

Communography¹ in Phyllis Naidoo's "Charlie and Jo"

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Summary

Phyllis Naidoo's *Footprints beyond Grey Street* (2007) adjusts conventional boundaries of the autobiographical genre: it is written *by* Naidoo but appears not to be principally concerned *with* the author's life. It is written largely about her comrades in the African National Congress who were in exile in African countries. Of the stories in Naidoo's "autobiography", "Charlie and Jo" in particular epitomises the absence of the author: a stylistic and generic anomaly which merits particular attention and thus forms the focus of this article. This memory-tale of social recollection evidences autobiographical self-displacement: the privileging of collective memory as opposed to an individual's nostalgic journey towards self-definition. This foregrounding of a collective identity has been identified and termed communography in the writings of comparable political groups such as the Irish Republican Army.

Opsomming

Phyllis Naidoo se *Footprints beyond Grey Street* (2007) verskuif die konvensionele grense van die outobiografie-genre: dit is *deur* Naidoo geskryf, maar dit kom voor asof dit nie primêr *met* die skrywer se lewe gemoeid is nie. Dit handel grotendeels oor haar comrades in die African National Congress wat in ballingskap in Afrika-lande was. Van al die stories in Naidoo se "outobiografie" staan "Charlie and Jo" veral uit wat betref die afwesigheid van die skrywer: 'n stilistiese en genre anomalie wat besondere aandag verdien en daarom die fokus van hierdie artikel vorm. Hierdie geheue-vertelling van sosiale terugroeping is 'n goeie voorbeeld van outobiografiese self-verplasing: die vooropstelling van kollektiewe geheue eerder as die nostalgiese reis van 'n individu na self-definiëring. Hierdie beklemtoning van 'n kollektiewe identiteit is geïdentifiseer en benoem as "communography" in die skryfwerk van vergelykbare politieke groepe soos die Ierse Republikeinse Leër.

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1. Communography is a term coined by Fanning (2003) to define the phenomenon he has observed in many IRA writers by which the individuality of the author is subsumed in the political anxiety of the community. This feature resonates in the Naidoo's autobiographical text, *Footprints in Grey Street* (2007).

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Introduction

In contrast to many post-1994 South African life narratives, there is little overt construction of an individual identity in Phyllis Naidoo's *oeuvre*. Although the apartheid state set out to obliterate the identity of activists, it was not this impetus that effected Naidoo's own persistent self-effacement. Naidoo grew to identify so intimately and passionately with the community of her African National Congress (ANC) struggle comrades that she voluntarily surrendered a private self to the collective self and collective memory of those heroes who had fallen. Her concern for her comrades, her determination to record their lives and thus deny the white Afrikaner government its desire to expunge their memory, caused her, as author, almost to "disappear" from her own text. The extremity and rarity of this generic and stylistic phenomenon as well as the complexity of private and public memory in her prose, single out her writing for analysis within the areas of autobiography, memory-work and political record.

She does not deal with her struggle in a personal manner nor is there evidence of a crisis of identity in her writings. Naidoo's narrative transcends or displaces the "self" in her existence within a collective social memory. Where autobiography is usually centripetal, in its concern with the author's own life, Naidoo's life, which is actuated so deeply by extreme political self-sacrifice, appears, in remarkable ways, to be centrifugal. Through the lives of others, yet still in Naidoo's own words, her text serves to embody the author in a unique way. Fanning observes this same phenomenon of autobiographical self-displacement in the literature of the Irish Republican Army (IRA): "Republican autobiographies subvert autobiographical conventions by shifting the focus of the text from the author to the community with the text becoming a critique of national and conventional historiographical ideologies" (Fanning 2003: iii).

