

A NATION BECOMING? MEDIATING POST-APARTHEID IDENTITIES IN ANTJIE KROG'S *COUNTRY OF MY SKULL*

Solomon Mwapangidza

Midlands State University

Gweru – Zimbabwe

solomwap@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In this paper I use postmodernism to explore Antjie Krog's engagement with post-Apartheid identities in *Country of My Skull*. These identities, often complex and multiple, are mediated in the process of nation-building. I take the exercise of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as metonymy for the nation-building project, and I argue that Krog quite deliberately chose an ambiguous and complex genre to represent equally ambiguous and complex identities. One of the salient features of postmodernism is its anti-systemic, anti-form impulse, and the form that Krog uses refuses to be conscripted into any single conventional form. Dominated by testimonies of victims and perpetrators of apartheid violence, the form also bears aspects of autobiography, novel, poetry and journalistic snippets interlaced with quotes from psychoanalysts and philosophers. From time to time, anecdotes, fairytales, myths and legends are interpolated into the narrative to remind the reader of the porous borders between fiction and reality.

Keywords: postmodernism, identities, truth, reconciliation, metanarrative

1. RETHINKING METANARRATIVES IN *COUNTRY OF MY SKULL*

As a discursive practice, postmodernism repudiates homogenising, universalising and totalising narratives, privileging, instead, the dispersal of epistemological centres. It dethrones meta-narratives and inaugurates dissident centres of meaning formations.

UNISA 
university
of south africa

Imbizo

Volume 6 | Number 1 | 2015

pp. 39–50

Print ISSN 2078-9785

© Unisa Press

Accordingly, postmodernist literary works cast a withering eye on realist representational modes. By conflating realism with fiction in *Country of My Skull*, Krog is expressing skepticism about the concepts of 'truth' and 'reconciliation,' the supposed twin pillars of the emerging South African nation. She is asserting, in the words of Oscar Wilde (1974, 7), that '[t]he truth is rarely pure and never simple.'

Country of my Skull invites a close interrogation and rethinking of meta-narratives, and one such meta-narrative is the nation. A product of the universalising and homogenising impulse of modernity/enlightenment, the nation should not be presumed to be a self-evident and 'naturally occurring' phenomenon (McLeod 2000, 68). Benedict Anderson (1991, 7) describes it as an 'imagined political community', and while Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) calls it 'a product of invention and social engineering.' Both descriptions seem to affirm the disputable status of the concept as well as its being a constructed entity, and are thus in harmony with postmodernism's demand on us to regard the concept with the skepticism that all meta-narratives deserve. Krog is aware that nations owe their reality to narrative processes, and is even more acutely aware of the possible occlusion and exclusion of minority identities by the dominant group in the imagining of the nation. That is why she liberates disparate subjectivities by creating space for individual tales in her narrative. In that way, she is privileging a postmodernist perspective that dismantles the centre. Being advanced by Krog is the view that there is no History, but histories.

The two major centers of power in the new South Africa at the time of writing, the African National Congress (ANC) and the National Party (NP), are depicted in Krog's narrative as advancing two diametrically opposed strands of history that refuse to coalesce. If the NP is supposed to represent the ugly past and the ANC the hopeful present, then Krog blurs the boundary between that 'past' and this 'present'. She does this by foregrounding the way both parties attempt to re-construct their respective pasts in a bid to carve unblemished identities; either party resorts to glossing over such aspects of its past with which it feels uncomfortable. In fact, reading the ANC's testimony, one cannot escape the impression that the ANC is telling the NP's story, which buttresses the contention that Krog's narrative affirms postmodernism's assertion that truth and meaning are anything but retrievable realities. What the ANC displays is what Chennells (2005, 153) describes as 'self-serving historical memory,' and it validates Werbner's (1997, 1) claim that 'memory as a public practice is increasingly in crisis.' *Country of My Skull* demonstrates that identities forged around such troubled and unstable memories are equally troubled and unstable. Conspicuous by its absence in this nation-building endeavor is what McLeod (2000, 3) calls 'a common historical archive that enshrines a common past of a collective people.' The emerging nation has an ambivalent relationship with its past: it needs memories of past suffering to nourish a sense of common destiny key to building the spirit of nationhood, yet that past is marked by glaring affirmations of difference and hostility that militate against the forging of a common national identity. The past is thus depicted as being at once constructive and corrosive; it strengthens a sense of identity and belonging while it also alienates.

