

Accountability, Acknowledgement and the Ethics of “Quilting” in Antjie Krog’s *Country of My Skull*¹

Ashleigh Harris

Summary

This paper is primarily concerned with accountability and acknowledgement, and their relationship to one another, in Antjie Krog’s *Country of My Skull* (1998). Arguing that both accountability and acknowledgement become ethically problematic in Krog’s transposition of one form of textual practice to another (for example, her transposing of testimony and of academic non-fictional texts into fictional narrative or poetry), the paper proposes that two very different ethical problems arise in *Country of My Skull* because of an elision of textual and generic frames that ultimately erases traces to textual “origins”: whether that origin be the testimonies given at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings, or other textual materials used by Krog in the making of this text. The ethical consequence of this muddying of genres and textual frames is twofold: first, the appropriation of individual testimonial voices and, second, plagiarism – two very different ethical transgressions which, nevertheless, bear consideration alongside one another since the two may be seen to emerge from the same textual practice as Krog’s; what she refers to as “quilting”. While Krog sees textual quilting as allowing for a multivocal text that does not present a singular or coherent notion of national truth, I will argue that it also allows Krog to transpose one form of textuality into a different generic frame altogether. While this is not in and of itself problematic, the ethical consequences of the transposition, reinterpretation, and transformation of one textual object to another require careful consideration. The paper ultimately suggests that fictional and poetic texts need to acknowledge and be accountable to the original texts that they transpose and transform by providing the reader with a clear and interpretable trace-back to that original.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel handel hoofsaaklik oor toerekenbaarheid en erkenning, en die verband tussen die twee, in Antjie Krog se *Country of My Skull* (1998). Daar word geredeneer dat sowel toerekenbaarheid as erkenning eties problematies raak in Krog se transponering van een vorm van tekstuele praktyk na ’n ander (byvoorbeeld haar transponering van getuienis en akademiese niefiktiewe tekste tot fiksienarratief

1. I am indebted to Michael Titlestad for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this paper. His insights were invaluable in bringing this paper to completion.

of poësie), en die artikel voer aan dat twee sterk uiteenlopende etiese probleme in *Country of My Skull* ontstaan weens die weglating van tekstuele en generiese rame wat uiteindelik die spore na tekstuele “oorspronge” uitwis: spore wat kon aandui of die oorsprong die getuïenisse in die Waarheids-en-versoeningskommissie- (WVK-) verhore was, of ander tekstuele materiaal wat Krog in die skep van hierdie teks aangewend het. Die etiese gevolge van hierdie onduidelike vermenging van genres en tekstuele rame is tweevoudig: in die eerste plek is daar die toeëiening van individuele getuigende stemme, en in die tweede plek plagiaat – twee totaal uiteenlopende etiese vergrype wat nietemin oorweging verdien indien hulle naas mekaar geplaas word, aangesien albei voortspruit uit dieselfde tekstuele praktyk by Krog; ’n tegniek waarna sy verwys as “kwiltwerk”. Waar Krog van mening is dat “kwiltwerk” voorsiening maak vir ’n veelstemmige teks wat nie ’n enkele of samehangende idee van nasionale waarheid weerspieël nie, redeneer ek dat dit Krog ook in staat stel om een vorm van tekstualiteit te transponeer tot ’n totaal ander generiese raam. Hoewel dit nie op sigself problematies is nie, moet daar versigtig gekyk word na die etiese gevolge van die transponering, herinterpretasie en transformasie van een tekstuele objek tot ’n ander. Die artikel stel uiteindelik voor dat fiksie- en poësietekste erkenning behoort te gee aan en verantwoordelikheid behoort te aanvaar teenoor die oorspronklike tekste wat getransponeer en getransformeer word. Dit kan gedoen word deur die leser te voorsien van ’n duidelike en interpreteerbare spoor terug na daardie oorspronklike tekste.

Immediately following the completion of the TRC’s national hearings, a great deal of scholarship emerged on the ethics involved in the archiving of the traumatic past.² Moreover, the recent expansion of trauma studies, particularly in scholarship on holocaust writing and literature, has deepened and extended South African critical appraisals of the role of literature in bearing witness to the traumatic past.³ This paper begins by discussing how

2. A few determining examples include *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton (et al.), Cape Town: David Philip; Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002; *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*, (eds) Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998; *African Studies* 57(2) (1998); Fiona Ross, *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa*, London: Pluto, 2003; and Alex Boraine, *A Country Unmasked: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2001.

3. While I do not intend to imply that the very different social, political and cultural contexts of the Holocaust and apartheid South Africa are comparable, the examinations of collective trauma and the role of bearing witness to histories of trauma that emerge out of Holocaust studies can illuminate an enquiry into what it means to bear witness to South Africa’s apartheid past in a contemporary South African context. Pieter Duvenage makes a similar claim in his paper “The Politics of Memory and Forgetting After Auschwitz and Apartheid” where he states that “the German Historians’ Debate (*Historikerstreit*) is relevant, also for other contexts, because it deals

Krog's text imagines and constructs its own role of bearing witness to the traumatic national past. In considering the ethics of representing and reproducing testimonies in fiction, the paper examines the limits of the literary in bearing witness to the traumatic past alongside an examination of the ethics of listening to, and then transposing (by which I mean reframing), traumatic testimony into fiction. To this end, the paper's focus is the accountability of fiction in relation to the traumatic national past.

Yet, a second ethical point requires discussion in light of the recent accusation of plagiarism levelled at Krog by Stephen Watson in "The Annals of Plagiarism: Antjie Krog and the Bleek and Lloyd Collection" (Watson 2006).⁴ that is, the ethics of acknowledgement. To my mind, the ethics of both accountability and acknowledgement can be considered alongside one another because both might be seen to emerge from a single textual practice of Krog's: what she refers to as "quilting". She claims of the text: "I'm not reporting or keeping minutes. I'm telling I am busy with the truth ... *my* truth. Of course, it's quilted together from hundreds of stories that we've experienced or heard about in the past two years" (Krog 1998: 170-171). Krog returns to the trope of quilting regularly in the text itself, as well as in her extratextual comments about it. Indeed, the trope of the quilt is part of her defence against Watson's accusation of plagiarism. She states, in a defence entitled "Last time, this time" posted on the LitNet website that she wrote and published *Country of My Skull* "[k]nowing that the text ... was a quilt of personal, South African and international input, and not a revelatory egg laid exclusively by myself" (Krog 2006c). That Krog should refer to the textual form of *Country of My Skull* to defend herself against Watson's accusation indicates that, even to her mind, the question of acknowledgement becomes muddled when one imagines a text as "quilted" from a number of voices, texts, and versions of the past. I believe that Krog's textual quilting has similarly problematic consequences for the matter of accountability in *Country of My Skull* since, in quilting together reproductions of the testimonies given at the TRC alongside fictional narratives, poetic expressions, and various other textual materials, and then presenting them as *her* truth, the question arises as to how the literary author is called to account for her representation, and transposing into fiction, of

reconstructively with the political and the moral dimensions of collective memory – the manner in which a present generation deals with a vanished past and its victims" (Duvenage 1999: 2).

