



**PDF Complete**  
 Your complimentary use period has ended.  
 Thank you for using PDF Complete.

[Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

**Table of Contents**

1. Introduction	3
1.1 Truth	7
1.2 Retribution	7
1.3 Religion	8
1.4 Reconciliation	8
2. Achmat Dangor's <i>Bitter Fruit</i> and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission	10
2.1 Memory	12
2.1.1 <i>Private Trauma vs. Public Truth</i>	12
2.1.2 <i>Silence vs. Articulation</i>	15
2.1.3 <i>Individual Guilt vs. Collective Guilt</i>	18
2.1.4 <i>Dealing with the Past</i>	20
2.2 Confession	21
2.3 Retribution	22
2.4 Reconciliation	23
2.5 Conclusion	25
3. J.M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i> and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission	28
3.1 The Trial	30
3.1.1 <i>Religion</i>	30
3.1.2 <i>Confession</i>	31
3.1.3 <i>Remorse</i>	33
3.2 The Attack	35
3.2.1 <i>Truth</i>	35
3.2.2 <i>Responsibility</i>	37
3.3 The Sacrifice	38
3.3.1 <i>Retribution</i>	38
3.3.2 <i>Justice</i>	39
3.4 Reconciliation	42

3.5 Conclusion	44
4. Nadine Gordimer's <i>The House Gun</i> and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission	46
4.1 Awaiting the Trial	50
4.1.1 <i>Truth</i>	51
4.1.2 <i>Individual Guilt</i>	53
4.2 Postponement of the Trial	55
4.2.1 <i>Reversal of Roles</i>	55
4.2.2 <i>Religion</i>	57
4.2.3 <i>Collective Guilt</i>	58
4.3 The Trial	59
4.3.1 <i>Climate of Violence</i>	61
4.3.2 <i>Justice</i>	61
4.3.3 <i>Retribution</i>	62
4.4 After the Trial	63
4.4.1 <i>Forgiveness</i>	63
4.4.2 <i>Reconciliation</i>	64
4.5 Conclusion	65
5. Conclusion	68
6. References	72

## 1. Introduction

“The Truth Commission functions as a sharply focused microcosm of the broader South African society in transition” (Krog, ix).

Antjie Krog, a poet of Afrikaner background who reported on the TRC hearings for the South African Broadcasting Corporation, argues that the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission exhibits the characteristics of post-apartheid South Africa. She points out that the work of the Truth Commission turned “an intensely illuminating spotlight on South Africa’s past” (Krog, ix), whilst South Africans endeavoured to cope with the country’s transition from white minority rule to black majority rule. Krog’s book *Country of My Skull* (1998) gives a personal account of the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Whereas it entails gruesome descriptions of rape, torture and murder, and largely seems to give voice to individual suffering, Krog concurrently explores the nature of guilt, shame and reconciliation. One might even suggest that she comes to question her own sense of guilt. Clearly, the truth and reconciliation process was a painful experience for everyone involved – victims, perpetrators, witnesses, commissioners, media, journalists – and prompted different responses. Black and white South Africans seemed to handle the pain of the Commission’s work differently. Halfway through Krog’s book, a psychologist claims that white journalists tend to get too involved in the TRC process because of a certain sense of guilt: “I find that white journalists are carrying a lot of guilt. Have you asked yourself why more Afrikaner journalists are covering the Truth Commission than any other group?” (Krog, 258). Antjie Krog appears to endorse his ideas about collective white guilt, because she directly addresses Afrikaners whom she “wishes to convince of our/their guilt and complicity in South Africa’s injustices, as recorded by the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission” (Coetzee, 686). One could therefore suggest that she considers whites beneficiaries of apartheid.

*Country of My Skull* appears to disclose the details about the suffering of individuals and display how their suffering invokes one’s memory of the past. Moreover, the text more or less seems to apologise for the author’s Afrikaner identity as the latter makes her an accomplice to the country’s injustices. Considering that *Country of My Skull* inherently deals with the TRC process, one might consider the book itself a microcosm of post-apartheid South Africa. When the country’s first non-racial elections were held in April 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) triumphed. Subsequently, Nelson Mandela was elected

Within this new South Africa, a wave of new literary African literature mostly constituted a reflection on apartheid up to that point, it currently endeavoured to convey how one could cope with a history of racial segregation. As the Truth Commission similarly intended to provide one with an understanding of the past, I would like to argue that some post-apartheid narratives can actually be considered allegories of the TRC.

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission attempted to reconstruct what happened under apartheid. Its format was significantly different from other truth commissions in that its hearings were broadcast throughout the nation and around the world. Hence, victims were invited to tell their stories and openly discuss their suffering. Moreover, perpetrators were encouraged to publicly confess their misdeeds. The Commission was a compromise between the National Party and the ANC. It was established in December 1995 and ran from April 1996 to October 1998, when its final report was presented to the country's President, Nelson Mandela. Considering that the TRC wished to make a clean break from the past and establish a common future, its aim was not simply to establish a relation between the individual and the state but between individuals in order to promote national unity (Ross, 332). As the country attempted to create a collective memory of its history of apartheid, it was willing to attribute blame to all parties engaging in the struggle over apartheid (Gibson, 417). In this particular context, one's individual responsibility appears to be replaced by collective guilt. Accordingly, individual suffering seems to be regarded as collective suffering. Clearly, change was necessary in order to bring about national reconciliation. As Jen Laakso points out, the commission needed to go hand in hand with institutional changes, including judicial, political and military reform, in order to promote reparation and reconciliation (Laakso, 53).

With regard to justice, one could say that the TRC sought to achieve restorative justice instead of retributive justice. This basically means that it wished to restore the balance within South African communities and prevent future violence. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission embraced the concept of ubuntu; something which the final clause of the new Constitution describes as "the African philosophy of humanism" (Krog, vii). One could say that the essence of ubuntu is captured in the mutual interdependence of people. As Nkonko Kamwangamalu argues, it embodies "the core values of African ontologies: respect for any human being, for human dignity and for human life, collective sharedness, obedience, humility, solidarity, caring, hospitality, interdependence, communalism" (Kamwangamalu, 26). In addition, Dorothy Driver emphasises that ubuntu served to oppose European greed,

ment of black South Africans, and to delineate a individual ó whatever their status ó is accorded dignity or personhoodö (Driver, 129). One could therefore say that ubuntu holds that humans should treat one another with respect because they belong to the same community. Perpetrators were often forgiven in the spirit of ubuntu, because many South Africans believed that their community would have no future without forgiveness.

Although the country wished to reinstate justice in order to create a common future for black, white and coloured South Africans, retribution nonetheless took place. One could suggest that a culture of violence persisted in post-apartheid South Africa, because it had been built on the legacy of its violent past (Hamber, 118). Although South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy reduced political violence, the latter still occurred, especially in the countryside. As Brandon Hamber points out; öIn 1997, the Human Rights Committee reported that more than 300 people in Kwazulu-Natal and 151 people in the rural Eastern Cape had been killed in political violenceö (Hamber, 115). Moreover, regardless of the Truth Commission's efforts to expunge former structures, race relations still proved problematic (Laakso, 51). For instance, victims of past violence who desired to take vengeance on perpetrators, almost certainly constituted different ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, white South Africans were occasionally assaulted because of substantial discrepancies in living standards. More specifically, östandards of living improved only marginally for black South Africansö in the post-apartheid era (Møller, 31), because whites still possessed most of the lands. Although there was a consensus that equal opportunities and living conditions had to be established, many blacks experienced hardship both in townships and rural areas. Whites appeared to believe that the violence that was carried out against them had everything to do with their economic status: öthere is a popular perception (largely held by white South Africans) that the wealthy are more affected by crime than the poorö (Hamber, 117). However, post-apartheid human rights violations were not necessarily race-related. Blacks committed crimes against blacks; they often behaved aggressively within domestic contexts. Moreover, there is no other country in the world that has higher incidences of rape of women and children (Moffett, 129).

The TRC was presided over by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and was comprised of a variety of commissioners; a group of seventeen men and women of different ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds served on the Commission. They were divided up into three subordinate committees; the Human Rights Violations Committee, the Amnesty Committee and the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee. Firstly, the Human Rights Violations

take an inventory of the causes, nature and extent of the between 1 March 1960 and 5 December 1993, thus including violations that were committed both in the name of apartheid and in the struggle against it (Laakso, 49). Hence, it sought to establish the hidden truths of state violence as well as underground and armed resistance by the liberation movement, and encouraged everyone involved in the process to come to terms with these truths. The Amnesty Committee was empowered to grant amnesty to perpetrators of political violence. When perpetrators testified before the Amnesty Committee, it was not about pleading guilty, but about revealing the facts about one's crime. They were clearly encouraged to show contrition and apologise. Yet, as amnesty was granted in exchange for information about political crimes, perpetrators did not necessarily show remorse. It was not considered part of the TRC process, as it was deemed too difficult to measure its sincerity (Kosew, 159). Thirdly, the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee attempted to promote reparation for the damage inflicted on people. Therefore, it made recommendations for reparations for victims. When the work had been carried out through these three committees, the TRC produced a report of its findings in 1998. This report provided the country with a historical record of past misdeeds. As Colin Bundy points out, "the archive becomes the official repository of memory, but is simultaneously a crucial site in the process of forgetting" (Bundy, 193).

Antjie Krog addressed questions of guilt, shame and reconciliation in *Country of My Skull*. In so doing, she contributed to the general debate about the TRC. Moreover, as she responds to the criticism of the TRC, her novel provides a space for continuing the debate. Clearly, the truth and reconciliation process has been heavily criticised since the Truth Commission began its public hearings. For instance, some critics suggest that the TRC underestimated the harm that had been caused by the country's former apartheid laws. Hence, political scientist Mahmood Mamdani argues that "the TRC focused on torture, murder and rape, all outside the law, ignoring everything that was distinctive about apartheid and its machinery of violence" (Mamdani, 181). Besides, some black South Africans appear to regard the TRC as a waste of money which could have been used to compensate victims (Vora and Vora, 312). Moreover, a number of Afrikaners claimed that the country's process of truth and reconciliation negatively influenced South African politics because they "feared political instability and felt disenfranchised" (Vora and Vora, 319). In addition, the TRC's uniform denunciation of white and black violence has often been criticised because the latter "should be judged by different standards, it is argued, because it was based on different motives and in a different context" (Buikema, 188). Although these shortcomings of the TRC were certainly

The TRC also raised questions about truth, retribution, and justice. These issues appear to be more relevant with regard to this study.

### 1.1 Truth

One could say that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been criticised for the way in which it strove to establish the truth. Truth was regarded as a confusing and problematic aspect of the TRC hearings. Hence, many South Africans feared that disclosing this truth would revive old wounds. They were concerned that individuals with TRC relevant experience would simply be re-traumatized by participation in the process (Williams et al., 462). Furthermore, opponents of the TRC did not consider the Commission's pursuit of truth viable. Whilst the TRC strove to expose the truth and unite politically polarised South African society, these opponents instead believed that the TRC process divided the nation. Clearly, the hearings helped victims to remember and deal with the past but it remained questionable whether these testimonies would actually bring one closer to the truth. The process was further complicated because the TRC could not easily decide whose truth counted when a victim's truth clashed with a perpetrator's truth. Apparently, shame prevented many victims from revealing what had happened to them. Especially women refused to acknowledge their status of victim and remained silent about the sexual abuse they suffered. Instead, they were more likely to convey what had been inflicted upon their sons or husbands (Minow, 343). Antjie Krog suggests that these women were afraid to lose something again – privacy, maybe respect (Krog, 277). Moreover, perpetrators were believed to tell lies because they either refused to confront their misdeeds or could not actually do so because their memory had been erased. Clearly, people reconstructed their memory and this made their truth a socially constructed history. As Krog points out, it was very difficult to distinguish between lies and memory loss (Krog, 117), because as narrators we all give ourselves permission to believe our own versions (Krog, 133).

