartheid past echoes throughout her oeuvre but, since space constraints prevent me from analysing more of her work, this section takes one poem and one prose text to illustrate how Sanders’ theory can be used as a reading strategy that illuminates the author’s concern with issues of complicity. This theoretical framework can, with similar fruitfulness, be applied to poems such as “ná grond-invasions in Zimbabwe” (Krog, 2000a:45), “slaapliedjies vir Ntombizana Atoo” (Krog, 2000a:79), “how long” (Krog, 2000b:83), “our half a town” (Krog, 2000b:84-89) and “Country of grief and grace” (Krog, 2000b:95-1000).

In a sense our whole nation was complicit in what happened in the past and we must find appropriate ways of recognising that fact without diminishing the importance of focusing on the extreme violations which took place.

The degree to which the TRC was successful in negotiating these demands is a subject that has received much scholarly attention and an evaluation of its success and failures is beyond the scope of this article.<sup>5</sup> Its work is raised here to explain the milieu within which Krog uses literature to continue the project of "self-analysis" (Truth and reconciliation commission of South Africa, 1998:2) and cultivates a "mood of introspection" in order to explore her own sense of complicity as well as the complicity of characters and readers.

The role of literature as a space where intellectuals could engage with issues of complicity is all the more important when one considers that the TRC's work was circumscribed by the fact that its very existence was a compromise. It was set up as part of a compromise between South Africa's political parties to enable the transition from apartheid rule to democracy. According to Jaffer and Cronjé (2004:8) "[t]he vastness of the exercise (although within limited parameters) unearthed a body of material that provided a solid foundation for understanding the past and *beginning* to deal with it" (italisation – JM). The messy ambiguities resulting from a compromise on this scale could not be dealt with comprehensively within the limited ambit of the TRC and Krog has taken up the challenge of dealing with these ambiguities in her writing. Literature provided the scope for the legalistic and necessarily constrained discourses of the TRC to be pushed into a sphere where more in-depth analysis was possible. The TRC's focus on "gross human rights violations" meant that it could not comprehensively address the responsibility of the "little perpetrator", collaborators, those who benefited from apartheid or others whose inaction made them complicit in the system. It is complicity in this broader sense of shared ethico-political responsibility that, I argue, Krog explores in her writing, both in terms of herself as author and of the demands she places on her readers. While Vera is writing from a very different context than Krog – and I do not wish to suggest that South African apartheid was coterminous with Rhodesian segregation – I would argue that Vera is

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5 In "The contributions of truth to reconciliation: lessons from South Africa" Gibson (2006:409-432) focuses on the success of the TRC. In *African studies quarterly's*, 8(1) of 2004 various authors, including Graybill and Lanegran (2004) and Borer (2004), adopt a more cautionary stand.

also engaged in a project of investigating broader complicity in the violence affecting the characters in her novels.

In theorising complicity Sanders draws on the work of Karl Jaspers, in particular his notion of “metaphysical guilt” where Jaspers (1948:32) argues that “there exists a solidarity among men [sic] as human beings that makes each co-responsible for every wrong and every injustice in the world, especially for crimes committed in his presence or with his knowledge”. Jaspers is here referring to a kind of moral guilt that can be attributed to all members of a community who stood by and failed to prevent harm from being done to others. While an individual who is metaphysically guilty might not necessarily be legally culpable, Jaspers nevertheless insists that, as a member of a perpetrating community, such an individual shares in the moral responsibility. Jaspers’ (1948:26) burden of metaphysical guilt is a heavy one and he acknowledges that the resultant feeling of guilt is “not adequately conceivable either legally, politically or morally”. It is precisely because legal, political and moral discourses fail to give adequate articulation to this particular kind of guilt that literature can play such a crucial role. Although Jaspers’ language is universal, whereas Krog deals with the issue of complicity from a much more localised position in that she addresses the specific anxieties of the Afrikaner, the issue of German guilt still “resonates in contemporary world politics, framing the way actors and observers conceptualize collective responsibility for past wrongs in diverse polities” (Schaap, 2001:749). Sanders (2002:6) sees this as a “radicalizing of ‘co-responsibility’” where the intellectual “affirms a ‘foldedness’ in human-being when particular loyalties threaten to bar the generalization of that foldedness”.

Both Krog and Vera write from socio-political spaces where the denial of this foldedness has long been institutionalised by legislation and, even after the abolition of apartheid and colonial rule, their societies continue to struggle with its legacies in diverse ways. In Krog’s (2000b:104) poem “In transit – a cycle of the early nineties”, the reader learns just how vigorously human foldedness is rejected:

on the casspir a man from my neighbourhood  
his teeth gnarling venom from his lips  
you disgrace whites  
another kicks open the door of the police van  
and curses all kaffirfuckers

The speaker in this poem is confronted with a denial of the humanity of black South Africans that literally originates from her own “neigh-

bourhood”. In addition to this individual abuse from someone who is ordinary enough to be referred to simply as “a man”, the presence of the casspir, the police van and the “slit-eyed policeman” (Krog, 2000b:103) in the previous stanza draws attention to the dimension of structural responsibility by revealing that the army and police service are institutions that are complicit in abuse. The implication of any attempt by the speaker to affirm a common humanity is that she will be rejected from her neighbourhood as a “disgrace” (Krog, 2000b:104). Krog’s work makes it clear that she is intimately acquainted with the racism and the apartheid system that she opposes.<sup>6</sup> She is thus, in terms of Sanders’s theorisation of complicity, in a position to explore her own sense of responsibility in a meaningful way. According to Sanders (2002:8-9):

To have any meaning, responsibility requires a motivated acknowledgement of one’s complicity in injustice. ... When opposition takes the form of a demarcation *from* something, it cannot, it follows, be untouched by that to which it opposes itself. Opposition takes its first steps from a footing of complicity. (Emphasis in original.)