4. I will not consider Krog's *the stars say 'tsau': /Xam poetry of Dia!kwain, Kweiten-ta-//ken, /A!kunta, /Han=kass'o and //Kabbo*, the text that Watson's article is based on, but will rather consider the instances of plagiarism found in *Country of My Skull*. See discussion below.

the traumatic past. Krog finds it “bizarre” that she is “being called to account why a fork is not a spoon” (Krog 2006b: 1), that is, why a semi-fictional text is being assessed as a “factual report” (Krog 2006b: 1), but this paper argues that a writer of fiction is ethically obliged to account for his/her representation of the traumatic past: particularly when that representation purports to bear witness to the traumatic past of the nation, as does *Country of My Skull*.

Accounting for the Traumatic Past: The Scar as Narrative Trace

Bearing witness to spoken testimonies – hearing the words spoken and the anguish and the anger of the speakers – is a very different process to that of reading the transcripts that now comprise the archive of the TRC. The body that speaks of this past is both the psychic and corporeal surface on which the traumatic past is inscribed and from which it emanates. In the presence of the speaking victim (in a space that validates that victim’s speech) we bear witness, though not in a judicial sense, to the personal trauma experienced by the speaker: the witness does not judge but simply listens. The words spoken and the emotions with which they are expressed are beyond questions of simple “truth”. Yet, as Mark Sanders notes, the TRC was put in a double bind of needing to validate victims’ testimonies whilst simultaneously requiring some form of verification for the tales told. It is because of this need for verification that testimony in the TRC becomes formal, exact, and attentive to the details that frame the narrative as “truth” and “fact”. While it is clear the commission preconstructed this attention to accurate detail in its insistence on the factual markers of times, dates, and places whenever possible, it also appears that the speakers, having been given a space of national validation for their previously muted narratives, are determined to have these narratives heard as fact. Indeed, many (though by no means all) of the accounts archived in both *Country of My Skull* and in the TRC archives are clear, cogent, meticulous, and non-metaphorical. Horror is placed carefully within the narrative with what appears to be a mimetic urge as though metaphor here might lead to misinterpretation or invalidation of the testimony. As Krog writes of the victims’ narratives, “[f]ocused and clear, the first narrative cut into the country. It cut through class, language, persuasion – penetrating even the most frigid earhole of stone” (Krog 1998: 56).

This urge to have one’s story heard as fact perhaps explains why many victims corroborate testimonies of their physical traumas by pointing to the scars those traumas left on their bodies: the physical scar becomes the

ultimate factual marker of the traumatic past. In *Country of My Skull* the testimony of one Lucas Baba Sikwepere illustrates the point. Sikwepere, testifying to being shot by a white police officer, gestures towards the scars left by bullets that are still lodged in his neck and face, and states: "Yes, there are several [bullets]. Some are here in my neck. Now on my face you can really see them ... my face feels quite rough" (Krog 1998: 30-31).

In such cases the victim's speech articulates the traumatic past for a listener at the same time as his/her body provides a visual palimpsest of that past. Bearing witness to this trauma becomes an act of both listening and observing, of tracing the narrative of the event whilst simultaneously "reading" and interpreting that event in the scars left on the body. Moreover, it appears, in the case of Sikwepere, that the act of testifying and of presenting his scarred body to a public gaze as evidence of this traumatic past becomes a form of catharsis. When asked how he feels about telling his story, he responds: "I feel what has been making me sick all the time is the fact that I couldn't tell my story. But now ... it feels like I got my sight back by coming here and telling you the story" (Krog 1998: 31). Testimony here is, at least partially, a psychological de-scarification process in which the body is relieved of the duty to archive the traumatic past; a duty that is now passed onto the testimony and, more broadly, onto the TRC itself.

It is precisely this transferring of the traumatic past from the individual's body, to his/her speech, and finally to national discourse, that creates the cathartic potential of a nationally validated process such as the TRC. Within the discourses of the TRC individuals' narratives, and bodies, become traces to the broader national and historical trauma inflicted by the apartheid regime. In *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* Jean François Lyotard, considering the relationship between discourse and absolute governmental power in the case of Nazi Germany, provides a definition of victimhood that can help us better understand Sikwepere's statement of having his "sight returned" through his act of testimony at the TRC. Lyotard argues:

[It] is in the nature of a victim not to be able to prove that one has been done a wrong In general, [a person] becomes a victim when no presentation is possible of the wrong he or she says he or she has suffered. Reciprocally, the "perfect crime" does not consist in killing the victim or the witnesses, but rather in obtaining the silence of the witnesses, the deafness of the judges, and the inconsistency (insanity) of the testimony.

(Lyotard 1983: 8)

The TRC was clearly configured to counteract and redress the consequences of the similarly invalidating system of apartheid. The act of speaking the testimonies previously invalidated by the apartheid state is then, as we see in Sikwepere's testimony, an empowering moment in which the individual's

personal narrative becomes woven into a broader national narrative that marks the fall of the apartheid regime.⁵ It seems that Krog's *Country of My Skull* rehearses this process in its imitation of the integration of victims' testimonies into a broader "national" narrative – arguably represented by her quilting together of the multivocal and -generic modalities of the text.

However, even this national validation of the victims' voices, and Krog's ("quilted") representation of that process, cannot raise the testimonies of the dead from the past. Lyotard, following a similar line of thought, argues that the narratives of those that died in the gas chambers in the Holocaust – the experience of death in the gas chambers – can never be enunciated. Despite the differing social and historical contexts, the dead victims' narratives of apartheid are relegated to a similar unspeakable space: a space that Lyotard elaborates as "the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be." He adds: "This state includes silence, which is a negative phrase" (Lyotard 1983: 13). Silence can also be attached to the loss of the physical trace or scar via the death and utter destruction of the body: a process interestingly fictionalised in Franz Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" in which a brutal scarring process envelops and eventually occupies the entire surface of the body. But without the body the scar itself becomes a negative space, a void that like Lyotard's negative phrase does not testify to the horror of the death itself or the regime that authorised it. This capacity for a regime to utter silence and erase the traumatic past through the complete destruction of the victim's body was a problem faced by the TRC and articulated in *Country of My Skull* by Cynthia Ngewu, the mother of one of the Gugulethu seven.⁶ She asks of her

5. It is worth noting that the victims' narratives in *Country of My Skull* are not only often accompanied by the display of bodily scars but also by statements about psychological symptoms which in some cases stand in for, and replace, the corporeal traces of the physical scar. An example of this is Mahlasela Mhlongo's testimony in which he reads his sexual impotence as the result of his torturous experiences in detention where he received shock "treatment" to his genitals (Krog 1998: 138-139). For Mhlongo the symptom is, obviously, a symbol of his emasculation at the hands of the state police. However, the testimony of the victim is enunciated now in space sanctified by the discourses of reconciliation and healing. It can be argued, then, that what shapes Mhlongo's testimony is the idea that public speech about the traumatic past is redemptive. In this sense Mhlongo's narrative is raised from the level of his bodily symptom, and elevated to the level of the national discourse of reconciliation. The body is no longer the archival surface for the traumatic past, instead, this narrative becomes inscribed in the archive of national and collective trauma.

son's murderers: "Didn't these *boers* have any feelings at all? Why did they just kill everyone, absolutely everyone? Not leaving even one to give witness. Now nobody knows the real-real story" (Krog 1998: 192).⁷ In the absence of first-person victims' narratives, witness bearing is relegated to the site (and sight) of viewing the dismembered body, rather than hearing the testimonies and narratives of those victims' experiences. The question emerges, then, as to how those traumatic pasts can ever be raised from the level of the (possible spectacle) of the mutilated dead body and brought into narrative and speech.