### 1.2 Retribution

In addition, objections have been made that the TRC was not a court of law and therefore not a legitimate setting to conduct public hearings. Some South Africans believed that its Amnesty Committee should therefore not have the power to grant amnesty from prosecution to perpetrators of gross human rights violations. More specifically, as Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela points out, critics of the amnesty clause argue that the TRC has sacrificed justice for reconciliation (Gobodo-Madikizela, 271). One might agree that it is highly difficult to achieve justice and reconciliation at the same time. Therefore, Jeremy Sarkin claims that the pursuit of justice does not always promote reconciliation (Sarkin, 34).

d for its religious character. The hearings of the TRC were conducted in a religious manner, because they were framed by a Christian ethos of forgiveness, personified by the chairperson of the TRC, Archbishop Tutu (Posel, 136). Yet, Tutu's religious explanation of reconciliation appears to be controversial because some South Africans considered it instead a political ambition. Moreover, they may have felt that Tutu used the country's history of apartheid in order to convert the entire nation.

#### 1.4 Reconciliation

It seems fair to argue that the TRC provided a setting for national reconciliation. Laakso claims that the Truth Commission provided "a way of dealing with the South African past by seeking to alleviate nightmares, thus providing a therapeutic cure, as well as fostering a sense of community, common identity and hope for a better future" (Laakso, 50). Hence, it strove to reconcile the entire population with South Africa's past and insisted on peace and reconciliation in order to prevent further violence. Nonetheless, claims have been made that the TRC was not successful in bringing about reconciliation. Considering that violence persisted within the new South Africa, some critics suggest that merely initiated reconciliation.

Despite these criticisms, one could say that the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission took groundbreaking steps towards a better future. As I shall argue, post-apartheid South African literature – especially when written by authors who are engaged with South African politics – draws attention to the country's process of truth and reconciliation. For instance, close readings of Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun* suggest that these novels can actually be considered allegories of the TRC. As Achmat Dangor's main character Silas Ali works for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Dangor seems to explicitly convey that his novel can be placed against a TRC background. Coetzee appears to be far less concerned with the country's process of truth and reconciliation. Yet, one could argue that the University's Committee of Inquiry that examines Melanie's complaint against David Lurie, Coetzee's protagonist, bears considerable resemblance to the South African Truth Commission. Perhaps Gordimer alludes to the TRC even less so than Coetzee. However, as *The House Gun* is often deemed a courtroom drama, there appears to be a connection between Gordimer's narrative and the country's preoccupation with real-life courtroom dramas. This thesis examines to what extent Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* (Chapter 2), Coetzee's *Disgrace* (Chapter 3) and Gordimer's *The House Gun* (Chapter 4) reflect upon the TRC. It will therefore explore how



*Your complimentary  
use period has ended.  
Thank you for using  
PDF Complete.*

[Click Here to upgrade to  
Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

re such as confession, truth, guilt, justice, retribution,  
addressed by Dangor, Coetzee and Gordimer. Moreover, as  
it will observe whether these books regard the TRC process as deeply flawed or as a good  
idea, it will concurrently endeavour to establish whether Dangor, Coetzee and Gordimer are  
positive about South Africa's future.

## *Bitter Fruit* and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission appears to play an important role in Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*. For instance, Paul Gready claims that the TRC is a backdrop to the novel, again providing one vocabulary among many to deal with political and personal pasts (Gready, 169). The Ali family appears to be the author's instrument; through the lives of Silas, Lydia and their son Mikey, Dangor reflects upon the issues that are raised in the debate on truth and reconciliation. Consequently, Ronit Frenkel considers *Bitter Fruit* a text that opens history's processes in order to narrate its ambiguities (Frenkel, 159). Whilst addressing themes such as memory, confession, and retribution, Achmat Dangor deals with South Africa's history of racial segregation and its transition from an apartheid society to a new democratic South Africa. Silas's fictional job as a liaison between the Ministry of Justice and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission provides an insight into the country's process of truth and reconciliation. His wife Lydia appears to represent one of apartheid's many victims of sexual abuse, as she was raped by a white police officer during South Africa's regime of racial oppression. Moreover, their son Mikey, who disregards all rules, seems to symbolise the violence that incessantly troubles post-apartheid South Africa.

One could say that Silas Ali's private life disintegrates into utter chaos when he runs into his wife's rapist, Lieutenant François Du Boise. Although the latter pretends neither to remember nor recognise Dangor's protagonist, he triggers distressing memories of the past. Silas fails to stand up for himself or his wife Lydia. However, Du Boise's ignorance about the trauma he has caused, deeply infuriates him. When he tells Lydia about his unexpected encounter with the Lieutenant, he clearly reopens old wounds. Their relationship rapidly deteriorates, because she cannot bear to relive the painful memory of her rape and blames Silas for bringing her rapist back into her life. Yet, considering that this particular confrontation with Du Boise forces Silas and Lydia to remember and deal with Lydia's abuse, one could to some extent regard the novel as an allegory of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation process.

Within this allegory, Dangor distinguishes between private and public trauma. For instance, he zooms in on the individual suffering of Silas's wife Lydia, but also explores to what extent her abuse traumatised her family. The author shows in what way private and public affairs are linked. Moreover, he differentiates between the characters' silence and articulation, and demonstrates in what way these are of vital importance to the TRC process.

suggest that the characters' reluctance to speak  
a totally uncontrollable way.

Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* is divided into three sections; Memory, Confession, and Retribution. One could argue that these sections simply draw attention to three significant issues of the TRC debate. However, especially in view of Mikey's claim that history is memory (Dangor, 32), the title of the first section could also be considered an allusion to South Africa's history of apartheid. Mikey appears to suggest that Du Boise is not merely his mother's rapist but a universal personification of a perpetrator: 'a ghost from the past, a mythical phantom embedded in the historical memory of those who were active in the struggle' (Dangor, 32). Seeing that post-apartheid South Africa endeavoured to come to grips with its painful history, pursuing an account of the latter was necessary. Similarly, although the TRC has often been criticised for reviving old wounds, *Bitter Fruit* appears to emphasise that reopening these wounds is unavoidable. According to Mikey, this inevitability is even used as an explanation of past and future violence:

After all, history is memory. Yet, it has an air of inevitability, solemn and compelling, especially when uttered by Silas and his comrades. It explains everything, the violence periodically sweeping the country, the crime rate, even the strange upsurge of brutality against women. It is as if history has a remembering process of its own, one that gives life to its imaginary monsters. (Dangor, 32)

Moreover, whereas Dangor's opening lines point out that 'It was inevitable' (Dangor, 3) and this most likely refers to Silas's encounter with Du Boise, one could argue that it also hints at the inevitability of the title he gave to the first section of his novel, and consequently implies the inescapability of letting one's memory speak.

The South African Truth Commission wished to bring about national reconciliation and individual catharsis. In order to heal the entire nation and allow people to reintegrate into society, victims and perpetrators primarily had to be willing to remember the violence. Consequently, victims were required to speak about the violence and give voice to their silent suffering so that they could move beyond their past. Furthermore, perpetrators were supposed to accept responsibility for their actions and understand the harm they caused. In exchange for a full confession of their wrongdoings, they could be offered amnesty. One might suggest that obtaining the truth about its history of apartheid, was the country's highest priority, as the TRC endeavoured to achieve the truth through these testimonies. Nevertheless, Dangor appears to convey that speaking one's memory, giving voice to one's history, cannot be forced upon someone. In addition, he shows how the burden of past atrocities is not confined to the victim but leaves its mark on the victim's family. In order to establish to what extent

ly with the past, this chapter will assess issues such as reconciliation. Clearly, its main focus will be the novel's engagement with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

## 2.1 Memory

Claims have been made that the TRC functioned as a bridge between the public and the private (Bozzoli, 170), as it encouraged victims to publicly revisit their private pain. Moreover, the Truth Commission urged perpetrators to individually confess their crimes within a public realm. Through these public confessions, private experiences of pain and violence became public experiences. Hence, as seen in the previous chapter, throughout the TRC process, individual suffering and responsibility were exchanged for communal suffering and guilt. One could argue that Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* relates the public and the private in a similar way. For instance, Silas's public activities affect his private life, because his involvement in the TRC circus helps him to confront the painful memory of his wife's rape. Subsequently, he mentions seeing Du Boise and encourages Lydia to face her past and testify before the TRC. However, she feels betrayed by Silas because he reminds her of her rapist, notwithstanding that she has never been able to talk to him about her rape. Her anger appears to correspond to the rage she felt, when she found out about Silas's infidelity and his involvement in the ANC underground: "Then, too, her anger had hardened into something impenetrable, an invisible crust that made her skin impervious to touch and her mind deaf to even his most heartfelt pleading" (Dangor, 13). Lydia believed that he "had endangered their lives, hers and Mike's, because of his secretiveness, his inability to trust her, his own wife" (Dangor, 57). Hence, one might argue that Lydia ascribes her rape to Silas's former political activities in the MK counter-intelligence unit. Moreover, one could say that she feels hurt and frustrated because of Silas's disloyalty, as he was reluctant to privately speak to her but not hesitant to share his secrets with his colleague Kate.

### 2.1.1 Private Trauma vs. Public Trauma

Pain appears to be a recurring theme in the discourse of the TRC, because it has always been considered a key component of healing. Not surprisingly, it is a theme that recurs throughout Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*. The novel illustrates that reviving the traumatic memories of the past strongly reinforces pain. Despite the fact that Lydia habituated herself to shutting out painful reminiscences, she is no longer able to expunge her rape from her memory when Silas brings up Du Boise. One might agree that she is burdened with memory, as she suffers both psychologically and physically from remembering her abuse. For instance, her inability to talk about it tortures her conscience. Hence, the wounds she inflicts upon herself when she decides

proposed to alleviate this very pain. Silas insists that he is not angry about Du Boise because he cannot keep a secret from her. However, they usually failed to articulate their feelings to one another; it struck him that he and Lydia spoke very little these days, and when they did, it was about something practical, the car needing a service, the leaking taps, the length of the grass at the back of the house (Dangor, 7). Moreover, considering that he kept many secrets from her in the past, it is more likely that he wished to unburden himself.

One could argue that Silas and Lydia strongly disagree about the impact of the burden inflicted on them by the assault on Lydia. Although Lydia is mostly concerned with her own suffering, Silas feels that he went through it as much as his wife: It was a time when, well, we had to learn to put up with those things (Dangor, 13). Nonetheless, Lydia does not agree and asks him what *he* had to put up with since he had not been raped. One could suggest that she does not consider him a victim. She casts aside his pain and refuses to acknowledge his suffering, because she thinks of it as her pain: He wants to make my inconvenience his, the husband who feels my pain as his pain (Dangor, 121). In addition, she might be convinced that the pain of rape cannot be diminished to being a thing; You don't know about the pain. It's a memory to you, a wound to your ego, a theory. You can't even begin to imagine the pain (Dangor, 14). Clearly, she considers it impossible for anyone to take on her pain. Nevertheless, Silas claims that he was seriously hurt by her rape, not in the least because he had been present during her rape. One could say that Lydia underestimates how awful it must have been for him to hear her scream and not have been able to do anything about it. Although Silas clearly distinguishes between her pain and his pain, he emphasises the impact of his imagined pain: Ja, I suppose imagined pain isn't the real thing. But I've lived with it for so long, it's become real (Dangor, 14). Considering that Silas here suggests that they share the pain of her rape, one could argue that the novel distinguishes between individual pain and collective pain.