This intimacy is also expressed in her *Country of my skull* when Krog’s authorial narrator comes to some uncomfortable realisations when she interviews perpetrators who are testifying before the TRC:

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6 West and Van Vuuren (2007:222) discuss Krog’s explorations of “her discomfort at being labeled white” in postapartheid South Africa in *Down to my last skin*, *Kleur kom nooit alleen nie* and *A change of tongue*. I agree with Viljoen (2007: 14) that Krog’s work contains repeated reminders of that which is common to all people, and in doing so, I argue that she is affirming the foldedness of people. Of Krog’s poetry collection *Kleur kom nooit alleen nie* (Krog, 2000a) Viljoen notes the following:

’n Mens sou kon sê dat sy onder die vel inbeweeg tot by dit wat gemeenskaplik is aan alle mense (die metafore van die skelet en menslike weefsel word onder andere gebruik om dit te bewerkstellig). Die titel van die bundel waarin Engelse vertalings van Krog se poësie byeengebring is, *Down to my last skin* (2001), sit hierdie tema voort. Dit is ’n titel wat suggereer dat die boonste lae van die vel (en ook die kleurverskil wat op die oog af rasseverskil merk) verweer is deur haar ervaring van die traumatise gebeure in Suid-Afrika.

*One could say that she moves under the skin to that which is common to all people (the metaphors of the skeleton and human tissue are, amongst others, used to accomplish this). The title of the anthology in which English translations of Krog’s poetry are collected, Down to my last skin (2001), continues this theme. It is a title that suggests that the upper layers of the skin (as well as the colour difference that marks racial difference at first sight) are eroded by her experience of the traumatic events in South Africa. (Translation – JM.)*

In some way or another all, all Afrikaners are related. If somebody says his father bought land here, or he grew up in Odenaalsrus or Welkom – then I know. From the accents I can guess where they buy their clothes, where they go on holiday, what car they drive, what music they listen to. (Krog, 1998:96.)

In this semi-autobiographical work, Krog's narrator addresses the complicity of the Afrikaner culture in apartheid.<sup>7</sup> She reflects on what she has in common with the men testifying before the TRC and identifies the commonality as her culture. She acknowledges that "part of that culture over decades hatched the abominations for which they [the perpetrators] are responsible" and she comes to the conclusion that, "[i]n a sense it is not these men but a culture that is asking for amnesty" (Krog, 1998:96). Sanders (2002:11) argues that the relationship between intellectuals and apartheid needs to be "deciphered, not by fixing on apartness alone, but by tracking interventions, marked by degrees of affirmation and disavowal, in a continuum of foldedness or responsibility-in-complicity". As an Afrikaner, Krog's narrator thus places herself on this continuum by affirming her foldedness with the perpetrators of apartheid abuses.

### 3. Vera's assertion of human foldedness

Vera's writing also draws repeated attention to the extent to which Zimbabwean society continues to be segregated. In Zimbabwe the rejection of human foldedness can thus also be seen as institutionalised. Despite the differences between South Africa and Zimbabwe, legalised segregation in both cases has the effect of "foreclosing reciprocal foldedness in human-being" (Sanders, 2002:118). In *Butterfly burning*, for instance, the narrator remarks that "[t]he only concreteness is the pavement, and that they [black people] cannot even walk on" it (Vera, 1998:45). City taverns "have NO BLACKS signs, WHITES ONLY signs, and CLOSED signs which say OPEN on the flip side signs" (Vera, 1998:6). Vera's use of the image of one sign that can simply be flipped to either allow or bar entry already hints at

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7 For an analysis of Krog's engagement with her own complicity in *Country of my skull* cf. VanZanten Gallagher's (2006:207-221) "Reconciliation and hope: confessional narratives in South Africa". VanZanten Gallagher (2006:209) asserts that, "[a]lthough political documents establish the contours of this new identity [of post-apartheid South Africans], the idea of being a South African still needs to be inhabited and enacted; it needs a story, or narrative". She explores this process of identity reconstruction by considering the ways in which South Africans use confession and testimony to come to terms with the past. Cf. also Garman (2006).

the porousness of the boundaries that are drawn to segregate black and white. Similarly, the eponymous story in the collection *Why don't you carve other animals?* (Vera, 1992:71) emphasises the institutionalised racism in pre-independence Zimbabwe by setting the narrative "outside the gates of the African-Only hospital". In Vera's work she both identifies the rejection of foldedness that racial segregation imposes and signals that such foldedness can be reasserted.