The TRC was clearly created not only to give voice to previously silenced narratives about the apartheid past, but also to speak *for* the "muted and mutilated" (Kanneh 1995: 346) dead body. This is made possible at the point that the individual's testimony becomes stitched into a broader national discourse, thereby coming to *represent* a broader national history. The only way for the Commission to trace those muted pasts then, was to read the individual's testimony as a metonymic trace to other, untold, traumas which become, in the words of the TRC itself, the "narrative truth" (TRC 1:112)⁸ of the entire nation. Tobias argues that

[in] situating individual memories within a framework of pre-existing historical knowledge and subjecting this memory to comparative and critical analysis, the TRC aimed at the production of a common memory in which

-
6. In 1986 seven young activists were ambushed and killed at a police roadblock in Gugulethu. They came to be known as the "Gugulethu Seven".
 7. In the context of apartheid South Africa, when the dead and brutalised black body is covered over and made invisible, and the victims' and witnesses' voices are invalidated by the regime, the traumatic narratives of the dead and dismembered – what Toni Morrison poignantly refers to as the "disremembered" (Morrison 1998: 3-12) – can only be enunciated by first-hand witnesses which are, in these cases, the perpetrators themselves. Dirk Coetzee's testimony (reproduced in *Country of My Skull*) of how Sizwe Kondile was killed and his body disposed of (Krog 1998: 60-61) provides a chilling example of this.
 8. Mark Sanders provides a useful insight into the Commission's terminology of "narrative truth" (Sanders 2000: 18). Discussing the dynamic between the unverifiability of personal testimony and the urge, on behalf of the Commission, and the testifiers themselves, to verify these testimonies, he states: "Telling ... signals an unverifiability which stands watch, at times ironically, over the impulse to verify and to corroborate tales, and so to falsify others, in the interests of fabricating what the report, entering the domain of fable, terms 'the South African story'" (p. 34).

these individual memories could find their place, and their owners, hopefully, some solace As such, the TRC initiative bears many of the characteristics which historians associate with the production of *common memory*: features such as the orientation towards *common understanding, cohesiveness, closure*, and what Saul Friedlander has described as a “redemptive stance”.

(Tobias 1999: 3; my italics)

The healing and redemptive potential of the TRC necessitates this move from victims’ narratives to national “narrative truth”: not only for the survivors but for the muted dead too. The redemptive and healing aspects of this move from individual testimony to common memory, or national narrative truth, is observed in Krog’s representation of one of the special women’s hearings⁹ in *Mdantsane*. After the testimonies for the day have been heard, Krog captures the mood of triumph: “[The] women of *Mdantsane* slowly get up. They fold their blankets, they smile, they congratulate one another ... no rain, no power failure, no men could silence their stories today” (Krog 1998: 190).¹⁰

The validation of these narratives not only redresses the silences imposed in the past, but also allows testifiers to reconcile these traumatic pasts. That this redemption extends to the dead is evident in one woman’s testimony of the death of her child when, having completed her narrative, she addresses her dead child and says: “Sonnyboy, rest well, my child. I’ve translated you from the dead” (Krog 1998: 28). The woman’s statement enacts what I see as the shifting of trauma from the body of the victim to the realm of nationally validated speech: Sonnyboy is *translated* from the dead.

This rearranging of the spatiality of trauma, that is, its move from the corporeal body to the realm of national speech, raises questions as to the efficacy of speech and testimony in representing and narrating trauma. Of course, not all testimony can be clear and precise, and not all narrative acts

9. For an informative discussion of the specifically gendered silence surrounding traumas suffered under apartheid, see Lyn Graybill’s “The Contribution of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission toward the Promotion of Women’s Rights in South Africa” (Graybill 2001: 1 – 10).

10. The women’s triumph illustrates Saul Tobias’s claim that [by] providing the environment in which victims could tell their own stories in their own languages, the Commission not only helped to uncover existing facts about past abuses, but also assisted in the creation of a “narrative truth”. In so doing, it also sought to contribute to the process of reconciliation by ensuring that the truth about the past included the validation of the individual subjective experiences of people who had previously been silenced or voiceless.

(Tobias 1999: 112)

defeat the pall of silence thrown over the traumatic past in this context. Tobias, again, argues that

[s]ome of the testimony presented at the TRC was fragmented and disjointed, and at moments of particular distress or trauma, bordered on the incoherent. Behind these shattered sentences lay depths of personal suffering which were glimpsed but would never fully find their way to language. In other cases, the factual recounting of events gave way to lamentation and prayer, a flood of metaphorical and lyrical language.

(Tobias 1999: 7)

In the absence of narrative sense and the ability to formulate an articulate narrative by way of expressing the traumatic past, the onus falls on the witness (of the trauma, or, in this instance, of the testimony itself) to narrate the testifier's expression of trauma. In Krog's text the shifting of this onus to bear witness onto those present at the TRC hearings is marked by a shift from a language of visual witnessing (the testifiers themselves who experienced or saw these traumas enacted) to that of aural witnessing (those who hear the testimony of those primary witnesses). Krog traces this process of devisualisation in *her* process of listening to the testimonies: the movement from the visual, corporeal, and physical to the aural, phonic, and acoustic. She writes: "In the beginning it was seeing. Seeing for ages, filling the head with ash. No air. No tendril. Now to seeing, speaking is added and the eye plunges into the mouth. Present at the birth of this country's language itself" (Krog 1998: 29).

I would argue that what Krog calls the birth of the country's language is, more modestly, the historical moment in which the language of testimony is validated, and the language of secondary witness, that interprets or re-narrates the pain of others, becomes an important narrative thread in the weave of national discourses. Indeed, when the testimony of the primary victim or witness breaks down, this second narrative can take over and interpret (within, not beyond, narrative) linguistic breakdown as an understandable aspect of the narrative of testimony. That is to say, breakdown in narrative becomes an intelligible signifier of trauma (in a sense it creates a narrative trace back to the trauma being narrated, and rhetorically replaces the role of the scar in verifying physical trauma) when reformulated in the narrative of the secondary witness. This suggests that this secondary narrative, that which narrates the testifier's unspeakable trauma, becomes the linguistic receptacle for that trauma, and thus is able to represent that which the victim cannot enunciate him-/herself – precisely because at this remove the breakdown of the testifier's language can be reconfigured as the signifier of the trauma itself.

This is illustrated in *Country of My Skull* when, after hearing a testifier,

Nomonde Calata, breaking down into sobbing and crying during her testimony, Krog's friend, and fellow witness of the testimonies, Prof. Kondlo, says:

For me, this crying [of Nomonde] is the beginning of the Truth Commission – the signature tune, the definitive moment, the ultimate sound of what the process is about. She was wearing this vivid orange-red dress, and she threw herself backwards and that sound ... that sound ... it will haunt me for ever and ever. It's significant that she began to cry when she remembered how Nyameka Goniwe was crying when she arrived at the Goniwe's house. The academics say pain destroys language and this brings about an immediate reversion to a pre-linguistic state – and to witness that cry was to witness the destruction of language ... was to realize that to remember the past of this country is to be thrown back into a time before language. And to get that memory, to fix it in words, to capture it with the precise image, is to be present at the birth of language itself. But more practically, this particular memory at last captured in words can no longer haunt you, push you around, bewilder you, because you have taken control of it – you can move it wherever you want to. So maybe this is what the Commission is all about – finding the words for that cry of Nomonde Calata.