With regard to the characters' willingness to confront their painful memories, Silas's job as a liaison between the Ministry of Justice and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission appears to be significant. Whereas Silas previously disallowed the thought of the rape of his wife from entering his mind and chose to suffer in silence, his involvement in the truth and reconciliation process enables him to reassess the past atrocities. Whilst he mediates between the Ministry of Justice and the Truth Commission and sees to the objectivity of the TRC's supporters and opponents, Silas and those involved in the TRC process collectively attempt to come to terms with the country's past and to heal the nation along the path of reconciliation.

Ministry of Justice in composing the TRC report, he  
confessions of rape and murder. One could argue that  
these testimonies provide him with a much more objective account of what happened during  
apartheid. Moreover, his position of an unbiased coloured lawyer whose main responsibility it  
is to ensure that everyone concerned considered the law above all, and did not allow their  
emotions to sway them (Dangor, 63), possibly enables him to gain control of his own  
feelings. Consequently, he considers it all the more necessary to confront the truth and  
emphasises once more the necessity to face the rape:

–Lydia we’ll have to deal with this.

–With what?

–With what we went through, both of us. He saw the smirk on her face. –Yes for  
fuck’s sake, I went through it as much as you. (Dangor, 15)

Considering that Silas attempts to convince Lydia to testify before the TRC, one could say  
that he bridges between his private life the TRC. Like the South African Truth and  
Reconciliation Commission, he endeavours to link the personal and the political. Moreover,  
whereas he had previously been an activist in the ANC underground, he currently endeavours  
to reconcile the ANC government and the TRC. Once again, he seems to be the in-between  
factor.

The nature of Silas’s job at the TRC points out the relevance of the Alis’s private lives  
to the larger political concerns of South Africa. For instance, it draws attention to the rift  
between the government and the TRC. One should take notice that some perpetrators were  
still part of the ANC government and the country’s security forces (Laakso, 49).  
Consequently, they were likely not to support the publication of the TRC report, as it would  
clearly divulge their violations. Furthermore, Silas’s job helps one to understand how the  
Truth Commission tries to restore the damaged relationship between the black, white and  
coloured South Africans. Moreover, it enables Dangor to put forth some diverging opinions  
about the Truth Commission and the publication of the TRC report. Regardless of its fictional  
context, these opinions about the TRC and Silas’s responsibility in the process mirror the  
different standpoints toward the Truth Commission amongst the South African populace:

–Ah! Silas Ali! How on earth did you make it to fifty? The boere couldn’t kill you, but  
the TRC damned nearly did, no? someone said.

–Yes, you should do what old Tutu did, go and live in America or somewhere, now  
that you’ve put the cat among the pigeons, someone else added.

–Ag, ou Silas, in the end I think you guys did a good job, you know, juggling those  
TRC commissioners, the old security people and our own fellers. (Dangor, 257)

onstrated that many victims were perpetrators and many apartheid regime. Dangor suggests that Lydia's brother-in-law Alec is a personification of such a perpetrator-victim. When Lydia is in hospital, she and Silas enjoy much support from their family and friends. For instance, she receives daily visits from her sister Gracie and her husband Alec. Despite their presence, she is in floods of tears when her son Mikey does not come to the hospital one day. On that particular day, Silas suffers a panic attack. As the doctors emphasise that it was caused by severe stress, this attack initially seems to result from remembering Lydia's tears and pain at the time of her rape. However, as Silas discovers that Alec's voice matches one of the voices he heard during the assault on Lydia, it is instead triggered by Alec. Silas tries to prevent himself from remembering the voices of the cops present during the rape, because he cannot imagine it to be true that Alec had been present: "No, Alec was safe, there was no need to try and match Alec's voice to another, more sinister memory. Ridiculous to have thought that about Alec in the first place" (Dangor, 105). However, when Silas later reevaluates his panic attack, he recognises Alec's betrayal. More specifically, he is confronted with the painful discovery of a particularly unwelcome aspect of the truth about the past; the fact that there were traitors in one's own ranks: "If Alec had been present that night, it could only have been as perpetrator, or conspirator, at best. Not as victim, no, everyone would have been made to know. Alec was never one to keep his suffering silent" (Dangor, 102). One could again argue that the political and the personal are linked, because Silas's discovery about Alec's political activities have a considerable bearing on his private life.

### *2.1.2 Silence vs. Articulation*

Considering that Lydia is reluctant to talk about her private pain and does not wish to appear before the TRC, one might suggest that Dangor draws attention to women's silence about their abuse. According to Helene Strauss, Lydia's character symbolises the women who chose to remain silent: "the stories of all the women who were not heard by the TRC, explains Dangor, are personified or represented by the character of Lydia" (Strauss). Despite the fact that the TRC organised some trials especially for victims of abuse, Lydia refuses to attend these hearings. It remains questionable whether she is too ashamed to publicly acknowledge her pain and accept her status as a victim or that she simply "does not allow her trauma to be appropriated for political ends" (Miller, 155). Besides, one could say that privacy is the only thing she has got left. Silas seems to be slightly disappointed when Lydia declines the offer. She blames his ego, because she assumes that "her appearance would have given him the opportunity to play the brave, stoical husband. He would have been able to demonstrate his

fied, in spite of being so close to the victimö (Dangor,

One might argue that Lydia has been deprived of her right to speak, because she has never been able to talk about her abuse. However, this appears to be somewhat unreasonable, when one considers that she is urged to testify before the TRC. Clearly, this is not the kind of speaking Lydia wants. Yet, one could say that she initially wished to privately speak about her rape and its consequences but lacked a suitable candidate. She could not speak to her husband: 'I cannot speak to Silas, he makes my pain his tragedy. In any case, I know that he doesn't want to speak about my being raped, he wants to suffer silently, wants me to be his accomplice in this act of denial' (Dangor, 127). Clearly, he was preoccupied with his own grief, fear and damaged manhood. Hence, Lydia points out that Silas's fear, 'that icy, unspoken revulsion' enabled her 'to cross over into a zone of silence' (Dangor, 129). Neither could she talk to Mam Agnes and Jackson, because her parents were devout Roman Catholics who would naturally demand of her a 'forgetful silence'. 'Confess your sins, even those committed against you - and is rape not a sin committed by both victim and perpetrator, at least according to man's gospel? - but confess it once only. There true salvation is to be found' (Dangor, 127). In spite of her religious upbringing, Lydia now appears to be sceptical about Catholicism. She has stopped relying on God a long time ago and considers herself beyond his help; 'I remember praying, calling on God to strike me dead, but knew instinctively that He too had fled somewhere' (Dangor, 128). Accordingly, she cannot grieve and heal. Although other characters seem to insist that she is healing along with her wounds; 'her wounds were healing and so too must the memory of their infliction, that's what everyone would tell her. The wisdom that helped people to get on with life, no matter what traumas they had lived through' (Dangor, 121), she will possibly never completely heal because she suppresses painful memories from the past.

Furthermore, Lydia appears to be an opponent of the TRC process. Ana Miller declares that 'her silence is an act of rebellion against the appropriation of personal trauma that is directed initially at Silas, at Catholicism, and later at the TRC' (Miller, 153). As mentioned before, the TRC has often been criticised because its hearings reopened old wounds. Hence, one could say that Silas revives the wounds of her rape, because he keeps the memory of her rapist alive. He keeps her updated on Du Boise: 'Du Boise has applied for amnesty, he and three, four others, for rape, assault, on women mostly. He has named you as one of the cases he is asking amnesty for' (Dangor, 161).

Lydia does not accept her husband's involvement in the TRC process, as she does not want to know. He observes, for example, that the TRC process will continue for years, whilst she wishes that the commission would stop reopening old wounds any time soon. "For a lot of people, it will never be over. For many, it will go on, for a while yet" (Dangor, 160). Thus, Lydia neither respects Silas's job nor does she truly value the Truth and Reconciliation process. She does not think that a victim's testimony brings one nearer the truth. "It was good to have a rule to live by, but how little his rule (í ) had helped all those 'victims' who had told their stories before the Commission. The brave victims and the wise Commissioners, the virtue of both defined as if by divine decree" (Dangor, 155-156). Additionally, Silas believes his wife has an "unforgiving mind" (Dangor, 7), and he does not expect her to be capable of forgiving, forgetting and reconciling.

Lydia is convinced that sharing her story will not help her. Instead she thinks that "the TRC would 'contain' and therefore suppress the magnitude and complexity of her experience by reducing it to a series of facts" (Miller, 155). One could claim that her dignity is never restored. According to Lydia, Archbishop Tutu will fail to understand the magnitude of her experience; "The difference is he'll never understand what it's like to be raped, to be mocked while he's being raped, to feel inside of him the hot knife- that piece of useless flesh you call a cock- turning into a torture instrument" (Dangor, 16). She does not want to give voice to her painful history. Her stubbornness impedes her reconciliation process: "For her to 'come to terms' with what had happened, she would have to seek some inner serenity, lock all her disturbing recollections into that secret crypt in her memory" (Dangor, 122).

Silas wished to remain silent about the rape of his wife for nineteen years. Due to his involvement in the TRC process, however, he learns to tackle the past and come to terms with what has happened under apartheid. Even though Silas still suffers from the pain of the rape of his wife, he appears to have found a way to live with it. "What Du Boise had done, he had done a long time ago. Nineteen years. And Silas had learned to live with what Du Boise had done, had absorbed that moment's horror into the flow of his life, a faded moon of a memory that only occasionally intruded into his everyday consciousness" (Dangor, 4). Moreover, he has learnt to appreciate the truth: "Speaking the unspeakable out loud had saved his sanity in the past, confused his interrogators, and, above all, allowed him to retain his sense of space" (Dangor, 102). On the one hand Silas hopes that Lydia will tell the truth and come to terms with her abuse. However, he knows that it is not only a matter of rape, but it is also about their decision not to talk about it.

Before he encountered Du Boise in a shopping mall, that he felt some hidden pain, perhaps not of her rape, but to do with the years of the silent years that had ensued between them. He was not capable of such an ordeal, he acknowledged. It would require an immersion in words he was not familiar with, words that did not seek to blur memory, to lessen the pain, but to sharpen all of these things. He was trained to find consensus, even if it meant not acknowledging the truth in all its unflattering nakedness. (Dangor, 63)

Clearly, Silas is obsessed with recording the atrocities that were carried out under apartheid. Yet, he appears to be fully aware that he restricts himself to the violence that has been inflicted upon others as he wonders: "what would happen if he broke his own golden rule and delved into the turmoil of memories that the events of those days would undoubtedly unleash?" (Dangor, 63). Recollections of his childhood companion, Dikeledi, dispel his fears and concerns. The powerlessness he felt, when Dikeledi and her family were taken away by soldiers during the apartheid regime, is similar to the incapacity he feels towards Lydia.

For years, this memory, this humiliating recollection of his own powerlessness, his inexplicable sense of detachment, would be his guard against complacency, the smugness of minor success, the vanity of petty fame. But the paradox was that it became a source of comfort, the very unease that it created in his mind seemed to still other, more immediate fears and concerns confronting him. (Dangor, 175)

He is ashamed of this powerlessness but he cannot turn back time. Moreover, whilst he develops a sense of objectivity towards the victims and perpetrators of the apartheid regime, he learns to deal with the pain of others but in the end he suppresses some significant personal memories.