Lyotard (1979) holds the view that words do not mean; he argues that the relationship between signifier (word) and signified (meaning) is arbitrary. *Country of My Skull* complicates the role of language by questioning the degree to which words can mean the same thing to different social groups. The word ‘reconciliation,’ for instance, has several meanings, and one of its meanings in Afrikaans is: ‘not resist,’ which perhaps explains why some Afrikaner politicians use it as a threat; ‘to dictate their demands’ (2002, 165). Even the more common meaning of the word, ‘restore to friendship’ (2002, 165) is an anachronism in this context because South Africans have no previous friendship to talk about, and the country has pasts rather than a Past. Elsewhere, the ANC adheres to the view that it was fighting a ‘just war’ and that therefore it has no obligation to apologise, or need to apply for amnesty. However, Krog rips the ANC’s defense to shreds by interrogating the meaning of ‘just war.’ By highlighting such practices as ‘necklacing’ (a practice where ANC ‘revolutionaries’ killed suspected sellouts by placing tyres around their necks and burning them), Krog is throwing the meaning of ‘just war’ into disarray.

The function of language is further brought into question when the Minister of Finance is asked by Krog, the journalist, what needs to be done in order to improve the lives of the poor. The Minister answers (2002, 286):

“[...] there is no plan to get from whites what they owe us. To really change the lives of the poor, we need a growth rate of 6%”.

Here, language is shown to be erecting a barrier between the educated ruling class and the masses. The peasant’s simple demand for economic justice is quashed and buried beneath modern economic jargon, something that accentuates division and further complicates the formation of a national identity. Being exposed here, also, are the false ideals of the modern nation-state. The nation-state’s promise of a utopia is being mocked by the government’s failure or reluctance to improve the socio-economic welfare of the citizenry.

Throughout, Krog’s narrative places emphasis on the dialectic between the past and the present, as if to suggest that the past is not even past. By invoking the ghosts of apartheid government officials such as Louis Botha and Hendrik Verwoerd, Krog seems to be ridiculing the belief that an ugly past can be wished away. The myth of Apartheid government ministers whose corpses could not fit into coffins, together with the stubborn bloodstain in the House of Assembly, become a metaphor for a history that is resisting erasure, an idea that is buttressed by PW Botha’s refusal to accompany FW de Klerk to the TRC. The latter’s snubbing by figures that represent the past underscores the idea of the past refusing to melt into the present ideal order of reconciliation and democracy. The fact that the stain is in the House of Assembly, the symbol of modern democracy and justice, articulates Krog’s cynicism about these enlightenment ideals.

Krog persuades the reader to see a link between truth and identity. She states: ‘What you believe to be true depends on who you believe yourself to be’ (2002, 149). For the likes of PW Botha, the TRC represents a platform where the Afrikaner is stripped of his

identity, hence the declaration: ‘The truth Commission is tearing the Afrikaner apart... An Afrikaner doesn’t go on his knees before people, he does it before God’ (2002, 402–403). Clearly, Botha’s refusal to testify is undergirded by his Afrikaner pride, and it bears close affinity to Winnie Mandela’s reticence. For Winnie, admission of guilt is tantamount to sacrificing her personal, tribal and ANC honour. Thus, Krog quite intriguingly demonstrates how identity pride stands in the way of truth – further casting doubt on the possibility of a national identity. In PW Botha and Winnie Mandela, we see personal and group identities refusing to be subsumed into a national identity; and group and national concerns are conflated in a way that blurs the distinction between them.

If it is hard to locate a distinct centre in Krog’s narrative (and it is), that is precisely because the postmodernist stance that she adopts disavows centres. The ANC seeks to position itself at the centre of the truth and reconciliation discourse as a strategy to carve its identity as *the* revolutionary party that had a just cause and that therefore has the legitimacy to lead the new nation. The Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) rightly complains that the ANC is monopolising the liberation history, and Krog delegitimises the ANC’s claim by invoking the views of thinker Mahmood Mamdani who aptly observes that ‘[i]t becomes a problem when the history of resistance is seen as synonymous with the history of the ANC...’ (2002, 171). She further disrupts the ANC’s narrative by throwing in other contending narratives, notably from the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) with their damning claims that ANC ‘freedom fighters’ orchestrated violence against IFP members in KwaZulu-Natal. Here, Krog’s narrative strategy effectively dissolves the distinction between liberator and oppressor. In attacking the ANC, a synecdoche of anti-colonialist nationalism, the writer is also expressing her incredulity toward this grand narrative; she is contesting its (the ANC’s) status as a champion of peace and justice, so often taken for granted.