(Krog 1998: 42-43)¹¹

The discussion between Krog and Kondlo becomes a site for the analysis and interpretation of the hearings, and they construct a narrative frame around the trauma they have heard by reading Nomondo Calata's "wail" as the "starting point" of the process. The cry itself resists representation, but constructing a secondary narrative around the cry, as both Prof. Kondlo and Krog do, allows the cry to be read as a signifier within a broader national discourse. Thus, while one unnamed witness claims, "This inside me ... fights my tongue. It is ... unshareable. It destroys ... words" (Krog 1998: 27), the witness, represented in this text by Krog herself, takes on the role of interpreting the unspeakable and thus, to use Krog's terminology, birthing that trauma into language.

This raises a set of ethical questions relating to the role of the witness's act of narrating. Krog considers some of these ethical ramifications in terms of the language of witness, which she dramatises through her struggle with using her mother tongue, Afrikaans, to speak, and thus bear witness to the traumatic past. Krog's problem becomes one of how to speak of the traumatic past in her language which "carries violence as a voice" (Krog

11. Parts of Kondlo's speech can be seen to derive from various academic texts. See discussion below.

1998: 216)¹² and her mother tongue becomes, for her, the language of "wrestling" (p. 9).¹³

This wrestling is configured as an ethical act in which Krog imagines the problems of remaining silent, on the one hand, and speaking to, and about, the traumatic past on the other. Indeed, Krog's first response to hearing these traumas is one of silence: having faced the first of the hearings she finds herself "without language". A counsellor tells the journalists that they "will experience the same symptoms as the victims, [that they] will find [themselves] powerless – without help, without words" (Krog 1998: 37). Again, Krog links her failing language, in the face of trauma, to her failing mother tongue. She states: "Speechless I stand before the Archbishop. Whence will words now come? For us? We who hang quivering and ill from this soundless space of Afrikaner past? What does one say?" (p. 128).

The text traces this struggle towards validating Krog's own voice and language, and she begins to move beyond the impasse of silence after contemplating Archbishop Tutu's prayer "[t]hat we may have the strength to listen to the whispers of the abandoned, the pleas of those afraid, the anguish of those without hope" (Krog 1998: 22). At this point speechlessness gives way to a form of speech, a form of bearing witness as Krog begins her search for a language strong enough to "listen" to the traumas of the past.

The language of witness that allows Krog to find the words with which to represent the enormity of what she "hangs quivering and ill" on the verge of

12. For an insightful discussion of this matter see de Kock 2001b: 28-31 and 2001a: 267.

13. Interestingly, Krog's descriptions of perpetrators' testimonies focus on their gestural and physical expressions of nervousness, not on linguistic breakdown as we saw in her analysis of Nomonde Calata's testimony. She writes: "Wouter Mentz seldom reads his evidence from papers. He answers in a soft, accommodating voice – the only sign of tension is the constant jerking of his legs and feet under the table" (Krog 1998: 95); and, "[t]he starting point of the human rights hearing was the indefinable wail that burst from Nomonde Calata's lips in East London. The starting point of the perpetrators' narrative is the uncontrollable muscle in Brian Mitchell's jaw" (Krog 1998: 156). The awkwardness and nervousness of these bodies narrate, for the witness, what the perpetrators do not speak: their loss of power in both a physical and corporeal as well as a linguistic sense. While Wouter Mentz speaks in a "soft" and "accommodating" voice, what Krog calls the "second narrative", that is the narrative of the perpetrators, is described as "muffled" and "unfocused, splintered in intention and degrees of desperation" (Krog 1998: 56). Krog seeks, then, to move beyond a second impasse: the muffling of the Afrikaans language by virtue of its being associated with the perpetrators' narratives.

the traumatic past, is a highly personalised voice which she wishes to quilt into the broader national narrative. Bearing witness for Krog is a twofold process: of accounting for the past, on the one hand, and of validating her own voice, on the other. She manages this twin process through the trope of the quilt: by quilting her individual truths and voice into the national narrative, her bearing witness to the traumatic past becomes validated.

Stitching the Pieces Together: The Trope of Quilting

My reading of Krog's use of the trope of the quilt, and her stitching of her own voice into the national narrative of truth and reconciliation, borrows Leon de Kock's determining notion, the "seam", which he defines as

a site of a joining together that also bears the mark of the suture ... [and] is characterized by a paradoxical process: on the one hand the effort of suturing the incommensurate is an attempt to close the gap that defines it as incommensurate, and on the other this process unavoidably bears the mark of its own crisis, the seam.

(de Kock 2001a: 276)

What de Kock's concept brings to this analysis is the fact that Krog's project is unavoidably a paradoxical one: whilst celebrating the essential differences between different national narratives, and validating the significance of her own personal truths, the text simultaneously seeks to quilt these narratives together as part of a new national discourse and suggests that Krog's personal truths represent, somehow, national truths. Krog's acknowledgement of different voices and voicings of the past become, as I hope to argue, subsumed under her own, singular, reinterpretation of what she hears as witness to those voices.

For the witness, the issue of accountability emerges in the ways that he/she hears and then transcribes, translates, and transforms the testimony into a new narrative form. The ethics of listening is, in the first instance, perfectly highlighted by the processes of the actual translation of testimony from one language into another in *Country of My Skull*. Lebohang Matibela, a TRC translator, says of translating victims' narratives: "[I]t becomes very difficult to interpret when they are crying, when they speak in instalments. He says something, then he keeps quiet and he starts again ... you have to bring the pieces together" (Krog 1998: 220). In this quotation we see that translation itself becomes a mode of mediation and of quilting together the important aspects of the narrative. Translation as an act of integration and interpretation can be compared to the act of listening and making sense of

the narratives in *Country of My Skull*. Ruminating on the testimonies that she has heard, Krog writes:

The stories stay with me. How they correspond. How they differ. The stylistic traits of the oral narrative. The story does not turn around a single climax. Rather, it collects smaller episodes: the murder is just as important as the arrival at the house

(Krog 1998: 87-88)

and

Oral narratives, the academics say, are driven by remembered core phrases and images that carry the distillation of the entire story. From these cores the action, the characters, the conclusion all unfold. And though the narratives may differ in the information they bear, the core elements stay the same. They overlap.

(Krog 1998: 88)

These statements indicate that Krog's process of learning how to hear more than the precise moment of trauma (for example, the murder is just as important as the arrival at the house) runs parallel to her learning how to hear, and interpret, oral narratives. At first, Archbishop Tutu is her translator, as is evident in her thoughts when he falls ill:

The process is unthinkable without Tutu. Impossible. Whatever role others might play, it is Tutu who is the compass. He guides us in several ways, the most important of which is language. It is he who finds language for what is happening. And it is not the language of statements, news reports and submissions. It is language that shoots up like fire – wrought from a vision of where we must go and from a grip on where we are now. And it is this language that drags people along with the process.