### *2.1.3 Individual Guilt vs. Collective Guilt*

In addition to the pain he faces in his job, Silas confronts the painful memory of the rape of his wife in his private life by mentioning his encounter with Du Boise. Clearly, Lydia ignores his request to do the same, because she does not allow for anyone to impose on her how to cope with what she has been through. Her psychological pain seems to be unbearable, as she endeavours to exceed it with physical pain. Whilst dancing on a broken beer glass, she badly injures her feet. Silas feels very guilty about telling her about Du Boise. Moreover, the powerlessness he felt when she was raped, mirrors his current incapacity to prevent her from damaging herself. He wishes to free himself from these feelings of guilt, so he tells himself that she did not intend to hurt herself: "Her wounds were not self-inflicted, not provoked by his obsession with remembering the past, it had been a freak accident, it had happened because she wanted to drink beer and hated the taste and he had criticized her for drinking flat

As blaming himself, he attempts to find other

As Gibson remarked in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the TRC wished to blame those who were involved in the struggle over apartheid (Gibson, 417). Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* deals with collective guilt, to the extent that it deals with collective suffering. As Lydia and Silas's behaviour seem to result from their suffering in the past, they collectively seem to share responsibility. Nonetheless, Lydia mostly appears to blame her husband for reintroducing her rapist into her life:

You should have left Du Boise alone when you saw him, Silas, you should not have brought my rapist home. I can't rest peacefully with both of you around, your bodies, your smells, even your sounds become all mixed up. It's like he raped me on your behalf, so that one day I would live with him, through you. When you are inside me, and around me, it feels like Du Boise. He made you his instrument. Is it not enough that I have to deal with the thought of his seed in Mikey, his genes, his blood, his cold and murderous eyes? (Dangor, 123)

She starts to associate Silas with the public sphere. Hence, she holds him accountable for her rape, because of his previous involvement in the underground. Years ago, Silas had been part of a MK counter-intelligence unit. His job was to identify infiltrators and informers. Lydia never knew about this, until he slept with another woman and jeopardised their work. Consequently, his close friend and colleague Kate could not avoid telling Lydia about his infidelity and involvement in the underground.

Although Lydia appears to be able to move beyond Silas's infidelity, she cannot forget his MK activities, because this can be considered an excuse for Du Boise's abuse of her. As a white police officer, Du Boise could have easily discovered about Silas's agenda and decided to threaten him through violation of his wife. This was believed to regularly happen under apartheid. Moreover, the cops who were present during her rape must also have known about Silas's infidelity, as one of them threatens Lydia: "You fucken terrorists must think again about what you're doing. Otherwise, we'll naai you every time we see you" (Dangor, 128). Here, the private and the public meet once again. According to Lydia, Silas put politics first and jeopardised her and Mikey in the name of a political ideal. Moreover, she considers it hypocritical that he concurrently had his private affairs with another woman. He betrayed her in many ways and now he wants to use her private grief for public ends again by making her confess at the TRC. Moreover, as Lydia clearly thinks of it as her pain, her memory, she criticises Silas for finding a way of handling things and moving beyond *her* painful history. She is convinced that it is something he thought out behind a desk;

...ural, was not an unconscious, pain-induced suppression  
ember, but a deliberate strategy, something thought out  
... ice tinkling, golden liquid contemplatively swirled.

That's why he was so good at his job, helping the country to forget and therefore to  
forgive, a convenient kind of amnesia. (Dangor, 122)

What is even worse, is that Lydia starts to identify Silas with Du Boise. Everyone becomes a  
rapist to her and she blames Silas for letting Du Boise get away with rape; "If you were a real  
man, you would have killed him on the spot, right there in the mall, splatter his brains against  
a window, watch his blood running all over the floor" (Dangor, 17). However, at some point  
*Bitter Fruit* seems to convey that Lydia partly blames herself for conceiving a rapist's child.  
Although this appears to be nonsensical, she nonetheless feels guilty about her pregnancy and  
grows to love the child out of pain and guilt. "Yes, she too suffered the inverted morality of  
other rape victims, accepting the blame for what had happened" (Dangor, 130).

#### 2.1.4 Dealing with the Past

As demonstrated in Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, the rape of Lydia has an immense impact  
on the Alis' family life. For instance, Silas acknowledges that Lydia has not been the same  
person ever since: "And then he remembered that Lydia, too, had never been the same since  
the night she was raped. Somewhere inside of her that other Lydia was hiding, shielding  
herself from the memory of being raped and from his response to it" (Dangor, 60).

Yet, the assault on Lydia also strongly affected Silas's life. One might argue that he  
has developed a drinking problem, because he turns to drinking six packs of beers when he  
cannot resolve his problems. Moreover, the hearings of the TRC have really changed him  
because he knows that he has to confront the past in order to move on: "He can no longer  
think of the future without confronting his past. Christ, he thinks, I am beginning to sound  
like Archbishop Tutu. And what does he know? He has never been raped, nor is he a child of  
rape" (Dangor, 131). As Hayner points out: "Common wisdom holds that the future depends  
on the past: one must confront the legacy of past horrors or there will be no foundation on  
which to build a new society" (Hayner, 30).

In addition, Silas and Lydia's secrecy surrounding the past appears to affect their son  
Mikey. The latter seems distant after he discovers Lydia's most private account of the past;  
her diary, and finds out that he is the bitter fruit of rape. Silas remembers that Mikey acted in  
a similar way when Lydia's sister Mireille was banned to Canada: "He had withdrawn from  
the family, suffered headaches and fevers, and seemed to be inflicted by an overwhelming  
lassitude" (Dangor, 45). Mikey clearly struggles with his identity, as he realises that his name  
"Mikey Ali" is an oxymoron (Dangor, 163), because he is not actually related to Silas.

held on to and blames his parents for not imbuing him with a sense of belonging, of being unmoored, is the fault of his parents (Dangor, 87).

When Lydia returns from the hospital, new secrets between Silas, Lydia and Mikey are established: "They live truly secret and secretive lives. They are as concealed from each other as they are from the world" (Dangor, 162). Although they remain at the same house, they establish different ways of dealing with the past. Silas and Lydia's ways of dealing with the past had always been very different. Whereas Silas mainly wished "to hug and make up, say nothing further about the problem, no matter how serious," Lydia needed "words of reconciliation, spoken out loud" (Dangor, 107). Clearly, because of his job Silas now wishes to speak about what happened. However, Dangor to some extent suggests that Silas's approach to the past does not really help. Whereas Silas thinks about the past "increasingly summoning up happier times" (Dangor, 164), Lydia "lives in the present, self-judging, brutally honest" (Dangor, 165). She becomes part of a research team in Soweto that tests HIV-positive mothers and has decided to see a counsellor. Moreover, she buys a car and starts doing things independently. Whereas Silas is concerned with the past and Lydia with the present, Mikey "lives only in the future, in the world of young people and young pursuits" (Dangor, 167). He starts wearing different clothes, listening to different music and reading different books. However, he moves away from the house, wanders through townships and takes taxis to Newclare, the township where Silas has grown up in order "to get away from the claustrophobic fervour of the 'new South Africa'" (Dangor, 181). One could argue that he hopes to find a sense of belonging and perhaps also some distraction.

## 2.2 Confession

The second section of Dangor's novel, entitled "Confession" is relatively short in comparison to "Memory" and appears to portray little confession. Consequently, secrets fester on until they erupt in a totally uncontrollable way. For instance, Silas and Lydia never tell their son that he is a child of rape. Not surprisingly, Mikey's life takes a different course when he discovers that Silas is not his biological father whilst reading his mother's diary. Although they are clearly not related, he starts to identify himself with Silas's ancestors. He reads the Koran and begins to retrace Silas's township sojourns. With the help of his cousins, he gets in touch with Imam Ismail Behardien. The latter tells him about the great life of his grandfather Ali Ali, who fled to South Africa after taking revenge on a British officer for raping his sister. Michael appears to be intrigued by the world he finds himself in. Consequently, he starts to identify with his grandfather and turns to the Muslim religion.

Mykey's relationship with Silas as a close relationship. Mykey does not want to identify himself with his biological father, who is a rapist. He associates Du Boise with all evil and blames him for the rape of his mother, his parents' separation and his own distress. Mikey clearly has some serious attachment issues, because of his awareness of the hate that his parents either consciously or unconsciously felt towards him. In addition, he has an obsessive and manipulative character. Furthermore, one might argue that he has disturbed sexual relationships. He usually chooses relationships that are doomed to fail. In addition, he develops a relationship with his father's colleague Kate and his teacher Professor Graham in order to get what he wants. Which is in Kate's case the file on his biological father, and in Professor Graham's case a gun and a book that is ironically called *The Outsider*.

Considering that Mikey had an abnormal sexual development, it is not surprising, however, that he feels attracted to surrogate mothers. His relationship with his mother has often been regarded as incestuous. Even Silas appears to support this as he regards them as "an oddly chaste couple, awkwardly trying to be close" (Dangor, 23). The nature of Lydia and Mikey's relationship appears to be a consequence of the fact that Lydia feels that she has to compensate for Du Boise and Silas. Undoubtedly, Du Boise is a horrible person and Silas is not Mikey's biological father. Mikey is aware of her feelings of guilt. Over all, Mikey's problematic relationships suggest that he faces some sort of identity crisis.

The only character who actually confesses in *Bitter Fruit*, is Alec, Silas's brother in law and a friend from the struggle. He confesses to Silas that he had been present during the rape of Lydia. Silas's previous instincts were correct; Alec's voice caused the panic attack in the hospital: "It was Alec's voice that had brought back some uncontainable memory, a grey-black photo of that day, the incident with Du Boise" (Dangor, 101). When Alec tells him about it, he cannot look at him, because he cannot "bear to witness the pain he knew Alec was desperately trying to hide" (Dangor, 217). During their conversation, Alec appears to suggest that memory is a nuisance that interferes with reconciliation. According to Alex: "a happy nation has no memory. That's the problem with this country, we want to forgive but we don't want to forget. You can't have it both ways" (Dangor, 79).

### 2.3 Retribution

As pointed out in the introductory chapter, some critics of the TRC argue that the Truth Commission has sacrificed justice for reconciliation. Dangor appears to agree that reconciliation comes at the expense of justice, as Mikey's pursuit of justice seems to demonstrate the need for retribution in post-apartheid South Africa. This seems especially

...ce that disrupts the country. Mikey feels that there is no  
...s to grant perpetrators such as Du Boise amnesty. As  
there is no retribution, he therefore takes the law into his own hands.

In contrast to Silas and Lydia, Mikey considers it justified to take revenge on Du Boise because he feels that the latter has to suffer for the rape of his mother, his parents' separation and his own identity crisis. In order to facilitate his quest for justice, he gets involved in a radical Islamic movement. He expects that people will help him carry out his vengeance within these surroundings, as he asks Imam Ismail Behardien, a dominant figure in the movement:

- Hypothetically speaking. If someone without the means, without the power, but with a just cause, comes to you for help, will you give it?
- In search of vengeance?
- Justice.
- Personal justice.
- Against one person, yes. But he and his actions represent an entire system of injustice. (Dangor, 196)

Seeing that Mikey seeks retributive justice, one could suggest that he criticises the TRC process. He clearly considers it impossible to reconcile with the past, because 'there are certain things people do not forget, or forgive. Rape is one of them. A crass, banal statement. Who are the 'people' who do not forget or forgive? The raped? The children of rape?' (Dangor, 205). Mikey expects to get a new life after murdering Du Boise. As he points out; 'Michael is to die, Noor will be incarnated in his place' (Dangor, 277).