The many remarkable similarities between the writings of IRA figures such as Bernadette Devlin (1969) and the work of Naidoo conflict with generalised assumptions made by Govinden (2008) and Coullie (1996) about the intrinsic nature of Western autobiography. So Govinden writes:

Coullie's observations about the autobiographical/biographical writings of Kuzwayo, Griesel and Gordon, that they move away from Western humanistic conventions of asserting an autonomous self in their writing, is relevant to my reading of Naidoo's writing in "Ten Days" in particular and her writings as a whole. Naidoo is similar to these other women writers who refuse "such conventions precisely because their strengths lie in the acknowledgement of mutuality. Autobiography in the Western tradition, with the strong authorising "I" gives way in these texts to the more fluid forms of auto/biography – forms which more fruitfully can fathom the nuances of reciprocity".

(2008: 296)

Although it is tempting to regard Naidoo's concern with a community as part of Ubuntu and something distinctly non-Western, this generalisation is overturned by the evidence of parallels in genre and style of IRA writers. Gerry Adam's *Before the dawn* (1996), Bernadette Devlin's *The Price of My Soul* (1969) and Sean MacStiofáin's *Revolutionary in Ireland* (1975) are decidedly Western yet exhibit clear similarities in autobiographical style to that of Naidoo. Unawareness of such writings, which would seem obvious in terms of common political and ideological concern, leads Govinden (2008) into a trap of some complexity. Most of her observations are based on the assumption of Coullie as it applies to Naidoo.

Centrality of "self", which is customarily taken to be the defining notion of autobiography, writing your own life, is silently deconstructed in Naidoo's communal "life". Such altruism, life lived in and for a community, is substantiated by the text's lack of authorial self-concern: something which in turn questions hegemonic values of self-achievement, self-importance and self-realisation. Absence of an author, by tacit implication, vilifies capitalist-materialist self-concern. In much of Naidoo's work, the sheer intensity of the political moment fuses text and cause into one. The unique form of Naidoo's writing is both a product of such fusion and a reflection of it.

The gravity and intensity of the ANC, Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and IRA struggle is comparable in both political and literary terms. The three movements shared information, strategy and ideology over many decades. Their common fight against colonial hegemony bound them together naturally and historically. Each movement aimed to create a single state with universal franchise: one South Africa, one Ireland and one Palestine. So far, the ANC alone has secured its objective. Fanning writes the following of Ireland and Devlin but it could as well have been spoken of South Africa and Naidoo:

At some point in a country's history there are enough people who feel the same way at the same time to create a force and change the pattern of events. Devlin's "autobiography" is not only a reflection or representation of this force – it is, to paraphrase Samuel Beckett on James Joyce, that force itself. Within the complex web of power relations in which she is writing, the act of writing this text creates the possibility of change rather than merely confirming its existence – it is part of the struggle, not a memory of it.

(2003: 62)

While nostalgia connects a person to his/her own past, nostalgic recollections tend to blend the private with the public (Meyers 2009: 739). Liberation activists might well feel nostalgic about historical events in which they personally participated: they might secretly mourn the lives of their fallen comrades. The tension that emerges through recollection prompts the question: to what degree is the memory influenced by deliberate and/or natural forgetting. A second tension is formed between history and

memory: the analytical interrogation of the past is an exercise in interpretation. The writer constructs her own meaning of historical events. Recollection may be so profoundly emotional for the writer that the reader has to ascertain to what extent it enhances the narrative with a personal perspective, reinforces communal identification as outlined by Rive (1990) and Barnett (1983) or distorts the historical event itself.

Naidoo and “Writing the Self”

The 1990’s marked the end of Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa which, for forty years, instituted oppression and statutory racism. The advent of freedom witnessed an unparalleled engagement with “writing the self”, social recollection and a proliferation of life stories in the literary landscape of the country. People were liberated, and encouraged to write their own biographies before vital memories were lost; memories which would build a counter-narrative to the old racist version of events. New historians had to re-write colonial and apartheid accounts of the white man as civiliser, three centuries of white occupation, in order to reconstruct a history of the struggle for, and final achievement of, democracy. Individual records of struggle leaders and members were essential to the re-writing of history in South Africa: their biographies and autobiographies were foundational in amassing new material. There was an outpouring of collective memory which proved restorative, reflective and humbling.