(Krog 1998: 152)

Until she finds her own way to integrate and translate these traumas, she relies on the mediating voice of the archbishop. Yet, it is only when Krog is able to integrate the narratives into her own personal narrative, represented by deeply personal narrative threads in the text, a point at which she moves beyond the broader discursive frames of interpretation and understanding, that she finds herself able to speak of these horrors, importantly, in her own language. She states: "[N]either truth nor reconciliation is part of my graphite when sitting in front of a blank page, rubber close at hand. Everything else fades away Something opens and something falls into this quiet space. A tone, an image, a line mobilizes completely. I become myself" (Krog 1998: 36). It is at the point when social discourses are

effaced that language returns, albeit in an entirely different modality: that of the metaphoric and the poetic which become the thread that quilts together the other textual forms presented in the text. It is only through Krog's admission that she is "not reporting or keeping minutes", but is, rather, concerned with *her* personal truth which is "quilted together from hundreds of stories" (Krog 1998: 170-171) that she moves beyond her struggle to find the words to express the horrors within the testimonies that she has heard. The ethics of transforming people's testimonies about their traumatic pasts into one's own personal "truth" requires, of course, more detailed consideration; particularly in light of how Krog then quilts together a poetic voice in the text.

Poetic Accountability

As regards the matter of appropriating testimonial voices in a poetic register, it is important to note that Krog abandons objective truth at the same point that she becomes a poetic, rather than a journalistic, witness to the traumatic past of a nation. For Krog, in poetic language, truth and all its attendant claims can be jettisoned and the witness can translate others' testimonies into a different register of meaning altogether. Interestingly, what appears to authorise this shift from the journalistic to the poetic for Krog is a discussion that she has with a Senegalese poet who responds to her statement that "in [her] culture you are a good poet if you can say old things in a new way" (Krog 1998: 221) with the following argument. He says:

[In] my culture you don't just become a poet. You have to apply first. And the older poets come together and your ancestry is studied and your ability tested. And if you are chosen, you take up an apprenticeship with the chief poet. And he teaches you the nation's poetry. And your people's poetry is your people's lyrical soul, their history. And you may *not* say it in a new way, you may *not* change it, because then you forge what has happened The more accurately you preserve the poetry, the better you perform, the better poet you are.

(Krog 1998: 221-222)

As opposed to Krog's definition of poetry, which is entirely aesthetic, the Senegalese poet describes the significance of poetry in bearing historical witness in his culture. Krog appears to include this discussion with the Senegalese poet to demonstrate how her own conception of the role of the poet shifts from an entirely aesthetic one to one in which the poet is able to bear historical witness. Clearly Krog attempts to stitch the poet-as-witness and the aesthetic-poet, who interprets the world anew through his/her individual lens, together. Krog's own conception of herself as poet in both

these senses constructs the entire text as something of an epic poem, weaving together the threads of a traumatic history to archive and maintain that history, whilst simultaneously expressing her personal truths. Krog's attempt to bring these two different notions of the poet together emerges out of her attempt to move beyond the famous impasse suggested by Theodor Adorno in his statement that there should be "no poetry after Auschwitz" (Krog 1998: 237). At first Krog, considering the role of poetry in representing South Africa's traumatic past, agrees with this statement: "[No] poetry should come forth from this. May my hand fall off if I write this. So I sit around. Naturally and unnaturally without words" (p. 49). This is Krog's journalistic voice that dismisses Adam Small's claim that "[o]nly literature can perform the miracle of reconciliation" (p. 18). Yet towards the close of the text, after the introduction of her fictional narrative, Krog writes: "Yet Paul Celan wrote this indescribably beautiful Fugue of Death. The reception of the poem was ambivalent. Isn't the poem too lyrical? Just a bit too beautiful? Is the horror not too accessible? In the end Celan himself felt this ambivalence and asked anthologists to remove the poem from their books (Krog 1998: 237).

Her merging of the poet-as-witness and the self-expressive poet allows Krog to shift her focus from the role of the testimonial narrative, to that of poetry and poetic language, in bearing witness to the traumatic past.¹⁴ This is not an uncommon shift in contemporary trauma studies. In *Poetry After Auschwitz: Remembering What One Never Knew* Susan Gubar sees poetry as uniquely placed in bearing what she terms "proxy-witness" (Gubar 2003: 23-27) to the traumatic past. Perhaps this interest in poetic language from and about the Jewish Holocaust emerges because we are currently in a position where there are so few survivors of the *sho'ah* to testify to the atrocities suffered under the Nazi regime, and, therefore, memory of that trauma is no longer personal and individual but cultural and general. Poetry, in this context, is uniquely able to reimagine historical trauma without being

14. Njabulo Ndebele traces a similar course of narrative in the TRC from testimony (what he sees as the "restoration of [the victim's] narrative") to story (in which "people [reinvent] themselves through narrative" (Ndebele 1998: 27)). Following T.T. Moyana's notion that "life [under apartheid] is too fantastic to be outstripped by the creative imagination" (Moyana quoted by Ndebele 1998: 21), Ndebele states: "If today [the memories of apartheid] sound like imaginary events it is because ... the horror of day-to-day life under apartheid often outdid the efforts of the imagination to reduce it to metaphor" (Ndebele 1998: 19-20). He then goes on to argue that temporal distance from these memories creates a "reflective capacity, experienced as a shared social consciousness" (p. 20), and that the public remembering of the "facts" of apartheid is becoming the "building blocks of [a national] metaphor" (p. 21).

critiqued by the terms suggested by Lyotard's *differend*, and enunciated by Mali Fritz's comment: "Obviously I would have had to have been through the gas chambers and the chimney to be allowed as a witness" (Fritz 1986: 136). Thus, it is precisely because poetry is *not* testimony that it can enunciate the cultural and general imaginings of the experience of the Holocaust. In *Narrating the Holocaust*, Andrea Reiter argues that within testimonial narrative on the Holocaust "the narrating self reflects upon lived experience with the help of a well-known rhetorical device, the trope of unutterability" (Reiter 2000: 18). It is precisely this trope constructed in the space of testimonial narrative that validates a space for the poetic: it is as though testimony grants poetry the space of proxy-witness in being unable itself to enunciate the traumatic past. To return to the context of this paper, Nomonde Calata's wail could be understood as the point at which Krog's poetic reinterpretation of Calata's pain comes to play an integral role in bearing witness to the traumatic past: Krog as listener bears witness to this anguish and then reinterprets it, bears proxy-witness to it, via poetic language.

Mark Sanders, discussing a conversation between Krog and her fictional lover/interlocutor in which they discuss the role of poetry in the holocaust, states: "Their conversation traverses the terrain between an impulse to leave the domain of words and utterance to those who testified before the Truth Commission, and the possibility of finding form, as a writer, specifically as a poet, for a collective memory" (Sanders 2000: 14), and goes on to argue that for Krog "the question of poetry, or literature, after apartheid concerns less an excess of lyricism or beauty ... than a writer's facilitation of the utterance of others" (p. 14). It is this interface between the collective and the individual voice that Krog seems to blur throughout the text: arguably (once again) through her trope of quilting, in this instance, the individual to the collective voice. This blurring of the roles of poet-as-witness and self-expressive poet has, in my view, problematic ethical consequences for the text, which will be discussed below.¹⁵

At first it seems that the poetic register takes over in *Country of My Skull* whenever something is too traumatic to state: For example Krog frames the unnamed witness's claims that his trauma is "unshareable. It destroys ... words", with the italicised words "*To seize the surge of language by its soft, bare skull*" and, "Beloved do not die. Do not dare die! I, the survivor, I wrap

15. Stephan Meyer makes a related point, commenting on Krog's insistence that "there is an irrefutable knowledge within a poet's language" (Krog quoted by Meyer 2002: 5) with the statement: "[If] one relies on [Krog's] creative writing to form an idea of what her notions of knowledge and truth are, the picture is rather vague, possibly inconsistent" (Meyer 2002: 5).

you in words so that the future inherits you. I snatch you from the death of forgetfulness. I tell your story, complete your ending – you who once whispered beside me in the dark” (Krog 1998: 27).