Krog’s postmodernist approach also questions the authority of the Christian model of reconciliation to speak for all South Africans. The privileging of Christianity to the exclusion of other religions is as ironic as it is unfortunate because as Javangwe (2011, 59) rightly observes, the very idea of nation ‘presupposes a homogenous composition which gives the impression that everyone is allocated equal space within it.’ By foregrounding this anomaly, Krog is crusading for the postmodernist view that disavows universalising dogmas. She challenges the totalising Western-Christian model of reconciliation by confronting it with indigenous models such as that of the *ilala* (a glass-blade milked for palm wine) that calls on two people with a dispute to sit opposite each other milking this blade as they confess. Any animosity that exists between the two parties dissipates with the emptying of the blade. The introduction of alternative models also functions as Krog’s way of refining our sensitivity to difference and capacity for tolerance, which is also why she emphasises the idea that the whole truth and reconciliation discourse is underpinned by Ubuntu, a humanist philosophy that is steeped in African epistemology.

Derrida’s (2001) postmodernist skepticism destabilises the notion of forgiveness which the ideal of reconciliation presupposes. He (Derrida 2001:32) cryptically captures

the paradox of granting forgiveness in his seemingly banal remark that ‘[t]rue forgiveness consists of forgiving the unforgivable.’ He argues that the introduction of a third is ‘a corruption of forgiveness itself’ (ibid), that true forgiveness is one that is unconstrained by sovereignty. Conspicuous in Derrida’s remarks is the iconoclastic impulse of postmodernism that ridicules man’s attempts at establishing order and rationalising the world in general. The TRC, with its assumed role of mediator, becomes, ironically, both a tool through which to achieve forgiveness (order) and a stumbling block in the pursuit of the same. Lyotard (1979) observed that, contrary to the Enlightenment assumptions, humankind cannot always organise the world rationally as well as bring everything neatly under control. The bitter words of Mrs Kondile best demonstrate the conundrum faced by both the state and the TRC (Krog 2002, 164–165):

It is easy for Mandela and Tutu to forgive...they live vindicated lives. In my life nothing, not a single thing, has changed since my son was burnt by barbarians...nothing. Therefore I cannot forgive.

Clearly, the forgiveness and reconciliation discourse is failing to resonate with the generality of the ‘injured.’ Being exposed by Krog here are the inadequacies of the much vaunted enlightenment methods of conflict resolution; no doubt they are found wanting when it comes to forging reconciliation and national identity in conditions of national trauma.

In order to lighten the prevailing serious mood and mock any pretensions to realism, Krog extensively deploys what Bakhtin (1975) calls ‘carnavalesque,’ a literary mode that diffuses the tension and seriousness of the dominant mood in a text. It creates ‘chaos’ mainly through parody and humor. The images that immediately come to mind are those of the six black youths who apply for what they call ‘Amnesty for Apathy’ (Krog 2002, 183), and the Eastern Cape artist who applies for amnesty ‘because she feels that she didn’t reflect the atrocities of Apartheid in her paintings’. The net effect of these comic interpositions is to conflate and confuse the serious with the trivial, thereby inverting reality and further underlining the illusive nature of the twin ideals of truth and reconciliation, the supposed foundation of a new national identity. A similar reality check deployed by Krog is the spectacle of ANC stalwarts who draw media attention as they bring to the TRC boxes full of amnesty applications which turn out to be blank. This parody simultaneously turns the TRC into a circus and subverts the assumption that meaning formations can be arrived at, a stance that implicitly privileges hiatus.