As part of this broader trend of reminiscence about the fight against apartheid, many autobiographical writings by South African Indian women emerged with strong undercurrents of individual nostalgia. Liberation activists among this group include Kesaveloo Goonam’s *Coolie Doctor* (1991), Fatima Meer’s *Prison Diary: One Hundred and Thirteen Days 1976* (2001); Zarina Maharaj’s *Dancing to a Different Rhythm* (2006) and Pregs Govender’s *Love and Courage: A Story of Insubordination* (2007). Although Phyllis Naidoo’s *Footprints Beyond Grey Street* (2007) belongs to this grouping in many respects, it differs from them in significant and compelling ways. The essence of many of these narratives is a bittersweet nostalgia: there is mourning for the losses, lost lives and lost living, mixed with a celebration of the gains, of freedom, dignity and self-determination. By contrast, Naidoo’s authorial absence shows little of this nostalgic sense of loss and triumph. She writes an autobiography of another kind. Her personal invisibility forms, or even demands, an ethical visibility: her self-effacement becomes a manifesto of community, of shared living at one with the way she lived in exile in Lesotho and consonant with ANC ideology. The unique form of her writings was a reflection in form and style of her own conscientious resistance.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a step towards healing in the country: it allowed and invited writers to engage with history and the "writing of the self" in a more candid manner and within a safe space. Although there have been critics of the process, there is validity in Antjie Krog's (1998) argument that, if the TRC sees truth as the widest possible compilation of people's perceptions, stories, myths and experiences, it will have chosen to restore memory and foster a new humanity, and perhaps that is justice in its deepest sense. The subaltern speak through such autobiographies: there is a "talking back", a restoration of memory, bringing to light the blanked out areas of their identity and in the case of prisoners and exiles, of their lives. Many of the activists stress an essential humanity in their self-narratives: they recover and reflect their roles as interventionist historians.

The element of nostalgia is mentioned by many of the activists and exiles with poignant elegance in their autobiographies: it was articulated by Mandela:

... the question each of us raises on occasion when we are alone with our own thoughts: What did we do to the people who loved us, our spouses, children, family? What price did they pay for the choices we imposed on them?

(2007: 17)

Nostalgia for home, family and life left behind looms large over the autobiographical current of the new country. The critical question here is the nature of, and reasons for, the difference in Naidoo's narrative: her conscious neglect of nostalgic memory and deliberate foregrounding of collective social memory. Again, patterns in IRA writing accord with Naidoo's rooted commitment to cause and community to the point of autobiographical displacement of self:

MacStiofáin ... does not see [t]his autobiography as being the story of a man, but of a community, of which he is only a small, albeit important, part. The private is always public in some ways in the north of Ireland, just as the public is always somewhat secretive; and just as the distinction between "self" and "community" does not work in this context, the distinction between "public" and "private" fails as well.

(Fanning 2003: 81)

Svetlana Boym, in her book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), stresses the centrality of space to the concept of nostalgia: longing for a home that no longer exists (or even never existed in the case of children of exiles). The democratic government post-1994 deployed nostalgia as part of their national programme for healing and reconciliation. They commissioned a range of museums such as the Apartheid Museum, the Robben Island Museum, Constitution Hill and Mandela's home in Soweto. These are state-backed initiatives to recover social memory through historical "spaces"

which could provide the kind of “restorative” nostalgia that focuses on *nostos*. Such sites reconstruct the lost home, and, in the case of South Africa, answer in part the African nationalist imperative to reclaim space.

“Reflective” nostalgia, on the other hand, dwells on *algia*: it is not restricted to place or habitation and is embodied in the essence of movement as opposed to destination (Boym 2001: 22). With regard to life narratives, nostalgic memories exist independently of the state so that the narrator is free to critique (sometimes vociferously) weak elements in the liberation movement during the freedom struggle and even those corrupt officials within the new democracy: as is evident in the narratives of Pregs Govender (2007) and Zarina Maharaj (2006).