But this poetic voice becomes increasingly problematic as the pronouns “I” and “you” come to signify in increasingly ambiguous ways.¹⁶ It appears that Krog’s poetic interpretation of the horrors that she has borne proxy-witness to becomes a way for her to validate her own voice and quilt it into the broader national narrative. Her description of the singing of the National Anthem is illustrative:

[The] song leader opens the melody to us. The sopranos envelop, the bass voices support And I wade into song – in a language that is not mine, in a tongue I do not know. It is fragrant inside the song, and among the keynotes of sorrow and suffering there are soft silences where we who belong to this landscape, all of us, can come to rest.

(Krog 1998: 216-217)

For Krog, the quilting of her own voice into the multiple tongues of the nation (a multiplicity she attempts to emulate in the narrative structure of this book), gives her a sense of belonging. She states: “The land belongs to the voices of those who live in it. My own bleak voice among them” (Krog 1998: 210).

More significantly, this voice becomes a writerly voice as Krog states that the commission has “painstakingly ... chiselled a way beyond racism and made space for all of our voices But I want to put it more simply. I want this hand of mine to write it. For us all; all voices, all victims” (Krog 1998: 278). This urge to write “it”¹⁷ – which is in stark contradiction to Krog’s earlier statement, “May my hand fall off if I write this” – is followed by a

16. Meyer sees the ambiguity in some of Krog’s indexical pronouns in her poetry as the result of translating the poems from Afrikaans to English. Considering Krog’s words “we who hang quivering and ill/ from this soundless space of an Afrikaner past” (Krog 2000c: 96) he argues that “[because] the utterance is no longer in Afrikaans, the danger of the ‘we’ being taken as another or a larger group has to be curtailed by specifying the referent of the indexical pronoun” (Meyer 2002: 12).

17. Meyer, again, makes an interesting observation in his discussion of Krog’s inclusion of the poem “Country of Grief and Grace” in these closing sections of *Country of My Skull*. He argues that “[r]ead in English, [the poems] veer towards reflections on the need for, and the difficulty of, putting the horrors of the South African past into language *as such*. In Afrikaans ... [they] are her contribution to a resistance tradition in Afrikaans in which those who suffered at the hands of Afrikaners speak back” (Meyer 2002: 12).

poetic coda that concludes the text. The poem reads:

because of you
this country no longer lies
between us but within
it breathes becalmed
after being wounded
in its wondrous throat

in the cradle of my skull
it sings, it ignites
my tongue, my inner ear, the cavity of my heart
shudders towards the outline
new in soft intimate clicks and gutturals

of my soul the retina learns to expand
daily because by a thousand stories
I was scorched

a new skin.

I am changed for ever. I want to say:
forgive me
forgive me
forgive me

You whom I have wronged, please
take me

with you.

(Krog 1998: 278-279)

Yet this poetic coda provides, to my mind, a somewhat diminished and attenuated notion of accountability for the past. While the poem, performing a poetics of accountability, suggests that there is a continuum between the wrongdoings of the perpetrators called to account by the TRC and Krog, as a white Afrikaner, herself, this continuum is presented in a general and vague manner that obscures, rather than bears witness to, the traumatic past. The poignancy of the poem lies precisely in its restaging of the perpetrator's, in this case the author's, plea for forgiveness, yet this also dangerously generalises the perpetrator. The poem manifests a slippage between the first-person singular and the first-person plural which leaves us wondering who Krog speaks for and to whom. As de Kock notes, it is "highly problematic to shift from the first-person singular to the first-person plural when talking South African – to move from 'I' to 'we' or 'us'" (de

Kock 2001a: 272). It is precisely this sort of slippage that is not only allowed but invited by Krog's accompanying slippage into a poetic register in which the personal pronoun is read metaphorically or as a metonym of a broader national "voice".

Moreover, Krog's inclusion of this poem at the close of the text suggests that the poetic voice seeks to bring the varying and multiple threads of the narrative together – that in its metaphoric and metonymic function the poem makes meaning cohere. This observation appears, at first, at odds with the fractured and multiple nature of the text which, as many critics have pointed out, suggests the multiplicity of tongues, truths, perspectives and pasts in the nation's history. Yet, when one considers Krog's repetition throughout the text of the metaphor of quilting, one begins to discern her urge to bring the nation's fragmented and fractured voices *together*. This urge towards coherence might be seen to reflect the notion of reconciliation propagated by the TRC, and represented through a host of national metaphors – the "rainbow nation" being the most ubiquitous of these. Yet the metaphors of reconciliation themselves can be understood as what de Kock calls the "totalising fictions" of nationhood (de Kock 2001a: 290) just as Krog's poetic coda might be understood as a reduction of the multiple voices of the nation, represented in this text by the testimonies given at the TRC, to a singular interpretative voice, in this instance, her own. The question arises as to whom, or what, this singular, perhaps "totalising", poetic voice is accountable in its interpretation of people's testimonies and personal narratives. As poetry, it resists the rigours of accountability expected in non-fiction genres precisely because the poetic register resists clear definitions of truth and falsity. Mark Sanders views positively the fact that the TRC hearings were "open to a thinking of the literary that holds literature and orature aside from any opposition of truth and falsehood. As kinds of telling, they are equivalent neither to truth nor to falsehood, nor yet opposed to either" (Sanders 2000: 21). Yet, beyond simple questions of truth and falsehood, surely we need to consider the accountability of literature, orature, and poetry (not as versions of testimony, but as aesthetic forms) and develop some sense of what the ethical obligations of the poet, writing about historical events and traumas, are? Surely, in the (differently applied but just as provisional, paradoxical and contestable) "seam" between poetry and the history it reflects, represents, and responds to, there are ethical obligations to be considered by the poet? To my mind, Krog's blurring of the role of poet-as-witness and self-expressive poet allows her to avoid any rigorous contemplation of such ethical obligations.

Mikhail Bakhtin attempts to develop an ethics of aesthetic representations of historical events in his essay "The Answerability of Art" in which aesthetics becomes "a form of embodying lived experience, for

consummating action so that it may have the meaningfulness of an event” (Bakhtin quoted by Holquist 1990: xi). The role of art in representing history lies, for Bakhtin, in transforming lived experience into a “meaningful event”. In this sense, aesthetics bears witness to experience. The question of the transformative capacity of poetry is, however, a vexed one. Whilst I would argue that *Country of My Skull* does transform victims’ testimonies into a digestible and understandable textual form – one that reaches an audience far broader than the actual audiences at the TRC hearings – and thereby interprets the moment of testimony as a meaningful event, I am not convinced that Krog’s inclusion of the poetic register in the text aids this transformation. Whilst the inclusion of the testimonies in the text allows the reader to trace the origination of the testimonial voice – the speaker is recalled in the repetition of his/her narrative – the poetic register in the text erases the palimpsest back to the testifier’s voice and is thus, in my view, in danger of reproducing what de Kock, following Spivak (Spivak 1993: 75-77), refers to as the epistemic violence, committed across South African colonial history and during apartheid, of “forcibly reassigning indigenous people’s cosmologies, identities, and cultures from one signifying system to another” (de Kock 2001a: 273). Krog, the ambiguously defined poet, is in danger of witnessing testimony in her role as poet-as-witness, but then reassigning the testifiers’ cosmologies to nothing other than her own personal truth.