In *Butterfly burning* Vera signals her own concern with issues of responsibility with a sentence that judges those who decline responsibility and deny their own complicity: "Revelations are burdensome to mere witnesses who want to hear but not be implicated" (Vera, 1998:32). The sentence is simultaneously epigrammatic and arguable. Revelations can be many things other than burdensome. It begs the question why Vera insists on it being burdensome rather than, for example, exciting, titillating or scary. Vera might be suggesting that one should feel burdened by revelations as implication in it is inevitable. This line appears in the context of a chapter that deals with Zandile's growing desperation "to know where, like all the women in Makokoba, she has planted trust and why it has taken so long for it to find root" (Vera, 1998:38). She was a friend of the main protagonist Phephelaphi's mother and she earns money by "mak-[ing] no distinction between white men and black men when it comes to pleasure and exchange" (Vera, 1998:40). Zandile's attempt to be heard by the women in her community fails as they "gaze at [her] in amazement" and she finds that "[n]o one listens" (Vera, 1998:39). According to Sanders (2002:17) literature can facilitate "receptivity to testimony" and I would argue that Vera's work, by exposing the reluctance of characters to listen to Zandile, encourages the reader to both hear and listen to her.

#### **4. A gendered reading of complicity in Krog and Vera's work**

While the reality of racial oppression and its consequences are evident throughout Krog's and Vera's writing, both authors also confront the oppression of women and call their readers to account for their complicity in the creation of an environment where women are vulnerable to abuse. This section of the article will explore how Krog and Vera's engagement with the issue of gender oppression constitutes a crucial dimension of their work. Wilson-Tagoe (2003:2) argues that,

... [b]ecause women's knowledge and art frequently contest conventional divisions between public and domestic spaces,

they make even the most intimate details of domestic life political, and reveal that gender ideologies are inextricably woven into the politics of culture, history and nationalism.

Although much of their work deals with women who have suffered horrific physical abuse, Krog's and Vera's works exhibit equal sensitivity to the more subtle and insidious forms of oppression to which women are subjected. While these challenges to women's agency and individual subjectivity are easily overlooked when incidences of much more brutal abuse abound, they do contribute to shaping societies where women are at risk.

In Vera's *Butterfly burning* Phephelaphi is a young woman in Bulawayo in 1946, when Rhodesia is still under British colonial rule. She meets an older man, Fumbatha, who wants to take care of her, but when a pregnancy threatens her dream of becoming a nurse and living a life of independence, she decides to abort the child. Phephelaphi's choices are severely constrained by both racial and patriarchal oppression. She lives in one of the townships which were, according to Wilson-Tagoe (2003:5), "built specifically to confine and limit Africans". In addition to the limitations resulting from her race, she is also restricted by her gender. Wilson-Tagoe (2003:6) points out that "Zandile expresses the cultural consensus when she upbraids Phephelaphi for dreaming beyond what is achievable in a place like Makokoba [township]". She asks Phephelaphi: "What can you do in Makokoba without being a man?" (Vera, 1998:110). She then goes on to admonish her by saying that "Makokoba is unkind to women like you who pretend to be butterflies that can land on any blossom they choose" (Vera, 1998:110). It is significant that this articulation of gendered constraint comes from another woman. Sanders (2002:208) notes that, "[a]ttending to the social inscription of the body, women [must also] negotiate a collusion in their own silencing". Zandile is able to give Phephelaphi this "advice" precisely because she herself is well acquainted with the reality of gender oppression in Makokoba and it is this familiarity with oppression that results in her becoming what Sanders (2002:178) refers to as a "complicitous victim".<sup>8</sup> While Sanders (2002:19) addresses a speci-

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8 The strategy of making Africans complicit in their own oppression was always an instrument of colonialism. The arbitrary division of the local inhabitants worked against human foldedness and, by bestowing privileges on the chosen few, resulted in schisms that continue to outlast formal colonialism itself. Vera (1993:51) notes this practice in *Nehanda*: "He [Mr Browning] now has ten African policemen. He has given each of them a bicycle and a uniform to distin-

fically South African context, his inclusion of "mental colonization" in the range of possible complicities is also illuminating when reading Zandile's behaviour. Sanders (2002:19) contends that "apartheid generated a common ensemble of complicities. These ranged from the support of specific policies and participation in certain institutions, to mental colonization". Zandile appears to have internalised sexist notions of what a woman can and cannot do, and she can thus be regarded as complicit in gender oppression.

Vera's writing refuses the reader's detachment by taking historical events and, rather than describing them by means of ethnographic discourse, her extraordinary use of language morphs and twists those events and harnesses the power of the literary to implicate the reader. She draws the reader into the history that shaped Fumbatha and in so doing moves the reader to understand and sympathise with Fumbatha's pain. The reader's uncomfortable identification with Fumbatha has the effect of forcing the reader to confront the little perpetrator in herself as she comes to feel a shared complicity in the suffering Fumbatha causes Phephelaphi. Fumbatha's need to control Phephelaphi reflects his fear and desperation. His own trauma, which can be traced back to the murder of his father, who was one of seventeen men hanged by the colonial regime, still haunts him and "[i]n sleep Fumbatha drowns in the death of the seventeen men" (Vera, 1998:10). Before introducing Phephelaphi, Vera devotes the whole of chapter two to a striking exploration of the murder of these seventeen men and its impact on Fumbatha. The murders are described in poetic, elegiac language and the death of the seventeen men is given a profound gracefulness as the "air leaves their bodies in a liquid breeze" (Vera, 1998:7) and their feet are likened to those of "dancers who have left the ground" (Vera, 1998:7).<sup>9</sup> These mur-

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guish them from the rest of the villagers. He has also taught them to put authority in their step by walking stiffly, their shoulders raised to the sky."