Naidoo spent over 13 years in self-exile, a “wanderer” in a range of places: Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Zambia, the United Kingdom, Cuba, Hungary and Russia. She left just after June 1976 and returned at the end of the interregnum in 1990 to a very different South Africa. Nietzsche’s articulation of the notion of the wanderer pertains to exiles such as Naidoo:

He who has come only in part to a freedom of reason cannot feel on earth otherwise than as a wanderer – though not as a traveler towards a final goal, for this does not exist. But he does want to observe, and keep his eyes open for everything that actually occurs in the world; therefore he must not attach his heart too firmly to any individual thing; there must be something wandering within him, which takes its joy from change and transitoriness.

(1986: 266)

Exile, journeys, migration, displacement and uprootment form the current “language of life” of much of the globalised world today but this sort of movement is often chosen or forced by economic necessity. It is neither an intellectual state of mind nor a metaphysical sense of alienation. In the case of political wandering, issues of injustice and nostalgia are much stronger. Voluntary, economically motivated, wandering or politically enforced displacement both create a feeling of *heimwee* (“longing for home”), which, as Stuart Hall (1999: 38) asserts, disturbs the notion that people come from originary, whole cultures. Several aspects of South African Indian history, which form the originary culture of Naidoo, are absent from her narrative: she prefers writing about the political heritage of the liberation movement. Naidoo asserts her African birthright, as opposed to her racial classification as Indian by the regime:

I know no other home. This is my birthplace and the birthplace of my father. My grandfather was brought here by the British colonialists so that he might work in the Natal sugar cane fields for ten shillings a month. Because my grandfather was brought from India, the white racists call me “Indian”

(Phyllis Naidoo collection)

An important question in collective memory regards construction versus selection in the process of shaping social recollections (Meyers 2009: 733). Are past events, key political crises such as Soweto 1976, the total onslaught period of the Botha regime or the border war, of less importance than a social group's utilisation or mobilisation of such events (Halbwachs 1992: 46)? Events themselves appear quite distinct from the opportunistic use of them for propaganda of the time. How important is the process of shaping collective memories into a reliable history of the country compared to the critical moments of history, and can the two ever be separated?

Naidoo replies in a way to part of this question. An important watershed in struggle history was Soweto 1976. Naidoo refers to the event as an imperative for the present. The heroism of the 1976 youth in standing up against Bantu Education must be emulated by youngsters through courage, determination and dedication to ensure that they acquire a good critical education: "The dead bodies of those children tell so eloquently to what extent our racist rulers will go to ensure that they alone are the Godfathers of our minds" (The Phyllis Naidoo collection).

Schwartz (1982) adds further complexity to the argument by maintaining that the essential activity in the process of creating collective memories is not construction, but rather selection. The history of the liberation struggle underpins the narrative of most activists. But, in the recording of social memories, the autobiographer often, and naturally, wishes to select and/or remember certain events while suppressing or even excluding more traumatic ones: specific happenings are emphasised while others are concealed. The personality of the writer naturally influences the narrative and the focus is on his/her individual experiences within the historical events. How this experience is transformed into literature is also dependent on the creative process of selection as well as the forms taken by human consciousness when remembering events (i.e. were they angry, proud, dismayed, bitter, sad, happy, etc?). Historical events are easily distorted in the process of recollection. Barnett (1983) claims that the truth of the historical event is unimportant; it is the spirit of the work of black South African writers that takes precedence:

Whether *Down Second Avenue* is strictly true is in fact of no importance. It is doubtlessly a true account in spirit of Mphahlele's life and that of the people around him.

(1983: 225)

Watts (1989: 113) explains this succinctly as an establishment of the black writer's own identity, a way of striking the balance between individual and historic events. It is the objective of the exercise that determines selection as well as how the memory is constructed in the narrative. Rive (1990), identified anger as a key element in black protest narratives during the thirty year interregnum from Sharpeville, 1960, to the unbanning of the African

National Congress in 1990. Rive (1990) concurs with Halbwachs (1992) that collective memory was used to suit current needs, and in the case of black autobiographers, for example Can Themba, Bloke Modisane, Ellen Kuzwayo and Ezekiel Mphahlele, the need was to portray the suffering of black oppression in sharp tones of protest against the regime:

There was no room for out-moded didacticism. The anger flowed directly out of the narrative sequence, sometimes obscuring it ... and the final product was often crude, ill-constructed and stylistically weak. But what was said took precedence over how it was said. Literature was exploited in order to reveal the racial evils of society.