Acknowledgement as Accountability

Interestingly, the problems inherent in Krog’s “reassigning of indigenous people’s cosmologies, identities, and cultures” also form part of Stephen Watson’s argument in “The Annals of Plagiarism: Antjie Krog and the Bleek and Lloyd Collection” in his argument that Krog does not adequately acknowledge the /Xam poets whose work she transcribes, adapts and reworks (cf. particularly Watson 2006: 5-6). Krog dismisses this part of Watson’s accusation, stating of Watson’s book, *Return of the Moon: Versions from the /Xam*: “[T]he front cover ... bears only Watson’s name. In contrast, on the cover of my book, the names of the people whose work was selected and adapted appear with mine” (Krog 2006: 1). While a discussion of whether *Return of the Moon: Versions from the /Xam*, “reassigns” the poetry of the /Xam into a different signifying system, in a manner that commits an epistemic violence rather than a translation, is beyond the scope of this paper, the question of the ethics of “reassigning” in the process of interpreting, translating, and transforming texts, stories, and testimonies into a “different signifying system”, in the case of *Country of My Skull* a

fictional system of signification, is germane to this discussion. It seems to me that the ethical debate at the core of Watson's argument is not dissimilar to the ethics of historical accountability discussed above.

I will consider the question alongside Watson's discussion of the transformative capacity of poetry, since this idea seems to give poetic license to the poet to reassign meaning to a different signifiatory order. Watson, drawing a distinction between T.S. Eliot's "poetic practice and straight plagiarism" argues that Eliot's "borrowings" "enabled him to recognise poetry where none had seen it before or thought to look Over and again, Eliot is able to turn the base matter of his supposed thefts into gold that was never present in the originals – or not in the same way" (Watson 2006: 7). The primary weakness in Watson's argument is that the ethics of "borrowing that is transformative and borrowing that is merely derivative" (p. 7) hinges on aesthetic opinion: the extent to which the borrowing transforms the original into something new and, hence, poetic. It is unlikely that there can ever be *aesthetic* agreement as to whether a poem may achieve such transformative borrowings or whether, in its borrowings from other works, it remains merely derivative. The debate¹⁸ that has followed Watson's accusation both in favour of and against Krog has been fuelled by such aesthetic concerns. However, there seems to me another, perhaps more easily discernible, way of ascertaining whether poetry and prose is derivative (and I am primarily concerned with the ways in which Krog's fictional voice in *Country of My Skull* appropriates the academic registers of Ted Hughes, Isabel Hofmeyr, and Elaine Scarry).¹⁹ This has to do with the question of whether the poem or fiction manifests or erases the trace back to the original. In Krog's fictionalisation of the academic prose of Hughes,

18. Much of this debate has played out on the LitNet website (<www.litnet.co.za>) and in *The Mail and Guardian* (cf. particularly issues between 17 February and 3 March 2006).

19. Watson himself quotes Krog's use of Hughes's essay "Myth and Education" (1976) (Watson 2006: 8); Colin Bower reports in *The Mail and Guardian* (03 March 2006) on Krog's extensive use of a passage from Isabel Hofmeyr's *We Spend Our Years as a Story That is Told*; and in an unpublished research report Jacqui Starkey-Melck makes the following observation: "Whilst Krog does not mention Scarry by name, Scarry's text *The Body in Pain* seems to echo through Krog's text. For instance, Krog notes that '[t]he academics say pain destroys language and this brings about an immediate reversion to a pre-linguistic state' (Krog 1998: 42). In *The Body in Pain*, Scarry asserts that '[t]o witness the moment when pain causes a reversion to the pre-language of cries and groans is to witness the destruction of language' (Scarry 1985: 6)" (Starkey-Melck 2006: 17).

Hofmeyr, and Scarry, she achieves a complete erasure of the original that is ethically flawed and constitutes, to my mind, plagiarism (despite her “transforming” these ideas, though barely the words themselves, into a new genre). This is an ethical rather than an aesthetic issue and it is the site at which the ethics of plagiarism and that relating to literatures of witness converge, as is evident in Krog’s defence of herself in “Last time, this time” where Krog defends herself against the accusation of plagiarism in *Country of My Skull* along aesthetic lines. She states:

Country of My Skull is my own, highly personalised version of experiences at the TRC. *Country of My Skull* is NOT a journalistic or factual report of the Truth Commission. In fact, the problem of truth, the ethical questions around the “making” of truth, the use of other people’s truths, the relation between power and truth, and other factors at play in the execution of truth, all form part of the text itself.

(Krog 2006b: 2)

The quote highlights the connection between the ethics of acknowledging sources textually and the accountability of fictional prose and poetry: for Krog, fiction is not understood as a genre requiring scrupulous acknowledgement of sources. If this more basic form of accountability is not demanded by fiction, then the ethical problems in, as Krog herself notes above, making use of other people’s voices, truths and experiences in fiction are all the more worrying.

I am not suggesting that poetic language and fiction should not, therefore, bear witness to historical trauma. Indeed, I am suggesting that it is precisely because the poetic register *is* able to render traumatic pasts in an emotionally affective manner and articulate that which is otherwise unutterable that makes the need for an accountability in poetry all the more pressing. Such a poetic accountability would acknowledge the historical and textual sources from which it departs, or that it transforms into a poetic register. Thus while an aesthetics of witness might, as Sanders suggests, involve the repetition of testimonial narratives “which permits testimony to be reinscribed away from its origin” (Sanders 2000: 24), this reinscription cannot, to my mind, efface the original entirely.²⁰

20. This notion of acknowledgement may appear to rely on what Walter Benjamin famously refers to as an “aura” of authenticity attached to an “original” work of art, narrative or text. Benjamin argues:

The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the

It is worth noting Krog's defence of why she did not reference her use of specific academic notions in *Country of My Skull*. She states:

My desire to respect ... equality of input would have been undermined by a bibliography, as it would have foregrounded certain texts as "established truth" while perhaps implicitly relegating the testimonies of victims to something "less".

So I tried to acknowledge sources in another way.

Throughout the book fellow textmakers were named, often together in a single paragraph, often under alternative names to protect their identities, often as spokespersons for ideas. Knowing that the text of *Country of My Skull* was a quilt of personal, South African and international input, and not a revelatory egg laid exclusively by myself, all source material was sent to the literary

authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object.

(Benjamin 1970: 215)

In this sense, my above argument *does* suggest that victims' testimonies are, and indeed *should* be, "auratic". This is not to say that testimony should be seen as innately authentic and authoritative. As we know, testimony can be false, misremembered, and inaccurate. Rather, what I am suggesting is that we should hear testimony, quote it, discuss it and refer to it *as though* it is authentic, or, to put it another way, we must, for all the ethical and political reasons elaborated above, grant it the *aura of authenticity*. This does not mean that we cannot interrogate the contexts that shape the initial expression of the testimony, or, indeed, question and criticise the testimonies themselves, but it does suggest that we should come to these engagements from a position of a priori respect for what is being uttered.