9 The evocation of these men's death strongly resembles the well-known photograph of African men hanging from a tree, which was taken in 1896. In 1896 Rhodesia saw Shona and Ndebele uprisings against colonial rule in Matebeleland and Mashonaland. These uprisings were brutally crushed by the Rhodes regime. Stanley's (2000:201) article about Olive Schreiner explores the use of this photograph which was used as a frontispiece to Schreiner's (1897) "anti-Rhodes and anti-imperialist allegorical novella *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*". Stanley (2000:201) argues that this

... photograph is truly one which shocks, even now in a time when we are more used than people were to visual depictions of moments of horror and terror: the hanged men's arms are jerked upwards by death and the feet of one almost, but not quite, touch the ground; the white men in the photograph are caught at one moment in the

ders also leave the “living equally dying and bewildered” (Vera, 1998:8). When Fumbatha is fourteen years old, his mother takes him to the tree from which his father was hanged and the pressures on this young boy are daunting:

When she [his mother] calls again, her voice is impatient and he knows that she had expected him to remain close to her, to witness the shiver of her arms, to see her eyes burn. His birth a witness to dying, a pledge to life. She expects him to know his link with the past. (Vera, 1998:10.)

The novel suggests that this traumatic history, as well as the powerlessness Fumbatha feels to resist an oppressive government, manifests itself in his desire to exercise control over Phephelaphi. While Phephelaphi is bewildered by Fumbatha’s reactions, the more experienced Deliwe, who “had scorpions in her eyes and called upon them whenever she needed them” (Vera, 1998:119), senses the origins of Fumbatha’s behaviour: “It was Deliwe who let her know about it [the murder of Fumbatha’s father], saying to her with raised eyebrows that, ‘A man whose father was hanged by a white man has a lot of pride. He must be treated with care’” (Vera, 1998:118).

After a description of Fumbatha working as a labourer to build “the dreams of white men” (Vera, 1998:59) and being oppressed to such an extent that he is “[t]old what to do, where to stand” (Vera, 1998:59), Vera reveals the repressive way in which he reacts to Phephelaphi’s ambition to become a nurse. His behaviour, which clearly amounts to chauvinism, is linked to his own disempowerment as a black man in Zimbabwe as Vera articulates Fumbatha’s reflection that “[i]t is important that she [Phephelaphi] understands his fear, not his constraint” (Vera, 1998:60).

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spectacle, and the present-day reader who gazes on the photograph is also implicated, a different kind of vulture perched around the corpus of this moment of times past.

It appears that Vera had not seen a copy of this photograph before writing the scene. Ranger (2006:7) provides the following account of him and Vera visiting the National Archives in Harare:

There Yvonne saw for the first time the enlarged version of the photo of African men, captured in 1896, hanging from a tree. She was astonished that the photograph fitted so exactly with her description of hanging men at the beginning of the *Butterfly burning*, the sense of the men swimming in the air being as vivid in the photograph as in the book.

Though Vera attempts to give the reader some understanding of Fumbatha's motivations, she does not mitigate the impact this has on Phephelaphi. The implication is that, in a society structured according to unequal racial and gender relations, even intimacy, love and tenderness become perverted:

He thinks deeply of Phephelaphi. He must keep her close. Somehow. All the time. He must make her belong. He understands her better now and watching her each day, he is convinced that she needs more. 'I want to become a nurse at the hospital,' she says. 'I am sending in my application.' She has all the qualifications to enter the course, and the absurdity to imagine – without ever having seen the evidence – that her application would be considered. (Vera, 1998:59.)

The breathless sentences at the beginning of this quotation convey the urgency of Fumbatha's need for control over Phephelaphi. It is the intimacy that has grown from their time together that enables him to understand her need for "movement forward – the entrance into something new and untried" (Vera, 1998:60). Yet his understanding of her need does not prevent him from thwarting her progress: "Fumbatha does not encourage her, instead, he reminds her of what they share. 'We are happy together. I work. I take care of you. It is not necessary for you to find something else.' He insists on her unwavering loyalty." (Vera, 1998:59-60.)

Phephelaphi's euphoria at being able to train as a nurse, when parliament is still debating the admission of black women, thus comes up against Fumbatha's refusal. Her belief that Fumbatha will share her joy in managing to resist the oppressive government that had hitherto denied access to black women is dashed, and it becomes clear that, for black women, the struggles against racial and gender oppression do not necessarily coincide:

Her emotions a flurry of excitement and curiosity, she speaks to Fumbatha with a hopeful tone believing that he will understand her immediately; he surprises her. Fumbatha forbids it. 'We have our life together,' he repeats. She turns her head away and lets her arms fall heavily. (Vera, 1998:60.)