(Rive 1990: 10)

Although Naidoo's narrative reflects, and identifies with, a sense of community among exiles, in a similar vein to black protest autobiography, there is a distinct difference in that she does not "recount her life": it is not an "individual life" or "a story of a personality", integral concepts of an autobiography according to Lejeune (1989: 41). Neither does she "stop and try to think about what these things were doing to me" as in the case of Mphahlele (Lindfors 1972: 40).

An interesting trope in Naidoo's narrative is the tension between construction and selection: characteristic of her writing is identification with the community of activists and a conscious attempt to write the other and not the self. Naidoo neither reflects on the formation of her own political identity like Goonam (1991), nor does she foreground her own role in the political struggle like Govender (2007). The "explosion of memory" evidenced in the proliferation of life narratives chiefly concerned the lives of the key figures in the liberation struggle, hence Naidoo's imperative to document the lives of the those at risk of being forgotten, such as Looksmart Solwandle Ngudle, Joseph Nduli and George Sewpershad.

Social Memory in "Charlie and Jo"

A primary objective of Naidoo's social memory dictates her use of writing as a means to keep alive the memories of others: in this case lesser-known freedom fighters. So, for example, a note in the margin explains that Charlie and Jo were born Clifford E. Brown and Leon Meyer respectively. In the opening of the story we glean a range of information: the date Charlie and Jo arrived in Maseru to join the liberation movement and start their journey with Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) cadres, the names of fellow activists in exile and a traumatic personal encounter that Naidoo experienced.

COMMUNOGRAPHY IN PHYLLIS NAIDOO'S "CHARLIE AND JO"

Charlie and Jo came to visit me on such a bleak, biting winter morning in July 1979. They decided to visit me, after a parcel bomb removed Father John's right arm and injured five ANC cadres, myself included.

I had been discharged and was at home. I suffered a burst ear drum, uprooted teeth and much shrapnel in my backside that made sitting and standing-up, a painful exercise. I made daily trips to the hospital to change my dressing, assisted by Monroe Gilmour, an American aid worker.

(2007: 15)

Immediately on receiving the two youngsters from the Eastern Cape, Naidoo seems to slip from social memory into a rare moment of nostalgia:

Their Cape accents were so welcome. Some things are so peculiarly South African – so much, us. In exile you miss home in all its pained complexities. I missed the boere musiek of Afrikaans-speaking South Africans.

(2007: 16)

Historical information is provided about the youth that left the country as political refugees. The issue around accommodating young refugees is captured in the story. Not only does Naidoo distance herself from the centre stage of historical events, but she also places the memory of the two young activists within the larger collective space. She does not foreground her role as the person tasked with the welfare of the young refugees, or the fact that Charlie and Jo were accommodated in her home. Govinden (2008: 299) notes that Naidoo was seen as a mother-figure to an extended family of exiles and refugees, being referred to as "Mother" or "Ma Phyl". Naidoo transforms what would have been her own conventional microcosm of home for herself, her children and family, into the meta-narrative: providing a home for the collective of young refugees that fled South Africa:

The problem of housing our youth, in exile, became urgent after June 1976, with our children streaming into Botswana, Swaziland and Lesotho. In Lesotho, the Anglican Church undertook this exercise at first. During the school holidays the refugees lived at Lesotho High School.

Around February/March of 1977 the Lesotho Government gave South African refugees a house in Maseru. This three-bed-roomed house was called *The Camp*.

The Camp has a two roomed outhouse, a toilet and garage. The outhouse was occupied by Willie and Betty Leslie, both South African refugees. Willy and Betty took care of this household and the new arrivals, so professionally, despite having to contend with their own pain in exile.