However, before he kills Du Boise, he finds himself a 'dry-run' (Dangor, 242). He murders Johan Viljoen, the father of his friend Vinu Viljoen, a girl from his English class at university. Vinu is struggling with her parents' divorce and looks for support. She occasionally stays over in Mikey's room. One night she tells him that she has been sleeping with her father. Although she does not seem to consider it abuse, her father does. Similarly, Mikey identifies Vinu's relationship with her father as rape: 'It was rape, Vinu, simple, crude rape' (Dangor, 210). He thinks that Vinu 'revels in her status as a victim' (Dangor, 241). However, Mikey believes that Johan Viljoen's confession and willingness to seek counselling do not suffice and murders him.

## 2.4 Reconciliation

It seems reasonable to suggest that the role of a forgiving victim cannot be imposed upon Mikey. Similarly, Lydia seems reluctant to forgive Du Boise, because she agrees with her son

forgotten. Yet, in contrast to Mikey, she does not see the

Nothing in her life would have changed, nothing in any of their lives would change because of a public confession of pain suffered. Because nothing could be undone, you could not withdraw a rape, it was an irrevocable act, like murder. Once that violating penis, that vile cock had been inside you, it could not be withdrawn, not by an act of remorse or vengeance, not even by justice. (Dangor, 156)

Hence, Lydia appears to think that one is able to physically recover from rape: ðI will discover from the physical act of that rape. We always do, women have this capacity to heal themselvesö (Dangor, 126). She does not deny that Du Boise has physically hurt her, but she feels that the way in which he forced his rapist's seed upon her, is much more painful; ðHe had hurt her, Du Boise, yes, but more than in the mere brutalizing of her vagina, he had violated her womb with the horror of his seedö (Dangor, 119). Lydia appears to find some release when she has sex with Joao, a Mozambiquan boy who she meets at Silas's fiftieth birthday party. Lydia considers this younger man to be an instrument of release. Going away from Johannesburg and moving away from the memory of her painful past to some extent frees her of her burden. Therefore, Frenkel appears to suggest that Lydia ðeventually forgives men in general, rather than Du Boise in particular, and reinvents herself away from her old lifeö (Frenkel, 163).

Silas appears to be the only character who somewhat reconciles with the past. For instance, he forgives Lydia for sleeping with Joao. He is able to move beyond her infidelity and considers it something he will have to live with, because he is happy that ðhis wife found release at last from both her captive demons: from Du Boise and from himself. Now not every man would be a rapist to herö (Dangor, 267). However, one could argue that he does not truly forgive his wife's rapist, because the TRC process failed to teach him how to forgive someone who disintegrated his personal life. Mikey points out the irony of his father's job as he says that Silas is a man who cannot show his emotions: ðMy father the stoic, can't tell you a thing when you look him in the eyes. An yet, there he is, dealing with the country's problems, trying to reconcile the irreconcilableö (Dangor, 29).

Although Lydia and Silas appear to forgive each other to some extent, one could argue that *Bitter Fruit* questions reconciliation, because the novel suggests that truth does not enable Dangor's main characters to move beyond the violence. The Alis's private life suggests that the new South Africa faces many problems. Instead of amnesty, retribution is considered justice. According to Miller the novel therefore ðraises questions about the TRC's ability to recover and recuperate the massive personal and collective traumas of South Africa's pastö

The TRC cannot solve the country's problems, as his novel shows the characters forgive and forget. He even incorporates Nelson Mandela's besides Tutu the very personification of the truth and reconciliation into his novel and lets him bump into Michael right before the latter kills Du Boise, in order to point out that retribution cannot be prevented. Although Dangor may not applaud his choice, he seems to suggest Mikey's quest for justice, which in this case means retribution, are a likely outcome given the circumstances of his birth, as a child of rape.

## 2.5 Conclusion

Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* can to some extent be regarded as an allegory of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. As the TRC endeavoured to heal the nation and facilitate perpetrators' reintegration into society, victims and perpetrators were asked to confront one another. In order to come to terms with past violence, they were encouraged to remember and publicly disclose the details of this violence. Similarly, Silas's encounter with Du Boise represents a confrontation between a victim and a perpetrator. Lydia appears to blame Silas for mentioning Du Boise and reviving old wounds, as many opponents of the TRC did. However, one could argue that Silas and Lydia remember and try to come to terms with Lydia's abuse, because of Silas's confrontation with Du Boise. Dangor reflects upon the TRC through the lives of Silas, Lydia and their son Mikey. For instance, Silas's job as a mediator between the Commission's supporters and opponents enables the main character to deal with the country's process of truth and reconciliation on a daily basis. Furthermore, Lydia can be considered a representation of one of apartheid's many victims and Mikey appears to embody South Africa's continuing violence.

One could draw a parallel between the novel and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, because they both give an account of private and public pain. Clearly, the TRC bridged between the personal and the political, because it encouraged one to publicly speak about the pain one suffered and the pain one caused. Seeing that Silas links his private life to the TRC, one could say that *Bitter Fruit* endeavours to relate the public and the private. As Silas's involvement in the truth and reconciliation process enables him to reassess past atrocities, he attempts to convince his wife Lydia to testify before the TRC. Despite his good intentions to help her face the past in a similar way, she feels angry and betrayed because he brings back her rapist into her life. Moreover she considers it hypocritical that he wants her to publicly reveal the private pain of her rape and its consequences, whilst they have never talked about any of it. Her anger appears to correspond to the rage she felt years ago, when

and his involvement in the ANC underground. She feels that her political activities put her life and that of Mikey's at risk.

Whereas he had previously been an activist in the ANC underground, Silas currently endeavours to reconcile the ANC government and the TRC. The nature of his job at the TRC points out the relevance of the Aliso's private lives to the larger political concerns of South Africa. Moreover, as the hearings of the TRC often demonstrated that many victims were perpetrators and the other way around, *Bitter Fruit* suggests that the character of Alec represents such a 'victim-perpetrator'.

Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* appears to be critical about the TRC process. Silas, Lydia and Mikey's different ways of dealing with the past enable Dangor to take different perspectives towards the TRC. He differentiates between the characters' silence and articulation and demonstrates in what way these are of vital importance to the TRC process. For instance, Lydia does not think that a victim's testimony brings one nearer the truth and refuses to testify before the TRC. She chose to cross over into a zone of silence, because Silas and her parents did not give her much hearing when she did want to talk about her rape. Her reluctance to publicly speak about her private pain seems to correspond to women's universal silence about their abuse. However, Silas considers it necessary to confront one's memory of the past in order to establish a better future. Despite the fact that the TRC process provided him with a much more objective account of what happened during apartheid and helped him to control his emotions, Silas eventually suppresses some significant personal memories and does not seem to know how to forgive the person who destroyed his private life.

In addition, Dangor distinguishes between individual and collective guilt. He mostly seems to be concerned with individual guilt, as he shows that Silas and Mikey blame Du Boise for raping Lydia, and Lydia in turn blames Silas for his secretiveness and hypocrisy. Moreover, Lydia cannot forgive Du Boise for forcing his rapist's seed upon her and blames herself for bearing the fruit of his rape. Besides individual feelings of guilt, Dangor appears to hint at the characters' collective responsibility for what happened. Clearly, Lydia and Silas' secrecy surrounding the past has affected their son Mikey. Upon his discovery that he is a child of rape, Mikey develops several personal problems. He struggles with his identity and starts wandering through townships in order to find a sense of belonging. He eventually finds the latter amongst Silas' ancestors and turns to the Islam.

Mikey thinks that rape is something that cannot be forgotten and forgiven. More specifically, he feels that Du Boise has to pay the price for his mother's rape, his parents' separation and his own identity crisis. One could say that Mikey does not agree with the way

perpetrators, such as Du Boise. Under these  
his own hands and kills his mother's rapist. His pursuit of  
justice seems to demonstrate the need for retribution in post-apartheid South Africa.

Dangor's novel initially seems to support the TRC's ideas about the need to remember in order to heal, as Silas tries to come to terms with the rape of Lydia because of his confrontation with Du Boise. Yet, one should bear in mind that Lydia is the actual rape victim and that she fails to speak her memory and give voice to her pain. Clearly, *Bitter Fruit* portrays little confession and therefore questions the need for public confession. Dangor seems to argue that confession is necessary but pretty pointless if it is not followed by justice, which in this case means retribution. As confession does not enable Dangor's main characters to move beyond the violence, reconciliation appears to be absent. Hence, the author is to this extent negative about South Africa's future. Moreover, he suggests that the TRC cannot solve the country's problems and that violence will continue to destroy South African society.

## and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

*Disgrace* has often been considered Coetzee's masterpiece, especially in view of the author's accomplishment of having been awarded the Man Booker Prize twice – for *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) and *Disgrace* (1999) – and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2003. Seeing that the novel depicts the rape of a presumably non-white woman by a white man, and the gang rape of a white woman by three black men, one could argue that it implicitly criticises post-apartheid South Africa, in suggesting that race relations are still problematic. Moreover, whilst Coetzee endeavours to show the characters' struggle to adjust within this new South Africa, he seems to imply that rape is a complex crime that destroys South African society. Therefore, Derek Attridge points out that 'for some readers, *Disgrace* is, above all, a forceful portrayal of a disgraceful situation: the continued flourishing of racist and sexist attitudes in postapartheid South Africa' (Attridge, 317).

Coetzee's narrative tells the story of David Lurie, a 52-year-old white professor of modern languages at the University of Cape Town, who abuses his power by imposing himself upon one of his presumably non-white students, Melanie Isaacs. When the latter lodges a complaint against him, David is offered a compromise. The University encourages him to issue a public statement of repentance and seek counselling, ideally by a priest (Coetzee, 49). However, he refuses to apologise or seek therapy for something which he considers a private matter, and is consequently asked to resign. In order to get away from Cape Town's 'gossip-mill' and pursue his dream of creating an opera on the last years of Lord Byron, he retreats to his daughter Lucy's isolated farm in Salem. Notwithstanding his own misdemeanour, David is outraged when Lucy is violently raped by three black South Africans. He strongly urges her to leave her smallholding in the Eastern Cape and seek refuge from oppression and violence. Nevertheless, Lucy insists on staying and refuses to prosecute her rapists. Instead she decides to share her premises with her black neighbour Petrus and desires to become part of the black community.

As pointed out in the first chapter, South Africa's transition from a regime of racial repression to democracy, opened up a new literary genre. Whereas South African literature previously dealt with life under apartheid, post-apartheid literature has endeavoured to portray how one moves beyond a past of gross human rights violations; how one copes with the country's history of apartheid. One could say that the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission facilitated a reconstruction of past atrocities. However, its hearings stirred

because the Commission adopted a restorative approach to *Disgrace*, Coetzee's first post-apartheid novel, to some extent reflects upon South Africa's TRC. Considering that Coetzee's fiction is anchored in history and politics, one could to some extent regard *Disgrace* as a political allegory. Hence, Jane Poyner proposes a reading of *Disgrace* as "an allegory of the troubled Truth and Reconciliation Commission within the context of a nation in transition" (Poyner, 67). In addition, she believes that "Lurie's sense of guilt for his exploitative attitude towards women symbolically configures a sense of collective responsibility of oppressors generally and of the white writer in particular for a history of abuse" (Poyner, 67). Poyner evidently suggests that Coetzee's narrative expresses a collective sense of guilt for the white man's participation in apartheid. Additionally, she appears to consider the violent attack that Lucy and David suffer on Lucy's isolated farm in Salem as "a symbolic reparation for South Africa's past" (Poyner, 71). Similarly, Ato Quayson to some extent relates *Disgrace* to South Africa's process of truth and reconciliation. According to Quayson, the latter "resides in the background to the unfolding crises of the lives of the characters. However, we are left in no doubt that the life-crises of these characters are ultimately to be connected to the presence or absence of truth and reconciliation" (Quayson, 767). Moreover, Sue Kossew argues that *Disgrace* "resonates with the national public spectacle of shame, confession, and forgiveness that was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission" (Kossew, 155).