Phephelaphi exhibits an awareness of the extent to which every aspect of her being is shaped by the fact that she is a woman. She is "intensely aware of being a woman. A woman in a room. It is a simple fact. It is so new to her. Phephelaphi is more frightened than she has been by the darkness outside the door." (Vera, 1998:55.) In spite of her statement to the contrary, however, there is evidently

nothing simple about her being a woman in this room. Her very presence in the room in Deliwe's house, which is also a shebeen, constitutes a defiance of her lover Fumbatha, who "knew and disliked Deliwe" (Vera, 1998:64). She chooses to go to Deliwe's house while Fumbatha is out of town and she is "free of his protection" (Vera, 1998:62). It is only in his absence that she can feel this "sense of wholeness in making a decision without him" (Vera, 1998:62). The apparent contradiction of associating freedom with escape from her lover's protection and of finding wholeness in his absence is reinforced when she enters the room. Although she experiences it as a "treasure to enter" (Vera, 1998:65) this room, she also finds that "suddenly she feels not complete, not ready for this encounter, her emotions too gaudy and imperfect, her experience slim as a needle". Her discomfort is in marked contrast to the "leisured atmosphere" (Vera, 1998:64) and the "men [who] have pride all over their fingertips" (Vera, 1998:65). Phephelaphi's attempt at asserting an independent identity is somewhat fraught and tenuous and seems very different from the ease with which the male patrons of the shebeen occupy their space.

Phephelaphi admires Deliwe's defiance of those who would oppress her because of her race and her gender. When she is arrested for selling alcohol in a "dwelling", she "threw her head back and laughed like a madwoman when she was told that this square shelter with its falling roof [...] was a house" (Vera, 1998:60). Her laughter exposes and challenges the living conditions in the township. She is similarly unwilling to quietly acquiesce to sexual exploitation and she spits at a "black policeman [who] followed her home and offered to heal her wounds" (Vera, 1998:60) after she is beaten by the police. While Deliwe has been assaulted by the policemen who represent and implement the oppressive practices of the racist government, she is also afraid of Fumbatha, a man who is part of her community and will become her lover later in the novel. Even after Deliwe has been left with a "deafness in her right ear [that] was caused by the beating she received during her detention" (Vera, 1998:50) she expresses her resistance by spitting at a policeman (Vera, 1998:51) and by going to bed naked because she "liked to see the surprise in a policeman's eyes" (Vera, 1998:52) when they come to arrest her at night. When it comes to Fumbatha, however, "she thought it best not to encourage [his] anger towards her" (Vera, 1998:53). Although Deliwe is curious about Phephelaphi after she visits her shebeen, she keeps a cautious distance because "Fumbatha would definitely not be amused by [her] interference" (Vera, 1998:63). The question thus arises why these women should be more afraid of the men they

know and care about than of the darkness and the police representatives of a notoriously brutal regime.

In *Butterfly burning* Vera suggests that women like Deliwe and Phephelaphi are right to be afraid. Phephelaphi's adoptive mother Gertrude was "killed by her lover, a white policeman who shot at her when he found her talking to another man at her door when he called on her after midnight" (Vera, 1998:122). After Fumbatha learns that Phephelaphi has aborted their child, his rejection and rage leave her feeling as if he "shattered her entire core and she became nothing, even more than she ever thought possible" (Vera, 1998:123). Her hurt results in a complex series of fantasies in which her traumatised imagination obsessively seems to (re)construct the places of her wounding. Bollas (1995:112) argues that, to some extent, trauma "create[s] its own potential space". His theory provides some illumination of Phephelaphi's mental processes:

Shocked by the effect of a thing done, the subject may not know what to do with *it*. Such a caesura becomes the potential matrix of psychic elaboration, if the individual can return to the scene of the fact done and imagine it, perhaps again and again. Indeed, it may be that such facts nucleate into unconscious complexes, collecting other facts from life which increasingly gravitate into a particular mentality that derives from the *hit* of the fact. (Emphasis in original; Bollas, 1995:112-113.)

She feels so vulnerable that, "[i]n the midst of this dream" (Vera, 1998:123), she experiences her body as exposed to her natural mother's lover Boyidi:

Fumbatha was not there at all in front of her but his voice was following her, accusing her and taking Boyidi's hands and placing them all over her body [...] Phephelaphi remained still and did not move and Fumbatha stood aside while Boyidi did with her whatever he wished. (Vera, 1998:123.)

The resonances between the section of the novel that describes Phephelaphi's disintegrating psyche and the description of the seventeen men being hung by the colonial regime encourage the reader to consider the connections between Phephelaphi and Fumbatha's pain. The men feel "lighter than air" and "lighter than rain drops" (Vera, 1998:7) while Phephelaphi's "legs felt light, more hollow than bamboo, weightless" (Vera, 1998:123). Both sections of the novel also describe the sensation of floating. Phephelaphi was "floating like a lone feather" (Vera, 1998:123) and the hanging men were "[f]loating and forever dipping down" (Vera, 1998:7). An eerie

stillness envelops the hanging men since the “earth is too still” (Vera, 1998:8) and Phephelaphi lies completely still while she feels Boyidi’s hands move over her body. This connection between Phephelaphi’s traumatised thoughts and the source of Fumbatha’s trauma reminds the reader that he is also a traumatised victim and thus complicates a simple categorisation of Fumbatha as a perpetrator. By linking the experiences of Phephelaphi and Fumbatha with the murder of the seventeen men Vera can be read as “mak[ing] a radical affirmation of foldedness with the other, living and nonliving” (Sanders, 2002:18).