(2007: 16)

The word "our" is charged with significance. Naidoo's use of it denotes the certainty of her belief in an inclusive, multiracial democracy just as it connotes the way in which youth of all colour are collected in her maternal embrace. Coullie (1996: 133) refers to the notion of the "relational self",

where the boundaries between self and others are “smudged”, as is the case here. It is unique in autobiography to discover that others are foregrounded to this extent. A “dispersal” of the self takes place in order to highlight and memorialise the lives of fellow comrades which leads to the obfuscation of her own self. Such a phenomenon may usefully be classified as communo-graphy. This profound sense of duty to remember the lives of those whom other “struggle autobiographies” are determined to forget is observable in “Charlie and Jo”, where mention is made of a range of activists who were refugees and who shared a common space with Naidoo at some period during their exile. They include Kathy Royer, Lerato Bargdett, Willy and Betty Mamorena, Father John Osmers, Chris Hani, Monroe, Rhonda and Jackie Quin. Other struggle personalities include Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim, Jeffrey Mthethwa and Gladman Matroos.

There are many names that emerge in the story. Apart from important figures in the history of the country such as Hani and Ebrahim, the ‘other’ names might never have been heard of again, lost in newspaper articles. But, it is in the recollection of the writer’s memory that “minor” comrades are brought back to life so that their memory will live on in the “story” which is the basis of the new history. The naming of lesser-known comrades is essential to Naidoo’s objective of constructing identities that apartheid forces attempted to erase. Ironically, her own identity *seems* to lie on the periphery while she shifts the identity of her comrades to the centre. This is not only characteristic of her narratives, but also of her political life as she explains in an interview with her struggle colleague, Hilda Bernstein:

Always, I wasn’t on the stage – no speaking. I was just doing things.
(1994: 226)

This apparent disappearance is countermanded, however, by the fact of her writing itself. Her persona seems absent from within the narrative structure, but her own writing, after all, remains: her name is inscribed, although her life and presence are not described.

Her own “life-story” or biography has to be excavated from the margins of her narratives. The personal, for instance, is evident in “Charlie and Jo”, the trauma of the bomb attack on her home, the separation from her own two sons and the harassment endured at the hands of the security police. Nostalgia for her sons, though spoken of softly, is intertwined and “heard” autobiographically within the story of Charlie and Jo:

They sat down shyly. Being on the floor, I looked up at their unshaven youthful faces. How young they were – so incredibly youthful. It was as if my own two sons, Sahdhan and Sha, were visiting me from Hungary and Cuba.
(2007: 17)

In the conventional writing of the self, Naidoo might easily, almost expectedly, have inserted the stories of her sons, the painful separation from them during her own and her sons' exile, the traumatic death of Sahdhan by South African security agents in Lusaka and the sudden death of Sharadh due to asthma upon his return from exile. Unlike the inclination of struggle autobiographers such as Meer (2001) who writes in an intensely personal manner, Naidoo neither focuses on her personal experiences nor claims a private space for herself or her family in her narrative. Her teenage daughter, Sukhthi, is mentioned in the story, but entwined with the story of Charlie and Jo:

In the meantime both Charlie and Jo had a crush on my daughter Sukhthi. Her views were not canvassed, but they asked me if they could marry her. "You better ask her!" I corrected both.

(2007: 19)

Naidoo is known for keeping detailed records of political events and experiences during her exile, especially of security force attacks on the liberation movement in Swaziland and Lesotho – writings include *Le Rona Le Batho: An Account of the 1982 Maseru Massacre* (1992) and *Waiting to Die in Pretoria* (1989). Both these texts by Naidoo were self-published. This fact points to a remarkable degree of clear-sighted political and strategic maturity. In the midst of political turmoil and danger, she was able to retain a sure focus and iron will. She never wavered with regard to the importance of the history in which she was engaged, its centrality and purpose in forging democracy out of tyranny. By avoiding conventional forms of publishing, her priority was made clear: to record the history of her comrades who died in the struggle as opposed to celebrating herself as a writer and historian.