Nevertheless, Thomas Bonnici fails to see the parallel between *Disgrace* and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He states that "nothing in the novel reminds the reader of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission" (Bonnici, 91) and argues instead that "Coetzee is perhaps trying to go beyond the constitutional successes (reassignment of property, hegemony, power over women) and clearing a way for prospects for white integration in post-apartheid South Africa" (Bonnici, 91). In so doing, Bonnici draws attention to the country's future and seems to suggest that Coetzee's narrative mainly refers to the reintegration of white perpetrators into South African society. However, as he identifies a current tendency of expressing collective guilt he eventually states that "a reading of *Disgrace* may subliminally show paradigms of reconciliation" (Bonnici, 91).

This chapter therefore examines to what extent *Disgrace* can be related to South Africa's truth and reconciliation process. It will argue that David's trial resonates with the public hearings of the TRC. For instance, the religious flavour of the University's Committee of Inquiry and South Africa's Truth Commission will be assessed. Furthermore, in order to establish whether *Disgrace* addresses similar issues, it will endeavour to draw parallels

erning confession, remorse, truth, responsibility,  
conciliation.

### 3.1 The Trial

On account of Melanie's complaint, David receives a memorandum from the office of the Vice-Rector and is asked to appear before the University's Committee of Inquiry. Although this academic committee has no power and merely examines Melanie's complaint in order to make a recommendation, one could argue that it bears some resemblance to the South African Truth Commission. Rosemarie Buikema claims that it is even "difficult not to read this long opening scene as a commentary on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and on the debate that was being conducted about this process in South African society, and that is still ongoing" (Buikema, 190). Firstly, its commissioners were of different religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Whereas the fictional Committee includes men and women of different faculties and ethnicities, such as its chairman Manas Mathabane and his secretary Aram Hakim, Farodia Rassool from Social Sciences, Desmond Swarts, Dean of Engineering, and an unnamed female student who represents the Coalition against Discrimination, the Truth Commission featured a comparable variety of commissioners.

#### 3.1.1 Religion

Moreover, both the University's Committee and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission appear to have a religious character. Whereas David's inquiry is chaired by Manas Mathabane, Professor of Religious Studies, the hearings of the TRC were led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The TRC appeared to rely on Christianity, because Tutu's Christian values strongly influenced its hearings. For instance, he "opened, closed, and punctuated sessions with prayer, hymns, candles, and olive branches" (Meiring, 105). In addition, the TRC embraced a philosophy of ubuntu which appeared to fuse with Christianity. Whilst Tutu presided over the TRC, he reformulated this ancient African concept by declaring "that humans are all part of one community, and that by creating a space within which the perpetrators of abuses might rejoin the community, they can be helped to regain something of their lost humanity, thus enriching everyone" (Laakso, 50). Hence, perpetrators who fully confessed to their crimes were often forgiven in the spirit of ubuntu, because many South Africans believed that their community would have no future without forgiveness. Similarly, Mathabane wishes that David publicly acknowledges his sins, because he hopes that a public statement will eventually enable David to return to the University. Despite being a member of a secular tribunal, Mathabane's religion teaches him to forgive. However, he does not really seem to care whether David is sincere because he does not consider it his job to forgive him;

own conscienceö (Coetzee, 58). As David Attwell points out, Lurie is a representative of the Enlightenment, and his generally forgiving stance echoes the presence of the clergy associated with the Truth and Reconciliation Commissionö (Attwell, 335).

### 3.1.2 Confession

One could say that the purpose of the inquiry into Lurie's behaviour is to establish whether further measures should be taken. Clearly, David needs to appear in front of the University's Committee because he is charged with sexual harassment. Besides, the committee has reason to believe that he has kept false records of Melanie's attendance and examinations. As demonstrated in Coetzee's *Disgrace*, the committee's main purpose is to assess whether he should therefore be disciplined; "A committee will be set up. Its function will be to determine whether there are grounds for disciplinary measures" (Coetzee, 41). Correspondingly, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission endeavoured to agree on whether perpetrators of violence should be prosecuted. Despite fierce controversy, many perpetrators were granted amnesty in exchange for a full public disclosure of their wrongdoings. Clearly, clarifying the truth was considered a crucial component of the TRC process. Hence, instead of pleading guilty or innocent, perpetrators were encouraged to openly reveal the details of their crimes. In so doing, they could avoid retribution. During David's disciplinary hearing, Farodia Rassool therefore emphasises the need to publicly disclose the truth: "The wider community is entitled to know" she continues, raising her voice with practised ease, riding over him, "what it is specifically that Professor Lurie acknowledges and therefore what it is that he is being censured for" (Coetzee, 50). Although David pronounces that he is guilty of all that he is charged with, she does not accept his empty confession because she obviously wants him to specify what it is that he is accountable for. Yet, David refuses to go into detail as he considers it a private matter. One could argue that he does not really care about the truth. When Mathabane asks him whether he accepts the truth of the complaint that is filed against him, he answers: "I accept whatever Ms. Isaacs alleges" (Coetzee, 50). As long as he does not have to go into detail about his sexual misconduct, he appears to be willing to accept every charge. Accordingly, Rebecca Saunders wonders whether Lurie's acceptance of the charges merely indicates "a willingness to pay the price, as in "accepting the charges" for a collect phone call" or whether it does "require a performance of deliberative reason and sincerity" (Saunders, 100).

Here, Kossew clearly sees another parallel between the text and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: "that of making a public apology for the past crimes of apartheid

public admission of guilt (Kossew, 159). Although David appears to suggest that he will be allowed to get off scot-free, if he publicly confesses his sins. Farodia Rassool and David seem to have different ideas about confession. He regards himself as a servant of Eros and appears to blame his uncontrollable lust for the young woman: "It is not a defence. You want a confession, I give you a confession. As for the impulse, it was far from ungovernable. I have denied similar impulses many times in the past, I am ashamed to say" (Coetzee, 52). By contrast, she does not acknowledge his impulse as a justification of his immoral behaviour. Hence, she strongly doubts his sincerity. Nevertheless, David compares his desire to that of a dog; he suggests that disallowing a dog to follow its instincts, is more cruel than shooting it. Under these circumstances a dog would rather be shot: "It might have preferred that to the options it was offered: on the one hand, to deny its nature, on the other, to spend the rest of its days padding about the living-room, sighing and sniffing the cat and getting portly" (Coetzee, 90). Likewise, he considers it impossible to reject his masculinity or to deny himself what he regards as a normal life.

Moreover, David and Farodia appear to have different ideas about the implications of David's affair with Melanie. She thinks that David raped his student. Consequently, she alludes to South Africa's history of apartheid and associates his abuse with the white exploitation of the black and coloured:

"We are again going round in circles, Mr Chair. Yes, he says, he is guilty; but when we try to get specificity, all of a sudden it is not abuse of a young woman he is confessing to, just an impulse he could not resist, with no mention of the pain he has caused, no mention of the long history of exploitation of which this is part." (Coetzee, 53)

In so doing, she suggests that David was racially motivated. Bearing in mind that she strongly wishes him to acknowledge his guilt, one might again argue that this episode echoes "the frustrations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, faced with the admissions of those who confessed but who failed to acknowledge their guilt, those who seemed to remain in their hearts unrepentant" (Cornwell, 316). David undoubtedly disagrees with Farodia and mocks her by saying that she supposedly perceives him as "a shark among the helpless little fishes" or "a great thick-boned male bearing down on a girl-child, a huge hand stifling her cries" (Coetzee, 53). Nonetheless, he seems to change his mind about the repercussions of apartheid when his daughter is raped. Lucy seems mostly taken aback by the hate of her rapists: "It was so personal," she says. "It was done with such personal hatred. That was what stunned me more than anything. The rest was expected. But why did they hate me so? I had never set

er to comfort her, David refers to the country's history going through them, he offers at last. "A history of wrong. Think of it that way, if it helps. It may have seemed personal, but it wasn't. It came down from the ancestors" (Coetzee, 156). Whereas David previously failed to see how his abusive sexual relationship with Melanie related to the country's past hierarchy, he unmistakably holds history accountable for the rape of his daughter. Hence, considering that he believes that the black's rape of Lucy was triggered by a history of wrong, accordingly, it seems fair to consider his abuse of Melanie to be part of a history of apartheid. Moreover, Lucy Graham appears to suggest that the names of both rape victims refer to this past:

In *Disgrace*, David Lurie translates Melanie's name as "the dark one" while Lucy's name has associations with light. Playing on tropes of darkness and light, the names of the two women expose 'black peril' stereotypes and the residual threat of the "white peril" that prevailed under colonialism and apartheid. Lurie has a history of desiring "exotic" women, and assumes that he has the right to purchase or possess their bodies without being responsible for them or respecting the lives they live. (Graham, 437)

In addition, she seems to imply that David's desire for "exotic women," such as Melanie and the prostitute he visits at the beginning of the novel, has been triggered by feelings of white superiority under colonialism and apartheid.

### 3.1.3 Remorse

Clearly, Farodia Rassool repeatedly attempts to convince David to openly confess his sins. One could argue that she thinks it is necessary that David shows genuine remorse for his abuse of power. However, David argues that sincerity is "beyond the scope of law" and does not change his plea. More specifically, he suggests that contrition belongs to a religious discourse: "Repentance is neither here nor there. Repentance belongs to another world, to another universe of discourse" (Coetzee, 58). Claims have been made that the Committee is a miniature of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission because religious rhetoric is mixed with legal rhetoric: "the confusion between the legal requirement of perpetrators to make a full disclosure and the unlegislated moral pressure to express remorse, make repentance, and even ask forgiveness of victims" (Sanders, 370). Hence, the TRC is once more considered to be a backdrop to the novel, when one agrees that Lurie's admission of guilt and lack of remorse "initiates the novel's reframing of, and reflection on, the ethical and juridical quandaries confronted by the TRC" (Saunders, 99). In response to Farodia, Mathabane says that David is not being asked to be remorseful. However, he seems to regret that David is not willing to take steps to remedy his fault, such as counselling or community service. In addition, Lucy does not seem to understand why David refuses to undergo

that it reminds him too much of Mao's China. In an old-fashioned , I would simply prefer to be put against a wall and shot. Have done with it. (Coetzee, 66).

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the Truth Commission did not aim to initiate repentance and occasionally granted amnesty without a public expression of remorse. However, the latter might have been something victims hoped to achieve. Hence, it appears to be no coincidence that *Disgrace* to some extent leaves the reader with contrasting ideas about remorse. Moreover, the novel seems to suggest that an apology does not always suffice. For instance, David refuses to apologise to the entire community because he considers his relationship with Melanie to be part of his private life: "These are puritanical times. Private life is public business. Prudence is respectable, prudence and sentiment. They wanted a spectacle: breast-beating, remorse, tears if possible. A TV show, in fact. I wouldn't oblige" (Coetzee, 66).