Phephelaphi witnessed her mother’s murder and was betrayed by the man with whom she “shared an intolerable tenderness” (Vera, 1998:41) and who has professed that “[h]e protected her” (Vera, 1998:29). The level of fear and powerlessness that Phephelaphi must feel as a woman, even before one considers the fact of her racial oppression, would justify my reading of her as a profoundly traumatised subject. Even as Phephelaphi struggles against racial oppression to become the first black woman to train as a nurse in Rhodesia, she finds herself constantly “place[d] back in a predictable, repetitive, and frustratingly stagnant narrative of woman’s subjugation to patriarchy” (Coundouriotis, 2005:66). Yet Phephelaphi’s actions also constitute a form of complicity with gender oppression. She clings to and thus perpetuates gendered notions of identity in that she associates attributes of strength and security with the masculine. According to Wilson-Tagoe (2003:6), for “Phephelaphi, Fumbatha is masculinised as an anchor, someone to hold onto in her efforts to attain freedom”. She also grants Fumbatha the right to name her when she tells him that he “could give [her] another name” (Vera, 1998:30). Although she tells herself that “this surrender was the only true thing she could give” and that this is a “harmless” (Vera, 1998:30) act, the power relations inherent in naming, and her willingness to relinquish that power to a man, makes her complicit in her own subjugation as a woman.

The relationship between Phephelaphi and the other characters in the text is continuously asserted by Vera, as “Phephelaphi’s story is intertwined with the stories of a genealogy of women and their negotiations of culture” (Wilson-Tagoe, 2003:7), particularly with those of Zandile and Deliwe. As the preceding section attempted to show, however, her story is just as inextricably intertwined with that of the male characters in the novel, especially with Fumbatha and the seventeen murdered men. Like Phephalaphi, Fumbatha keeps returning to his own places of wounding as, “[a]t the back of

Fumbatha’s every dream is a sorrowful wind blowing like a hurricane” (Vera, 1998:19). Vera makes this observation in a paragraph that reminds the reader of the sources of Fumbatha’s pain: “Fumbatha knows too little of the world of his father except that others fought on the side of the white men” (Vera, 1998:19). Responsibility for the pain Fumbatha causes Phephelaphi thus extends beyond himself and implicates the colonial regime that murdered his father and disempowered him in Bulawayo, which is a city that “he has held brick by brick” (Vera, 1998:20) since, for “almost twenty years Fumbatha has done nothing but build” (Vera, 1998:20). As a white reader from a South Africa built on black labour, I share in the responsibility-in-complicity for Phephelaphi’s pain. Vera draws South Africa into the Zimbabwean situation with the statement that “Bulawayo is close to South Africa and that, by itself, is a full story” (Vera, 1998:44).

The vulnerability of women in their own communities and homes is an issue that Krog’s work also explores alongside her engagement with racial oppression in South Africa. In Krog’s (2000b:26) poem “sonnet (I will always remember)”, the speaker, who is closely identified with Krog herself, addresses her husband and reflects:

[...] as your dark head  
bent down to greet every child something  
authoritarian stayed with your body as of one  
who always lies on top your hands moved  
with the orders of a boss this morning I bring

breakfast – on the bedside table you put my monthly allowance –  
and I see how the word finance also breathes the word violence<sup>10</sup>

While I am in no way suggesting that the violence experienced by Phephelaphi and the speaker in Krog’s poem is the same, I do want to argue that Krog and Vera are both dealing with the violence women are exposed to in apparently safe environments when those environments are structured according to unequal gender relations. Coundouriotis (2005:64) contends that

violence as lived experience must find a way to be told ... Vera has spoken of her novels as works that are ‘breaking silences’ and of the reader as ‘witness’. *Butterfly burning* both breaks a

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10 This poem first appeared in Krog’s 1981 anthology *Otters in bronslaii*. For more on the poem’s “poetics of dissidence aimed primarily at ... patriarchal repression”, cf. Visagie (2007:i).

silence and shows how such silence comes about in the first place.

Krog and Vera, in drawing their readers in as witnesses, tell experiences of violence and, by exposing and exploring the conditions that allow violence to flourish, they enable readers to recognise their own complicity in the creation and maintenance of those conditions.

Phephelaphi and the speaker in Krog's poems also deal with their sense of disempowerment in very different ways. Phephelaphi performs an abortion on herself and eventually "seeks her own refuge" (Vera, 1998:128) by immersing herself in a "pool of flammable liquid" (Vera, 1998:129) and setting herself alight. Her desperation means that it is only through this extreme action that she can feel "free and weightless like herself, now, safe, now" (Vera, 1998:129). She dies "[l]aughing at Getrude [her adoptive mother] who had the foolishness to trust a man knocking on her door" (Vera, 1998:130). The speaker in Krog's poems reacts to her disempowerment with more anger than desperation. In "nightmare of A Samuel born Krog"<sup>11</sup> the speaker's anger is palpable:

books swell with indignation  
the typewriter grinds its Olivetti teeth  
I write because I am furious (Krog, 2000b:49)