In the case of Phyllis Naidoo, it is strangely necessary, in searching for filaments of her *own* life within her *own* biography, to employ Foucault's archaeological approach: to pick information about Naidoo's own life from her writings, analyse unrecorded information and practices, engage the discipline of inferences and detect what lies latent beneath the text, and, essentially, instigate a different history from what is patently recorded or spoken (Foucault 1972: 138). In the gaps and discontinuities, the reader is able to unearth what is concealed and buried in order to piece together an oblique narrative of Naidoo, to excavate a submerged self. The archaeologist's aim is therefore to elicit discursive regularities and conditions of existence from the discourse. It is important to acknowledge that it was Karl Marx and not Foucault who first attacked a history of uninterrupted continuities, a history based on the founding function of the subject, of human consciousness (Chetty 1988: 31). Marx's analysis of social relations shows that human activities are in the final analysis determined outside the consciousness of the individual subject (Sheridan 1980: 92).

Trinh's (1989: 20) description of women's writings generally as an act of solidarity is valuable in understanding Naidoo's narrative. As Naidoo holds up a mirror, reflecting and constructing the story of Charlie and Jo through her writing, she is in turn reflected back in that very writing. She focuses on the lives of her comrades, and in the writing of their stories, we garner information concerning her own life story. For example, Naidoo is known for her role as legal counsel for her colleagues on Robben Island during the 1960s and 70s and her legal work during exile.

In the description of the visit of Charlie and Jo's parents/family to Maseru and their rapt attention to the story of the exiles, we detect her long stint as a teacher:

As a teacher of some 14 years, you remember the pleasure when your class was locked into your lesson with shocked interest at what you did or said. Questions are put to the teacher that shows that the class is thinking. You are reaching their minds. Our instant 'students' read and questioned with such religious fervour.

(2007: 21)

When Jo's parents spent the night at Rhonda's home, they noticed Mandela's *No Easy Walk to Freedom* on the table and naively questioned Rhonda about it. (This text, edited by Ruth First (1965), contained Mandela's speeches at the Treason Trial and is not the later text by Anthony Sampson):

"Do you read this *Kaffir's* book?"

Rhonda looked at the book and said: "I don't know the meaning of the word *Kaffir*. Yes, I have read Nelson's book. He is one of the greatest minds on the African continent. He is a world leader. If *Kaffir* means all that, it was correct."

(2007: 20)

The negative terms "Kaffir" and "Coolie" to refer to social groupings are the shameful inheritance of apartheid. The dawn of enlightenment experienced by Jo's parents after finishing the book overnight is important. The Afrikaner regime was successful to a degree in its propaganda campaign to paint Mandela, and his fellow Robben Island prisoners, during incarceration, as terrorists. But the propaganda was not completely successful. Though few, some sustained the truth about Mandela's principles. Opponents to white dominance such as Naidoo and her group of exiles were able to make Charlie and Jo's family aware of Mandela's principle of non-racialism. Ironically, Jo's parents were confused because, to them, Mandela in his memoir *Long Walk to Freedom* sounded just like their Dominee (Minister). The book was banned in South Africa so they had not been able to read it before. The message of reconciliation is clearly articulated, not by Naidoo or

the comrades, but in the words of Jo and Charlie's family, portraying a new understanding of the divided society, couched in strong Biblical undertones. But, it is also a clear reflection of the role that Naidoo played in the welfare and wellness of the young refugees, in caring for them *in loco parentis*:

This home is like Christ's mansion – everybody is welcome. No one bothers whether you are White, coloured, African or Indian. Why can't we do these simple things at home? What we did not give our children at home, they found here. Why don't we see this Charter at home? It says what the Bible says. We are going to talk to our Dominee.

(2007: 22)

More importantly, and as a kind of comfort to all the parents whose children fled the country to join the liberation movement, Naidoo sums up the discussion about Mandela in a reconciliatory and somewhat triumphant manner:

They wanted so much to understand this new and frightening world their children have embraced.