The notion of the aura is different when we consider academic texts. I do not believe that the academic texts that Krog makes use of have any greater auratic authority or authenticity in their representations of the traumatic past than *Country of My Skull* does. However, academic convention does posit, in its understanding of plagiarism, the notion of an original text, and it is this version of the "original" that I have accepted in my discussion of Krog's plagiarism.

In relation to both testimony and academic texts, I am primarily interested in how the act of transferring texts from their initial frames to others – whether through quotation, paraphrasing, translation, or even the indistinct area of "inspiration" – shifts the signifying meaning of those texts. To my mind, such shifts in meaning necessitate scrutiny: scrutiny that does not seek to return the meanings conjured by the text in a new frame to an original state, but rather wishes to understand the trajectories of the text's meaning across "the history which it has experienced", so as to better grasp the complexities of that text's relations to the contexts in which it is read, quoted, or made use of.

museum in Grahamstown for anybody to access.

(Krog 2006b: 3)

Krog is suggesting here that she does leave an adequate trace back to her sources, not through references but through a different, genre-appropriate, form of acknowledgement. While Krog does not, in my opinion, adequately provide traces to her sources in *Country of My Skull*, this does seem to me her strongest line of defence against her detractors; this, and perhaps the final line of her acknowledgements page in *Country of My Skull* where she writes, “I have exploited many lives and many texts” (Krog 1998: 281). The statement indicates the convergence of the two ethical matters of appropriating people’s stories, on the one hand, and their ideas, on the other.

Tracing the Suture/Scar

It is interesting to note that Krog, once again, makes reference in the above quotation to the quilted nature of *Country of My Skull*, by way of defending her montage-like use of multiple sources and voices in the creation of the text. In conclusion, I would like to point to what I see as the fundamental difference between Krog’s notion of quilting and de Kock’s all-important notion of the seam. As stated above, de Kock’s seam is “a site of a joining together that *also bears the mark of the suture*” (de Kock 2001: 276; my italics). The presence of the mark is crucially embedded in the concept – it allows for the paradoxical nature of the concept itself. Krog’s quilting, on the other hand, attempts to overcome the paradox of the seam and simply bring “everyone’s voices” together as equal patches in the national quilt: she argues that at the time of her writing *Country of My Skull* “we were forging a new vocabulary in an open and democratic society where finally the past had been made known. Everybody was a textmaker. Everyone’s input was equal” (Krog 2006b: 2-3). The trope of the quilt not only allows Krog to seamlessly universalise individuals’ voices and testimonies, but, by muddying the distinction between genres (non-fictional texts and testimonies become quilted into a fictional narrative), has also allowed her to defend herself against plagiarism.

The danger of the trope of the quilt, then, as opposed to de Kock’s more sophisticated notion of the seam, is that in its “flattening-out” and universalising, of individuals’ voices and testimonies, as well as its muddying of the distinctions between genres, the mark of the suture which traces, in this instance, traumatic histories – the *scar* – is erased. The invisibility of the

suture and/or the scar²¹ leads to the problem of re-enacting the discursive erasure of the traumatic past discussed at the outset of this paper. Thus, while the trope of quilting might seem an appropriate one to represent the multiple voices, perspectives, and versions of the past in post-apartheid South Africa, like all national metaphors of reconciliation, it is in danger of effacing, rather than archiving, the traumatic past.

References

- Benjamin, Walter
1970 The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction in *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn. London: Fontana, pp. 211-244.
- De Kock, Leon
2001a South Africa in the Global Imaginary: An Introduction. *Poetics Today* 22(2): 263-298.
2001b The Trouble with Afrikaans: Leon de Kock Interviews Johann Rossouw. *Scrutiny* 2 6(1): 28-31.
- Duvenage, Pieter
1999 The Politics of Memory and Forgetting After Auschwitz and Apartheid. Conference Paper. *TRC: Commissioning the Past*, 7-9 June, University of the Witwatersrand. Online: <http://www.trcresearch.org.za/papers99/duvenage.pdf>. Accessed on 19 December 2005.
- Fritz, Mali
1986 *Essig gegen den Durst: 565 Tage in Auschwitz-Birkenau*. Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik.
- Graybill, Lyn
2001 The Contribution of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission toward the Promotion of Women's Rights in South Africa. *Women's Studies International Forum* 24(1): 1-10.
- Gubar, Susan
2003 *Poetry After Auschwitz: Remembering What One Never Knew*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Holquist, Michael
1990 Introduction: The Architectonics of Answerability. In: Bakhtin, Mikael *Art and Answerability*, translated by M. Holquist & V. Liapunov. Austin: University of Texas Press.

21. The trope of the scar as narrative trace is, of course, very different from de Kock's notion of the seam. I do not mean to imply here that these concepts can be applied equivalently. However, the active similarity between the two concepts is the presence of the mark that acts as a trace to a particular event (in the case of the scar, always a traumatic event).

- Kafka, Franz
 1961 *"The Metamorphosis" and Other Stories*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Kanneh, Kadiatu
 1995 *Feminism and the Colonial Body*. In: Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (eds) *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Krog, Antjie
 1998 *Country of My Skull*. Johannesburg: Random House.
 2000a *Country of Grief and Grace*. In: *Down to My Last Skin*. Johannesburg: Random Poets.
 2006b Stephen Watson in the Annals of Plagiarism. Online: <<http://www.suntimes.co.za/2006/02/19/krog.pdf>>. Accessed on 21 February 2006.
 2006c Last time, this time. Online: <http://www.litnet.co.za/seminarroom/krog_krog2.asp>. Accessed on 22 March 2006.
- Lyotard, Jean-François
 1983 *The Differend: Phases in Dispute*, translated by G. van den Abbelle. Minnesota: Manchester University Press.
- Meyer, Stephan
 2002 "the only truth stands skinned in sound": Antjie Krog as Translator. *Scrutiny* 2 7(2): 3-18.
- Morrison, Toni
 1998 Home. In: Lubiano, W. (ed.) *The House That Race Built: Original Essays by Toni Morrison, Angela Y. Davis, Cornel West, and Others on Black Americans and Politics in America Today*. New York: Vintage.
- Ndebele, Njabulo
 1998 Memory, Metaphor, and the Triumph of Narrative. In: Nuttall, S. & Coetzee, C. (eds) *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Reiter, Andrea
 2000 *Narrating the Holocaust*. London: Continuum.
- Sanders, Mark
 2000 Truth, Telling, Questioning: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*, and Literature After Apartheid. *Modern Fiction Studies* 46(1): 13-41.
- Scarry, Elaine
 1985 *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Spivak, Gayatri
 1993 Can the Subaltern Speak? In: Chrisman, L. & Williams, P. (eds) *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Starkey-Melck, Jacqui
 2006 Reclaiming Her Body, Remembering Her Voice: The Quest for the

ACCOUNTABILITY, ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND THE ETHICS OF "QUILTING" ...

- Unheard Voice in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* and Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*. MA dissertation. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
- Tobias, Saul
1999 History, Memory and the Ethics of Writing: Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*. Conference Paper. *TRC: Commissioning the Past*, 7-9 June 1999, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Online: <<http://www.trcresearch.org.za/papers99/tobias.pdf>>. Accessed on 19 December 2005.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission*
Online: <<http://www.truth.org.za>>. Accessed on 19 December 2005.
- Watson, Stephen
2006 Annals of Plagiarism: Antjie Krog and the Bleek and Lloyd Collection. Online: <www.suntimes.co.za/2006/02/19/watson.pdf>. Accessed on 21 February 2006.