The rage that is expressed in this poem is linked to Krog's husband by the inclusion of his surname in the title. In addition to the anger, however, the poem also articulates a sense of being threatened. The images of the speaker's clothes that "rear like snakes" (Krog, 2000b:49) and her tongue with its "tail upright acrimonious" (Krog, 2000b:49) call to mind the self-defensive stances of animals under threat. More importantly, the titular mention of a "nightmare" and the anthropomorphic Olivetti typewriter grinding its teeth can be read as a projection of the speaker's own symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder onto her typewriter.<sup>12</sup> Her poetry thus becomes the space

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11 Samuel is Antjie Krog's married name. While she publishes her books and poetry collections as Antjie Krog, she reported on the TRC proceedings in her capacity as journalist for SABC radio under the name Antjie Samuel (cover of *Country of my skull*). The copyright for both *Country of my skull* and *A change of tongue* is asserted as that of Antjie Samuel while she claims the copyright for the poetry anthology *Down to my last skin* as Antjie Samuel-Krog.

12 Krog's main narrator was diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder after her work covering the TRC. The intensity of her reaction to the testimonies can be

where she explores the often contradictory emotions that result from combining marriage, motherhood and writing.

Though Krog's speaker struggles to reconcile the demands placed on her to be a "good" wife and mother with writing, Krog the writer engages with issues of marriage and motherhood in her writing and has attained significant success and recognition as an author and poet. Her work constitutes a kind of fictionalised public debate with her husband. In an interview with Krog, McGrane (2007:4) asks Krog about her husband's reaction to this particular poem. Krog's response maintains that her work is fictional and it also reveals her recognition of the foldedness between people:

[h]owever personal it *sounds*, it is carefully selected, not by the intellect, but by the poetic sensibility, to resonate. So my children and husband immediately realise that it's not about them. Parts of them, which are like those of others, are being put together around something that wants to be said. (Emphasis in original; McGrane, 2007:4)

It is the aspects of the self that her loved ones share or have in common with others which make up the characters in the poems. Krog's reference to the resonances between her characters and family members thus reveals her awareness of the foldedness between her family and the larger community of human beings.

While I in no way diminish the difficulties Krog voices, it must be noted that Vera's characters do not have the same space within which to manoeuvre. This is particularly clear in Phephelaphi's case. Her dream of becoming the first black woman to be trained as a nurse in Zimbabwe is shattered when she becomes pregnant. Even before her first pregnancy and without being married to Fumbatha, the obstacles Phephelaphi faces are myriad. Her race and gender combine to constitute a double layer of oppression.<sup>13</sup>

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read as a result of her confrontation of her own complicity in the abuse of people with whom she experiences a "foldedness in human-being" (Sanders, 2002:17).

13 I am aware of the difficulties of any attempt to theorise the intersections between racial and gender oppression. Maynard (1994:13) criticises early feminist work for not paying sufficient attention to these challenges:

They imply that 'race' simply increases the degree of inequality and oppression which black women experience as women and that oppression can be quantified and compared. This ignores the fact that 'race' does not simply make the experience of women's subordination greater. It qualitatively changes the nature of that subordination.

Phephelaphi and the speaker in Krog's poems are both searching for ways in which to be subjects in their own right. Phephelaphi experiences this ambition as a "longing" (Vera, 1998:64) and an "urge" (Vera, 1998:64) that is so far removed from her own reality that she struggles with its articulation:

It was nothing she knew but she wanted it, missed the future somehow. She was nothing now. She was not anything that she could feel. She wanted to be something with an outline, and even though she was not sure what she meant, she wanted some respect, some dignity, some balance and power of her own. (Vera, 1998:91.)

This diffident and nebulous desire to be a subject is in sharp contrast to the confident assertion of the same desire in "paternoster", which is the final poem in Krog's *Down to my last skin*:

like hell! I am rock I am stone I am dune  
  
distinct my tits hiss a copper kettle sound  
my hands clasp Moordbaai and Bekbaai  
my arms tear ecstatically past my head:  
I am  
I am  
god hears me  
a free fucking woman (Krog, 2000b:117.)<sup>14</sup>

In her analysis of women's narratives Miller (2005:57) notes that women's "attempt[s] to exercise some agency in their lives" are affected by the differences in their "structural location and material circumstances". It is important to keep in mind that the different con-

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Cf. also Collins's (1990) and Bell Hooks (1984).

14 "paternoster" is a translation of a poem that originally appeared in Krog's *Gedigte 1989-1995* (1995). Meyer (2002:12) offers an example that "affirms Krog and Rushdie's assertion that translation does not only constitute loss but can also proffer some gain" in his reading of Krog's "paternoster" poem. He refers specifically to the word *sidder* in the phrase "die rots sidder" (translated by Krog as "the rock quakes"). He notes that the

... unmistakable reference to the slogan, 'You strike a woman, you strike a rock!' of the 1956 women's march on the Union Building is immediately apparent in the English in a way it is not in the Afrikaans. But once these Afrikaans and English phrases are placed alongside each other, Krog's translation has the effect of tying the Afrikaans original more tightly into democratic resistance politics, thereby inserting into Afrikaans literature an important radical gain. (Meyer, 2002:12.)

texts of Krog and Vera's characters mean that their ways of exercising agency, and as a result the language in which their agency is articulated, are very different. While Krog ends her collection with the assertive repetition of "I am" in a poem that signals her defiance of the forces that would deny her agency (as explored in the rest of the anthology), Vera ends Phephelaphi's story with a repetition of negation: "I am nothing ... I am not here ... I am not here" (Vera, 1998:126). With the very limited power that she has, Phephelaphi still expresses her will and the phrase "I will not" is repeated three times on p. 126.