2. IDEOLOGICAL CONTRADICTIONS: LANDMINES IN NATIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Country of My Skull questions the feasibility of forming a national identity in the absence of restorative justice. The writer stimulates reflection on the issue through an unsettling rhetorical question from Mahmood Mamdani: ‘If truth has replaced justice

in South Africa – has reconciliation then turned into an embrace of evil?’ (2002, 169). This question exposes the contradictions inherent in modern systems of governance of which the TRC is one. A reconciliation whose precondition is blanket amnesty is in direct conflict with modernity’s ‘rule of law’ which demands always that justice take its course. The absurdity of justice without restoration is ridiculed through an anecdote which depicts victim and perpetrator trying to forge reconciliation, with the perpetrator refusing to return the stolen bicycle. When the victim asks (2002, 164) ‘And what about the bicycle?’ the thief’s answer is: ‘No, I’m not talking about the bicycle – I’m talking about reconciliation.’

Krog deploys the figures of Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu on the one hand, and Thabo Mbeki on the other, to dramatise not only the contradictions that attend the TRC, but to register her skepticism about the feasibility of forging a national identity in a country that is driven by concrete struggles over material resources and moral possibilities. Both sides have a common mission to build a nation, but between them lies a wide ideological chasm that makes their positions appear irreconcilable. Mandela preaches a universal morality that is in tune with Tutu’s overtly Christian ethos in its waiving of conditionality. Any appeal that the Mandela-Tutu position may draw is tempered by the sobering voice of Thabo Mbeki which calls for an ‘African Renaissance’ (2002, 444) whose telos is black empowerment. By introducing this opposing perspective, Krog is by no means endorsing it, for the postmodernist writer is, to twist Achebe’s phrase, a giver of headaches, not prescriptions. What Krog is doing instead is reminding the reader that meaning arrival in this troubled post-colony remains deferred and that national identity formation remains in limbo.

After using Mbeki’s stance to critique the Mandela-Tutu tranquilising, gradualist message, Krog goes on to expose the contradictions inherent in Mbeki’s own message. She writes (2002, 444 my emphasis):

...Mbeki was in a bind: to realise his African Renaissance dream he needed to instill pride in blacks as black African people. *He needs to isolate blacks from whites* in an effort to restore pride and confidence in them as blacks and as blacks in Africa. On the other hand, he needs to restore the moral fibre in a country wrecked by criminal violence.

By portraying Mbeki’s stance as being in conflict with itself, Krog is querying the capacity of the pan-Africanist meta-narrative to create and sustain a national identity. This is consistent with her postmodernist disposition that is inimical to totalising discourses.

Krog’s narrative gets more and more personal with the introduction of Thabo Mbeki’s “two nation” speech. When Thabo Mbeki blurs the distinction between perpetrator and beneficiary, it is almost as if the author is unable (or unwilling) to maintain the critical narrative distance she has hitherto maintained. As a white middle class person, Krog is implicated and her discomfort manifests in a series of self-serving questions (2002, 436–7):

What more does Tutu want? Is it something as insignificant as an apology from a senile PW Botha? Is it more? An Afrikaner Million March? Is it more than money? Is it to give the land back? ... What do we owe?

The writer's introspection creates a paradoxical situation where both victim and perpetrator become 'affected' (2002, 438): the former by 'injury' (2002, 438) and the latter by 'guilt' (2002, 438). Thus, the world the reader is made to see through the prism of postmodernism transgresses identity categories; it is a world where victim, perpetrator and beneficiary often get bunched up.

At the point where Krog becomes quite emotionally involved and increasingly conscious of her own identity, she almost jettisons her authorial 'objectivity'. Suddenly, the cautious optimism that has until now punctuated her narrative is replaced by a detached cynicism. The tone of the narrative gets ever more strident and caustic (2002, 440):

The accusation that Parliament was never told about the Apartheid regime's destabilising incursion into Angola continue to ring out. But the non-racial South African Defence Force of the first democratically elected government of the majority moved into Lesotho, and Parliament was only informed of this action two weeks after the event.

It is difficult to miss the sarcasm in the description of the new government as the 'non-racial,' 'democratically elected government of the majority.' Krog here deploys irony to spew her postmodernist venom at the enlightenment ideals of democracy and racial harmony. The wheel has come full circle: the juxtaposition of apartheid impunity with the ANC government's cynical disregard of Parliament completes her disillusionment with modern institutions, but more significantly, it is a scathing critique of modernity's 'democracy' and 'progress' mantra. By highlighting the continued invasion of sovereign states in the so-called modern era, Krog ruptures the progress claims of the Enlightenment, and that way rejects the so-called linear progression of time. It is as if the present remains trapped in the feudal past. True to her postmodernist stance, Krog is disavowing what Lyotard (1979:2) describes as "categorical and definitive periodisation of history," effectively asserting that a new South Africa and a new national identity are not 'givens' as the 'post' in 'post-Apartheid' would have us believe.