(2007: 22)

Naidoo also pays tribute to all youngsters, through the story of Charlie and Jo, whose courage and political passion drove them to leave the security of their homes and join the freedom struggle in foreign lands. Many of them lost their lives in the process:

Later we were to learn that our Charlie aka Clifford Edmund Brown (26), Vincent de Vos (25), Jeffrey Mthethwa (28) and Gladman Vuyisile Matroos (27) were cornered and killed at Brighton Beach where they were to blow up an oil refinery.

Who would have believed me if I had told someone that the youth who came to visit me that morning in July 1979 would be dead on 13 May 1984 – five years later.

(2007: 25)

The story remains pertinent to South African society with regards to the influx of refugees from Africa. The collective memory of the generosity of poor African neighbours in providing political asylum to the activists is documented in the story:

I later found out that these comrades had fled South Africa and surrendered their arms to the Lesotho police. The South African regime was out to get them and was threatening to invade Lesotho. The three comrades were put on a plane to Maputo. Lesotho was spared another invasion

(2007: 23)

The hospitality of the neighbours, in spite of the violation of their space by the South African regime as a consequence of providing refugee status for the ANC exiles, stands in stark contrast to xenophobic attacks on foreign Africans today. In her submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1996, Naidoo requested reparation for the losses suffered by neighbouring countries as a result of their support for the liberation of South Africa. The countries she mentioned in her submission include Angola, Mozambique, Zambia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Botswana and Lesotho. It was Lesotho that received special mention by Naidoo as the country that suffered the most for their generosity. The story entitled “Charlie and Jo”, the memories of the real young men behind it and the shelter given by Lesotho are all part of that country’s memorable kindness: all justly recorded by Naidoo, as chronicler/historian of so much that might have been forgotten.

An unusual construction in the story is how Naidoo links the death of Charlie to another famous activist that bombed a bar in Durban:

The night that Charlie was killed, a little boy sat on the roof of his humble home in Wentworth, while the comrades and the police exchanged fire.
(2007: 25)

The words “a little boy” is in italics and along the margin, a handwritten note explains further:

That little boy sitting on the roof on that fateful night would later follow in the footsteps of the dead comrades. He was Robert McBride.
(2007: 25)

The story seems to have a cyclical ending indicating that the struggle continued; the batons of the fallen comrades were passed on to other comrades. It seems as if this is more than the story of Charlie and Jo, it is the story of the numerous heroes who died fighting the apartheid state, with the inevitable question asked by parents:

Why did Charlie’s dream for a free SA end so tragically? That smiling beauty has left us forever.
(2007: 25)

Conclusion

Naidoo’s legacy as memory-builder and public chronicler of sacrifices and dedication balances this great sense of nostalgia and loss. Her defence of the defenceless and her writing of the unwritten, are bulwarks against the pain of private grief which she, like many others, had to pretend to ignore for the

greater good ahead. Naidoo's community of spirit is aptly reflected in her communography. Her prose is made all the more compelling for its autobiographical innovations and unique position in the field of memory-work. IRA ideals and community of concern similarly led to self-denial and patterns of autobiographical self-displacement:

[These] texts by Devlin, MacStiofáin, and Adams question the form and politics of autobiography as a genre, as well as such conventions as authorship. That they come from an environment in which subject construction and power/resistance are violently fought over should make us re-examine the politics of autobiography, perhaps of writing itself. Writing a 'communography' as I have called these texts, is to situate oneself within a nexus of power relations – which necessarily means that one is resisting power at the same time that one is seizing it. When the focus of the text is shifted from the individual to the community, it is the community which is situating itself within the realm of power and resistance.

(Fanning 2003: 97)

The reader is left to piece together Naidoo's life from her writings, her reminiscences of the experiences of others and historical events that affected her comrades. Naidoo's invisibility, though largely created by circumstances and adopted by her as a pragmatic way of life and writing, ironically creates in the reader an urgent need and desire to see her, make her visible however evident it is that, for her, the process of shaping collective memories was paramount.

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