As the hearings of the TRC were often broadcast throughout the world, *Disgrace* might also allude to the Commission's public character. One could claim that David discards a compromise offered by the University because he does not see the point of such an apology. In addition, he does not understand the Committee's eagerness to hear a confession: "Confessions, apologies: why this thirst for abasement? A hush falls. They circle around him like hunters who have cornered a strange beast and do not know how to finish it off" (Coetzee, 56). David seems to suggest that his colleagues blindly hold on to confession and do not know how to act upon his decision not to issue an apology in a public manner. According to Elizabeth Anker, "the narrative, here, alludes to allegations that the TRC was premised on a communal pillorying, its rhetoric of healing creating the expectation that the identification of apartheid's worst perpetrators would perform a public purgation or catharsis" (Anker, 237). One could say that such a public cleansing is absent in *Disgrace* because David is not willing to accept responsibility as a perpetrator. Moreover, considering that Coetzee remains rather ambiguous about the nature of David's relationship with Melanie, it appears to be something more complex than rape. For instance, Coetzee does not directly refer to this relationship as rape but describes it as "an impulse" or "an affair". In addition, although he hints at Melanie's presumably non-white features, one cannot be certain that she is black or coloured. Despite the absence of catharsis, Sue Kossew points out that "the text itself can be seen as a kind of confession" (Kossew, 159). Whereas David clearly disapproves of confessing, he eventually confesses to various things throughout the novel. For instance, he acknowledges that he has

failed to protect his daughter. Moreover, he confesses to what happened between him and his daughter.

### 3.2 The Attack

Whilst at Lucy's farm, David and Lucy are attacked by two black men and a boy. David suffers some severe blows on the head and is locked in the lavatory of Lucy's house. Subsequently, the men douse him with methylated spirits and throw a match at him. He eventually gets away with minor burns but Lucy seems to be worse off, as she is gang raped. Although she initially does not speak to David about her experience, he soon realises what has happened. One could say that Lucy's attackers branded David and marked Lucy. As Lucy points out; "I think I am in their territory. They have marked me. They will come back for me" (Coetzee, 158). Notwithstanding this dangerous possibility, she does not want to talk to the police and asks David to keep to his own story; to tell only what happened to him.

#### 3.2.1 Truth

One could say that none of Coetzee's main characters discloses the truth about the past; neither David, Lucy, nor Melanie reveals the details of their abuse. Although one should bear in mind that David is the perpetrator, whilst Lucy and Melanie are victims, both victims' and perpetrators' silence was a common problem during the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Clearly, in order to reconcile the nation and restore justice in post-apartheid South Africa, the TRC staged public hearings. Victims and perpetrators were called before the Commission so that they could give their account of history. As touched upon in the first chapter, through these testimonies the Truth Commission strove to create a shared memory of the past and eventually endeavoured to restore the relationship between black, white and coloured South Africans. However, the TRC has often been criticised for reviving old wounds. Besides, it has often been suggested that its public hearings caused numerous new wounds by delving into one's painful memories of past atrocities. In spite of thousands of testimonies on human rights violations, it seems to be indisputable that many voices remained unheard. Although they often considered their family's misery worth speaking of, especially women were believed to remain silent about their own sexual abuse (Krog, 208). However, by arranging special hearings for abused women, the TRC also encouraged these victims to testify. One could claim that the Commission underestimated the impact of the hearings' public character, as many victims nonetheless preferred not to disclose the truth. In addition, many perpetrators chose not to step forward and accept responsibility for their sins. Besides those who did not apply for amnesty at all, many who did and received the latter, failed to fully confess their misdeeds because they either adjusted their memory and

to remember. Considering that David, Lucy and Melanie appears to draw attention to both forms of silence.

Firstly, one could say that David chooses not to reveal the details of his relationship with Melanie, because he does not really consider it rape and therefore none of other people's business. He argues that it was not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core (Coetzee, 24). Lucy is convinced that David deliberately represented himself in an undesirable way in front of the Committee because he did not want to reveal the details of his crime:

—That may be so, David, but surely you know by now that trials are not about principles, they are about how well you put yourself across. According to my source, you came across badly. What was the principle you were standing up for?  
—Freedom of speech. Freedom to remain silent. (Coetzee, 188)

Hence, as for his relationship with Melanie, David clearly considers both silence and articulation amongst his rights. One could even argue that he despises prurience and does not want others to delve into his sexual behaviour. Consequently, it is especially ironic that David later on fails to grasp why Lucy cannot reveal the truth about being raped. He seems to have changed his mind about rape; he no longer regards it as a private matter now that it concerns his daughter. Hence, he strongly advises her to talk to the police. Moreover, he appears to think of other women who are telling their stories throughout the country as he asks her: —I am sure you have your reasons, but in a wider context are you sure this is the best course? (Coetzee, 110). In addition, he thinks that she merely keeps quiet because she is ashamed of the act. As David expects her rapists to be aware of the possibility that she will not press charges against them, he encourages her to move beyond this shame. He clearly fears that they will take advantage of her integrity: —It will dawn on them that over the body of the woman silence is being drawn like a blanket. Too ashamed, they will say to each other, too ashamed to tell, and they will chuckle luxuriously, recollecting their exploit (Coetzee, 110).

Lucy does not want to think or talk about her rape because it embitters her. Consequently, she attempts to make her father and herself believe that she has told the whole story. However, she clearly decides what exactly constitutes this story as she says; —I have told the whole story. The whole story is what I have told (Coetzee, 110). Additionally, she repetitively reassures David that she does not need to share the details of her rape with anyone, as it only concerns her: —Don't shout at me, David. This is my life. I am the one who has to live here. What happened to me is my business, mine alone, not yours, and if there is one right I have it is the right not to be put on trial like this, not to have to justify myself or not

133). She clearly feels that it is none of her father's  
live at her isolated farm if he does not want to.

Furthermore, Lucy appears to suggest that post-apartheid South Africa is a country  
where a white woman's rape is to some extent justifiable because of the country's history of  
apartheid:

-The reason is that, as far as I am concerned, what happened to me is a purely private  
matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in  
this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone.

-This place being what?

-This place being South Africa. (Coetzee, 112)

David seems to disagree with her and argues that this is not how vengeance works:

-Vengeance is like a fire. The more it devours, the hungrier it gets (Coetzee, 112). Here,  
the novel cleverly portrays rape's complexity; despite South Africa's current state of affairs it  
is hard to decide whether rape should be considered a private or a public matter. Father and  
daughter contrast one another as they blame each other for the same thing: Lucy does not tell  
the truth about the violence she suffered but she appears to consider David's fault to be a  
public matter. In contrast, David considers his relationship with Melanie a private matter,  
whereas he thinks that Lucy should speak up in order to come to terms with her rape.

### 3.2.2 Responsibility

An important feature of the TRC process was a perpetrator's willingness to acknowledge his  
or her responsibility for past misdeeds. Considering that David appears to hold himself  
responsible for Lucy's rape, one could say that *Disgrace* to some extent discusses  
responsibility. David has never really felt accountable for anything but the attack seems to  
have changed things; -Despite Bev's counsel, despite Petrus's assurances, despite Lucy's  
obstinacy, he is not prepared to abandon his daughter. This is where he lives, for the present:  
in this time, in this place (Coetzee, 141). In a way, he appears to appreciate this  
responsibility. Yet, one could also suggest that he fails to distinguish between responsibility  
and guilt. He feels guilty about Lucy's rape; despite the fact that he does not truly  
acknowledge that he has committed a similar crime. Moreover, he cannot come to terms with  
his daughter's rape, because he had been there during her attack but could not save her from  
her rapists. Although he endeavours to understand what she has been through, he seems to be  
more concerned whether she blames him for not stopping them:

-You were in fear of your life. You were afraid that after you had been used you would  
be killed. Disposed of. Because you were nothing to them.

-And? Her voice is now a whisper.

-And I did nothing. I did not save you.

However, Lucy says that he should not blame himself. More specifically, she does not expect him to feel responsible because she does not truly hold anyone accountable. Nevertheless, David considers it possible that she blames herself. Consequently, he tries to warn her against future violence: "Slavery. They want you for their slave" (Coetzee, 159). Lucy disagrees and instead claims that it is not slavery, but subjection and subjugation (Coetzee, 159).

### 3.3 The Sacrifice

The attack of David and Lucy further estranges father and daughter from one another. As David fears that Lucy's rapists will come back for her, he considers it impossible that she stays at her isolated smallholding. Furthermore, he is clearly worried about Lucy's risks of pregnancy, venereal infection and HIV (Coetzee, 106). Nevertheless, Lucy mainly wishes to go on as before (Coetzee, 105). Moreover, whereas she merely seems to accept Petrus's absence at the time of the attack, David seems suspicious. Rosemary Nagy appears to underline his suspicions by drawing a parallel between Petrus's supposed absence or deliberate distance from the farm and the distance of the NP under and after apartheid: "The distancing of the National Party (NP) government from systemic gross violations meant that individual perpetrators were hung out to dry while the role of complicit bystanders was left unscathed" (Nagy, 717). Although the perpetrators are not actually punished in the case of *Disgrace*, it is certainly true that Petrus does not suffer any consequences despite his complicity.

One could suggest that David wishes to reinstate justice, when injustice has been done to his daughter. For instance, although David previously refused to apologise for his immoral behaviour towards Melanie and the University and surely left some people involved with a sense of injustice, he now feels it incumbent on him to strive for justice. "Am I wrong? Am I wrong to want justice?" (Coetzee, 119). Here, *Disgrace* appears to resonate with the Truth Commission's desire to restore justice. Although the country's transition from apartheid was characterised "by remarkably little bloodshed, retribution, and vengeance" (Gibson, 410), Tutu's message of forgiveness and reconciliation was nonetheless highly controversial. Opponents of the TRC were determined that the government should seek retribution against perpetrators of human rights violations. They seemed to prefer justice to reconciliation.

#### 3.3.1 Retribution

Not surprisingly, *Disgrace* also appears to discuss notions of retribution and revenge. For instance, the rape of Lucy could be interpreted as an act of retribution. She compares her rapists to tax collectors, who have come to make her pay her debt:

[Click Here to upgrade to  
Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how  
how I should look at it too. They see me as owing  
as debt collectors, tax collectors. Why should I be  
allowed to live here without paying? Perhaps that is what they tell themselves.  
(Coetzee, 158)

Whilst Lucy's rapists ransack her house and steal her father's car, they supposedly seek some sort of financial compensation. However, by gang raping her and shooting three of her dogs, they primarily deprive her of her dignity. Although Lucy's response to the attack might suggest otherwise, the emotional impact of her rape appears to be immense. Lucy believes that David will never understand what she has been through. She supposedly values his concern but she does not think that he will ever grasp the consequences of her rape: 'You don't understand what happened to me that day. You are concerned for my sake, which I appreciate, you think you understand, but finally you don't. Because you can't' (Coetzee, 157). Yet, David does not believe that he is incapable of understanding rape and appears to be annoyed because of her assumptions: 'do they think that, when rape is concerned, no man can be where the woman is? Whatever the answer, he is outraged, outraged at being treated like an outsider' (Coetzee, 141). Whilst he continues to emphasise his sympathy, Lucy seems to identify him with a rapist by asking him whether sex is more exciting when it is driven by feelings of hate:

'Maybe, for men, hating the woman makes sex more exciting. You are a man, you ought to know. When you have sex with someone strange ó when you trap her, hold her down, get her under you, put all your weight on her ó isn't it a bit like killing? Pushing the knife in; exiting afterward, leaving the body behind covered in blood ó doesn't it feel like murder, like getting away with murder?' (Coetzee, 158)

The metaphor of the knife clearly points out her emotional distress. Moreover, as she compares the act to murder, she appears to suggest that the act of rape leaves an ineradicable wound. Rosemarie Buikema implies that the rape of Lucy symbolises the retribution that takes place in post-apartheid South Africa: 'Desire, revenge and retribution have supplanted the old African Ubuntu values' (Buikema, 193).