The narrative's satirical tone reaches its biting climax towards the end, where the South African society is described as 'remarkably well reconciled' (449) in the sense that 'all parties that participated in the June 1999 election [at some point] rejected the TRC or its final report' (449). So, in effect, the reader is being told that South Africans have finally achieved unity – in agreeing to remain in disunity. Krog's pessimism is barely disguised: the post-colony remains in deep identity crisis. Its precarious existence is little helped by the continued presence of international media organisations. Apparently the new nation is under constant surveillance by cultural vultures. The BBC documentary that details South African police brutality is at once a reminder of this surveillance and a satirical commentary on the modern nation-state. Being highlighted

here is postmodernism's inextricable link with the proliferation of communication and media technologies, with their notorious disregard for spatial, temporal and discursive boundaries.

3. RESCUING SUBMERGED AND FRACTURED IDENTITIES IN A WORLD OF STRANGERS

Country of My Skull rescues submerged identities by bringing them to the centre of national dialogue. Most conspicuous among these are female identities whose voices are often muffled in the gendered discourse of nation-building. Krog questions the underrepresentation of women in the TRC without necessarily suggesting that meaning arrival in the embattled process would have been made possible through their involvement. Her aim, rather, is to liberate the discursive space where diverse subjectivities are valued simply for their uniqueness. At the TRC testimonies, however, women's presence is also an absence. I say this because the public nature of the testimonies imposes severe restrictions on what women can testify. A woman who speaks the 'unspeakable' risks earning a label even before she is off the podium. In cases involving sexual abuse, for instance, the victim as woman has only two choices: not to testify and live with her traumatised identity, or to speak and earn a stigmatised identity. That partly explains why few women came up to testify. Psychologist, Ria Kotze, instructively notes that having to testify in public causes a kind of memory loss that is born out of the anxiety about having 'to live with the reality' (2002, 117). While this problem is not gender-specific as such, there can be little doubt that women are the more affected in a society that subjects them to a higher moral standard.

Krog's narrative alludes to the gendered nature of Apartheid violence whose prime target was the female body. Such violence was so calculated as to undermine the female's sense of self, characterised as it was by language that targeted the body ('You are a whore,' 'you are fat and ugly', 'you are not a revolutionary: you are a black bitch on heat' 2002: 271–4). It was language that ensured that the female victim lived with a constant awareness of her body and the shame socially associated with it. Thus the female body becomes 'a terrain of struggle' (2002: 271), and women experienced violence as black Africans and as women. The narrative however holds out the possibility of women forging new identities even under the most traumatic of conditions. The writer gives women agency by depicting them as displaying a spirit of sisterhood in adversity, sharing small but symbolic things such as skin oil, pajamas and slippers.

If Apartheid inflicted physical wounds, it also left many psychologically injured and alienated. The testimony of Lekotse, the shepherd, is poetically representative of the ravaged national psyche. He narrates an occasion when his privacy was brutally invaded by the police, an experience that permanently changed his view of the world. As head of the family, he was unable to prevent the strangers from harassing his family, and since then he has not been able to get over his sense of emasculation and loss. His

disconnection from the world of the strangers is captured in the series of questions he asks but to which he gets no answer (Krog 2002: 330):

What do you want? [...] Will you give me money to take my children to the doctor if they become ill from this cold? Who gave you permission to visit my home? Is this the way you conduct your affairs [...] Do you want beer, drink, boerewors? Are you hungry? [...] When are you going to fix my doors? Who is APLA?

As the authorial voice aptly diagnoses, the experience has taken away Lekotse's capacity to comprehend not just the world outside, but his own private space, for it has assumed an altogether new meaning. No longer is he able to understand even his own children who are educated. Clearly, this character is past what Giroux (1991, 222) calls "the unified self" celebrated in modernism; he is schizophrenic. The modern world represented by the brutal police has supplanted his own peaceful, private one which is characterised by hospitality, suggested in the questions (2002: 323):

Can I offer you beer,

Can I offer you drink,

Can I offer you boerewors?