## 5. Conclusion

In "Country of grief and grace" Krog (2000b:100) reflects on the implications of a denial of complicity:

(but if the old is not guilty  
does not confess  
then of course the new can also not be guilty  
nor be held accountable  
if it repeats the old

things may then continue as before  
but in a different shade)

The racial anxiety that is betrayed by the phrase "different shade" reminds the reader that this speaker's negotiation of her place in the new South Africa necessarily involves addressing her own whiteness. She implies that it is important for those who have wielded power in the past to reflect on their actions and to acknowledge their responsibility as a kind of moral investment in the future. In "Living in the interregnum" Nadine Gordimer (1988:264) considers "how to offer *one's self*" to postapartheid South Africa since white people "will have to redefine themselves in a new collective life within new structures". For Gordimer, part of the "essential gesture" that whites must make is to confess to past abuses that were perpetrated in their name. She also identifies literary fiction as the space where this process can take place and she insists that "nothing I say here will be as true as my fiction" (Gordimer, 1988:264).<sup>15</sup> While Gordimer anticipates the problem of white belonging at a time when apartheid still institutionalises white privilege, Krog is living the issue and she

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15 Gordimer is here referring to a public lecture that she originally gave at the New York Institute of the Humanities.

offers her vulnerable self to the new South Africa in her writing. Both Krog's and Vera's literary fiction explores ways of responding ethically to the pain of victims of violence in an attempt to ensure that things do not "continue as before".

Krog's (2000b:100) concern that, if South Africans do not address the past, "things may then continue as before", is also expressed in the last paragraph of Vera's *The stone virgins* (2002). In this novel, the sisters Nonceba and Thenjiwe are attacked by a former liberation soldier, Sibaso. He murders Thenjiwe and rapes and mutilated Nonceba. Cephas had been in love with Thenjiwe and, in the aftermath of the attack, he tries to help Nonceba to heal. Cephas realises the need to engage with the past without repeating it:

He must retreat from Nonceba, perhaps he has become too involved in replicating histories ... A new nation needs to restore the past. His focus, the bee-hive hut, to be installed at Lobengula's ancient kraal in kwoBulawayo the following year. His task is to recreate the manner in which the tenderest branches bend, meet, and dry, the way grass folds smoothly over this frame and weaves a nest, the way it protects the cool liveable spaces within; deliverance. (Vera, 2002:165.)

Cephas needs to negotiate between replicating, restoring and recreating the past and he is sensitive to the intricate differences between these modes of addressing history as he has seen what the past has done to Nonceba and Thenjiwe. For him, the possibility of "deliverance" is connected with taking responsibility for history and he seems to approach this in a broader sense of complicity as he wishes to make amends even though he was not the one who attacked Nonceba and Thenjiwe.<sup>16</sup> He is "seeking penance" (Vera, 2002:164) as "he now felt it was he who had walked away" after "Thenjiwe had asked him to stay". He makes the gesture of offering himself to

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16 Such a broad notion of responsibility is highlighted by a section in *Country of my skull* where Krog (1998:121) recalls the story of "six black youths" who approach the TRC with an application for "Amnesty for apathy". Krog (1998:122) notes that

[w]ith applications like this, the amnesty process has become more than what was required by law. It has become the only forum where South Africans can say: We may not have committed a human rights abuse, but we want to say that what we did – or didn't do – was wrong and that we're sorry.

While this may be the only official forum for working through complicity, I have argued that literary fiction provides a space to do just this.

Nonceba and to the "new nation" (Vera, 2002:165) of Zimbabwe by trying "to sustain the attitude of the penitent: a contrite heart which dares not double its original sin"<sup>17</sup> (Vera, 2002:164). Gunner and Ten Kortenaar (2007:5) contend that Vera "distorts history, but in so doing she produces restorative and radical new histories". I would similarly argue that the term *restoring* is the most apt to describe Vera's and Krog's interventions in history. While replication does not do justice to the originality of the histories they write, recreation does not sufficiently acknowledge that they are dealing with real historical events and experiences.

Literary fiction has the capacity to allow authors to create and readers to experience imaginary situations where they are either the victims or the perpetrators of abuse, or even where they identify with both these subject positions. When readers identify with a perpetrator of abuse it means that it is no longer tenable for such readers to distance themselves completely from that perpetrator. When a reader imaginatively substitutes him-/herself for a perpetrator it facilitates such a reader's exploration of his/her own sense of possible complicity. This article has argued that one of the most important functions of Krog's and Vera's texts is their ability to encourage both explorations of complicity and an ethical response to the pain of victims of violence.

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17 The sense of contrition is present throughout Krog's work, sometimes as explicitly as in her "Country of grief and grace", where the speaker pleads: "I want to say / forgive me / forgive me / forgive me / you whom I have wronged" (Krog, 2000b:98).

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**Key concepts:**

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**Kernbegrippe:**

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