Are you hungry?.

In this new, rough world, he too becomes a stranger. On the other hand, the intruders' inability to appreciate Lekotse's simple, innocent hospitality represents their inability to spiritually connect with the latter's world. Thus, meaning (or its absence) erects a barrier between the invaders and their victim. Here again Krog's subversive strategy blurs the boundary between national and individual experiences, and Lekotse's experience in a sense reenacts the moment of encounter between the coloniser and the colonised. Lekotse's home thus becomes a microcosm of the world of strangers that is the new South Africa.

4. KROG'S CRISIS OF BELONGING

Inasmuch as we applaud Krog's success in uncovering narratives and bringing to the fore obscured subjectivities, it is only fair that we pose to reflect on some of the limitations of her narrative. Krog herself says of narrative, that it 'carries the imprint of its narrator' (2002: 131), that '[t]elling therefore is never neutral, and the selection and ordering try to determine the interpretation' (2002: 127). Perhaps the greatest tribute we can pay the author is to use her own theory to critique her own narrative.

Part of the challenge *Country of My Skull* poses relates to what Cook (2001, 73) describe as 'the impossibility of representation' that typifies trauma narratives in general; and Krog refers to this problem when she talks of the difficulty of artistically

representing what she calls reality that is stranger than fiction. I argue here that in this narrative ‘about the truth’ (2002, 425), the writer is torn between the need to tell the truth and the desire to heal. She admits (2002, 300):

It is useless to talk about the truth. My whole telling of what happened will be driven forward, determined, trimmed, slanted by my desire not to hurt you, to entice you back, to protect your honour and to convince you to exonerate me.

Krog’s struggle to find a form for dealing with a past in which she herself was on the offensive side is symptomatic of her own crisis of identity, something akin to what Dubois (1994) has described as ‘double consciousness.’ She makes a self-conscious effort to distance herself from the men of her race because she feels embarrassed by their refusal to show penitence. She declares her wish to distance herself from them, stating: ‘I am not of them’ (2002, 135). She dramatises her avowed disconnection from her fellow Afrikaners in a diatribe aimed at PW Botha (2002, 410–411):

And I know that this man, who had Mandela offering to accompany him to the Commission, who had Tutu begging him to assist the Commission... is *dom*. He is not senile, or old, or suffering from the effects of a stroke: he is a fool – ‘n dwaas. And we have been governed by this stupidity for decades...

As much as this vitriolic attack is designed to convince her black audience of her purported migration from her white race, it is arguably all the more unconvincing for its viciousness. In fact, one can use this ‘attack’ to advance the argument that Krog is playing Botha’s advocate and is making a case for his exoneration. Her strategy as a defence advocate is, conveniently, to plead senility and non-humanity for her client. The coercive logic here is that if Botha is a non-human, a (‘a gliding crocodile’), then he is beneath contempt, and to hold a grudge against such a figure is to debase oneself. The writer thus is arguing for unconditional amnesty for Botha; he should be forgiven, with or without confession. Krog seems to be asking the victims: ‘You are in power, what more do you want?’ Indeed, this is the question Krog patronisingly asks when frustration eventually gets the better of her (2002, 436, my emphasis):

What more does Tutu want? Is it something as insignificant as an apology from *a senile* P.W Botha?...An Afrikaner Million March?...Is it to give the land back?.

There is a tinge of sarcasm in these questions. Earlier on, Krog stated that Botha is ‘not senile,’ now we are being told that he is senile. Her decision to play Botha’s advocate makes her ideological identity quite ambivalent. Is she a liberal genuinely determined to see true reconciliation, or just another apartheid apologist camouflaged as a liberal? She is redefining fairness and has fallen into the trap of defending the ultimate icon of Apartheid. This of course is a manifestation of her desire to belong” (2000: 289); she is trying to reconfigure her identity in order to make ‘a new kind of relationship possible’ (2002, 292), and this desire manifests in her rejection of Afrikaans (her mother language) and the wish to shed her white skin. Yet still she is informed by a consciousness that

complicates her effort to write herself into this deeply divided post-colony. That is why her voice is rather flat on the issue of economic redress. By not taking to task the Finance Minister when he shockingly expresses government's reluctance to redress economic imbalances, she creates the impression that she is content with the status quo. When a fellow journalist points out to her that what she is, has been informed by blackness (referring to her socio-economic status), she elects to misinterpret her, and escapes instead into a talk on the more abstract concept of Ubuntu which she condescendingly proclaims she got from blacks.

Krog exhibits desperation to carve space for her race in a country whose rallying history is marked by racial rancour. That explains why she is at pains to blur differences, an effort that unfortunately tempts her to equalise pain. She commends the TRC for regarding victims the same way, stating that 'grief, loneliness, bewilderment and pain knows no colour or creed, that the cut of hurt is the same for all' (2002, 290). Because she is using tinted ideological lenses, it eludes her that she is praising the TRC precisely for its shortcomings, and again she seems to be in confusion as to who really her audience is.

One can argue that Krog inhabits the space between belonging and not belonging. When the TRC seems to be making satisfactory progress, her sense of belonging is strong and she boldly declares: 'Yes, I would die for this [country]' (2002, 421). Yet when the voice of economic redress gains prominence and the Commissions' prospects appear bleak, she admits that she would not die for this same country. Her equally ambivalent relationship with men of her race, which is part of her bigger crisis of belonging, is best summed up by Mamogele, who remarks thus (2002, 421):

My problem with the argument is that she jumps all over the place – the moment the argument gets tough she prefers not to be an Afrikaner, not to be white, yet when we criticise them, she starts talking on behalf of them.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that *Country of My Skull* dramatises the close – sometimes inalienable – relationship between reality and fiction as a method of expressing skepticism at the chances of realising a post-Apartheid nation and forging a new South African national identity. In her assessment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Antjie Krog acknowledges the fact that the commission did succeed in making the experiences of victims a part of the national psyche. Both the Commission and Krog, the writer, subscribe to Hall's (1992) view that every single micro-narrative carries a truth of its own which constitutes a critical pillar in the construction of a national history and, by extension, a national identity. Krog, however, bemoans the fact that the Commission is guided almost exclusively by a single meta-narrative – Christianity. She rejects universalistic modes of reason, totalising notions of history and the ideal of a

unified self. The form that she has used eludes fixity; it allows her to navigate freely the space between fiction and reality, but more importantly, to articulate the view that post-Apartheid identities are just as complex and unstable as this genre.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, B. 1991. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso.
- Bakhtin, M. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Chennells, A. 2005. Self-representation and National Memory: White autobiographies in Zimbabwe. In *Versions of Zimbabwe-New Approaches to Literature and Culture*, ed. R. Muponde and R. Primorac, 131–144. Harare: Weaver Press.
- Cook, M. 2001. Metaphors for suffering: Antjie Krog's Country of My Skull. *Mosaic* 34(3): 73.
- Derrida, J. 2002. Negotiations. In *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971–2001*, ed. E. Rottenburg. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. 1994. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Giroux, H.A. 1991. *Postmodernism, Feminism and Cultural Politics: Redrawing Educational Boundaries*. New York: Albany State University.
- Hall, S. 1992. *Formations of Identity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hobsbawm, E. and Ranger, T., ed. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hutcheon, L. 1989. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge.
- Javangwe, T. D. 2011. *Contesting Narratives: Constructions of the Self and the Nation in Zimbabwean Political AutoBiography*. Doctoral thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Krog, A. 1999. *Country of My Skull*. London: Vintage.
- Krog, A. 2002. *Country of My Skull* (Second edition). Johannesburg: Random House.
- Lyotard, J. F. 1979. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Kwame, K. A. 2004. *The State and the Shaping of Identity*. Cambridge: Clear Hall.
- Mbembe, A. 2001. *On the Post-colony*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- McLeod, J. 2000. *Beginning Postcolonialism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Werbner, P. 1997. Essentializing Essentialism, Essentializing Silence: Ambivalences and Multiplicity in the Construction of Racism and Ethnicity. In *Debating Cultural Hybridity, Multicultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, ed. P. Werbner and T. Modood. London: Zed Books.
- Wilde, O. 1991. *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Essex: Longman.
- Zegeye A. and Vambe, M. T. 2007. *Close to the Sources*. Pretoria: Unisa Press.