### 3.3.2. Justice

Regarding her pain, it is all the more interesting that Lucy decides not to prosecute her rapists and does not seem determined to restore justice. One could therefore argue that she considers her rape atonement for crimes that have been carried out in the past. David does not support this idea and urges her to stand up for herself: 'Lucy, Lucy, I plead with you! You want to make up for the wrongs of the past, but this is not the way to do it. If you fail to stand up for yourself at this moment, you will never be able to hold your head up again' (Coetzee, 133).

her abuse as atonement. However, he appears to be reflect on the whites' position in post-apartheid South Africa, as he wonders: 'if Lucy's mode of engagement with history is Coetzee's valid paradigm for whites' negotiation for a precarious foothold in post-apartheid South Africa, then his conception of their fall from grace evokes near absolute depravity' (Diala, 60). Hence, Diala considers it somewhat far-fetched that Lucy's willingness to put up with whatever is necessary to make up for the atrocities that were carried out by white South Africans under apartheid, represents the general attitude of whites.

Although David thinks it is unfair that Lucy treats him like an outsider whilst he had actually been present during the attack, the violence that has been carried out against his daughter helps him to reassess the concept of rape. According to David, Lucy's rapists were not merely expressing their lust but they were 'mating':

It was not the pleasure principle that ran the show but the testicles, sacs bulging with seed aching to perfect itself. And now, lo and behold, the child! Already he is calling it the child when it is no more than a worm in his daughter's womb. What kind of child can seed like that give life to, seed driven into the woman not in love but in hatred, mixed chaotically, meant to soil her, to mark her, like a dog's urine? (Coetzee, 199)

He states that her rapists attempted to mark her like 'a dog's urine' because they seem to think of her as their territory. As Horrell therefore points out; 'it is on and through her flesh, it would seem, that the conditions of the new South Africa are written. Not only has she borne the burden of shame through rape, but she will bear a child whose flesh will bear witness to her moment of inscription' (Horrell, 32). Considering that 'mating' usually refers to animals that are producing young, David here points out the bestiality of the gang rape. Coetzee draws various comparisons with dogs. In so doing, he appears to suggest that justice is absent in *Disgrace* and so are the possibilities of forgiveness and reconciliation. Hence, Lucy seems to believe it is necessary to start at ground level in order to restore the balance within South Africa:

'Yes, I agree, it is humiliating. But perhaps that is a good point to start from again. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity.'  
'Like a dog.'  
'Yes, like a dog' (Coetzee, 205).

*Disgrace* seems to lead the reader astray by remaining rather vague about Petrus's intentions. Although he initially appears to be the rock on which Lucy depends as he does chores around the farm, Petrus rapidly makes a transition from assistant to co-proprietor. In

Lucy's land, but he offers to accept her as his wife and seem that Petrus considers it necessary to marry Lucy, because he worries that she cannot live by herself. Moreover, as he clarifies that he only stands up for his family by claiming that Pollux, who is one of Lucy's rapists, is too young and therefore not guilty, he demonstrates the necessity to become part of his family. However, he is not benevolent at all, as he actually uses the implicit threat of rape to force Lucy to marry him and thereby sign over her remaining land to him. Hence, the very aim of his plan was to possess the land and its previous owner.

One could suggest that Petrus acts out of revenge and demands that Lucy pays a certain price. This appears to be especially plausible because his wife is related to Pollux. However, some black or coloured South Africans might not approve of such a negative portrayal of Petrus, and are more likely to claim that Petrus is willing to protect Lucy out of ideological motives. He considers Lucy to be a modern woman and seems to appreciate her forward-thinking: 'The new pipe will have to cross Lucy's land, he says; it is good that she has given her permission. She is 'forward-looking' 'She is a forward-looking lady, not backward looking' (Coetzee, 136). Yet, there is more evidence to be found in favour of the idea that Petrus was opportunistically motivated. For instance, one should bear in mind that Lucy considers her black attackers 'debt-collectors'. Moreover, as noted in the introductory chapter, the new South Africa required equal opportunities and living conditions for blacks. Nonetheless, the economic status of many blacks in townships and rural areas did not really improve. This might have been another reason for Petrus's to take away Lucy's rights to her land. It remains debatable whether justice is achieved and by whom. Rosemarie Buikema and Rebecca Saunders appear to have different opinions with regard to justice. Buikema suggests that Lucy's acceptance of Petrus's offer emphasises that the usual rules do not apply and 'justice can only be expected from a system that refuses the economy of legal procedure and conflict resolution' (Buikema, 194). In addition, Saunders points out that

Petrus proposes to Lurie a series of indemnifications that, while extrajudiciary, largely conform to the exchange structure of justice: that the insurance will give Lurie a new car, that his (Petrus's) promise of future protection will compensate for Lucy's lost sense of security, and that his offer of marriage will function as reparation for her rape. (Saunders, 100)

Hence, she suggests that, for Petrus, a variant of such legalistic rules does apply and brings some justice. Clearly, as it all appears to be a matter of ownership, one could argue that Petrus merely masterminded the assault of Lucy in order to improve his own situation. The latter

his ideas about vengeance, and therefore about a degree  
of justice.

### 3.4 Reconciliation

David and Lucy to some extent agree that David's visit has gone on too long (Coetzee, 141). He wants to go back to Cape Town but does not consider it safe to leave his daughter behind. When they finally speak about the abuse that Lucy suffered, she manages to convince him that he cannot be a father forever and that he is not the guide she needs at this time (Coetzee, 161). Consequently, he packs his belongings and prepares himself to move back home. He still does not really seem to worry about his immoral behaviour towards Melanie, but wonders whether he will ever be forgiven for abandoning the dogs when he leaves Salem; "As for the dogs, he does not want to think about them. From Monday onward the dogs released from life within the walls of the clinic will be tossed into the fire unmarked, unmourned. For that betrayal, will he ever be forgiven?" (Coetzee, 178). Nonetheless, on his way back to Cape Town, he decides to pay a visit to Melanie's family. David initially tells Melanie's father that he mainly stepped by in order to ask how Melanie is doing. However, one could argue that he wishes to apologise and hopes to find redemption.

#### 3.4.1 Redemption

According to Kimberley Segall, *Disgrace* "is a mirror to the fate of a country locked into required rituals of self-examination, but unable to find true repentance or comfort in the process" (Segall, 49). Not surprisingly, David seems unable to find redemption when he visits the Isaacs family. Although he previously refused to apologise to anyone, he now lowers himself as a dog before Melanie's relatives. However, Melanie's father does not consider regret to be a solution. He does not want David to apologise but he wishes that he acts upon his misdeeds: "But I say to myself, we are all sorry when we are found out. Then we are very sorry. The question is not, are we sorry? The question is, what lesson have we learned. The question is, what are we going to do now that we are sorry?" (Coetzee, 172). One could argue that Melanie's father wishes to convert David to Christianity. He seems to expect religious expiation because "the expression of contrition is given validity only by the consequent actions issuing from it" (Diala, 57). Here, *Disgrace* once again seems to allude to the religious character of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Whereas non-Christians might consider certain crimes inexcusable and therefore feel that some misdeeds remain beyond the pale of forgiveness and reconciliation, Christians seem to be willing to forgive perpetrators. Despite Mr Isaacs's willingness to hear out David, the novel appears to suggest that converting one to Christianity is impossible, as David is not truly repentant. Hence, whilst he kisses the

siree and apologises for his sins, he most ironically  
sire(e).

Lucy identifies David as a scapegoat that wanders in the wilderness (Coetzee, 91). She might therefore feel that he bears the blame for other people's abuses of power. However, she could also consider him a sinful character who has been driven out of Cape Town into the wilderness of the Eastern Cape and no longer knows what his purpose in life is. Clearly, his abusive sexual relationship with Melanie has caused such a displacement, that he could not stay on as a Professor at the University of Cape Town. However, David does not regard himself as a scapegoat because he regards post-apartheid South Africa as a post-religious country, and his ideals of expiation exclude religious symbolism (Diala, 59):

–Scapegoating worked in practice while it still had religious power behind it. You loaded the sins of the city on to the goat's back and drove it out, and the city was cleansed. It worked because everyone knew how to read the ritual, including the gods. Then the gods died, and all of a sudden you had to cleanse the city without divine help. Real actions were demanded instead of symbolism. The censor was born, in the Roman sense. Watchfulness became the watchword: the watchfulness of all over all. Purgation was replaced by the purge. (Coetzee, 91)

Nonetheless, Elleke Boehmer considers this to be a crucial statement as it conveys how one achieves moral cleansing in both an individual and a collective capacity in a secular age (Boehmer, 136). Similarly, the TRC aimed to bring about such cleansing in post-apartheid South Africa by means of individual catharsis through confession, and national reconciliation through the hearings of the Truth Commission.

#### 3.4.2 *The New South Africa*

The TRC process hoped to create a setting where forgiveness and reconciliation could take place. However, bearing in mind that reconciliation has often been critically discussed, claims have been made that *Disgrace* fails to depict national reconciliation. For instance, Buikema claims that *Disgrace* demonstrates in an unforgettable way that in a situation as complex as South Africa's post-apartheid era, one cannot get away with empty mantras (Buikema, 195), such as reconciliation. Although Lucy seems to forgive her attackers because she has to think about her future, David does not truly understand how Lucy is able to forgive. As time heals his wounds, David similarly heals. However, he wonders whether his daughter will ever recover from the violence that was inflicted upon her. Presumably Lucy is healing too, or if not healing then forgetting, growing scar tissue around the memory of that day, sheathing it, sealing it off. So that one day she may be able to say, –The day we were robbed, and think of it merely as the day when they were robbed (Coetzee, 141).

*Disgrace* succeeds in pointing out the complexity of reconciliation, Rosemary Nagy claims that several questions spring to mind, such as: “Does reconciliation depend upon moral atonement, or is formal recognition of past wrongdoing sufficient?” and “How much should a nation look backward in order to move forward?” (Nagy, 709). Considering that Coetzee’s main character does not truly atone for his actions and does not formally recognise his relationship with Melanie as wrong, Coetzee appears to hold a negative attitude towards the future of South Africa. As Boehmer points out: “Coetzee has openly cast doubt on the possibility of achieving closure on a painful past, of ever adequately saying sorry. Instead, he proposes the far more painful process of enduring rather than transcending the degraded present” (Boehmer, 343). Similarly, Hannan Hever underlines Coetzee’s skepticism by claiming that:

Coetzee, who casts a sober and even somewhat cruel gaze over the aftermath of the enormous victory of the anti-apartheid struggle, demands sustained skepticism regarding some of the illusions attaching to “Truth and Reconciliation” in South Africa, particularly regarding the quasi-official notion that treaties and agreements are sufficient to purge the traces of oppression from the deepest tissues of the South African social body. (Hever, 42)

Moreover, Diala argues that “Coetzee hardly seems to be under any delusions of the immediate possibility of reconciliation so soon after apartheid” (Diala, 68), and Nagy suggests that the process established some truths but has merely started reconciliation: “But these minimal “truths” have, at best, initiated rather than fulfilled the goals of national reconciliation” (Nagy, 719).

### 3.5 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter aimed to demonstrate to what extent Coetzee’s narrative bears resemblance to South Africa’s truth and reconciliation process. Although Thomas Bonnici fails to draw a parallel between *Disgrace* and the TRC, scholars such as Jane Poyner, Ato Quayson, and Sue Kossew to some extent consider the novel as an allegory of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Firstly, David’s trial appears to resonate with the public hearings that were conducted during the truth and reconciliation process. For instance, the University’s Committee of Inquiry appears to symbolise the TRC because of a similar setup and religious character. Moreover, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission endeavoured to agree on whether perpetrators of violence should be prosecuted, the University’s Committee tries to establish whether David Lurie should be punished for his abuse of a presumably non-white student.

the need to publicly disclose the truth is repeatedly suggested to suggest that David will be allowed to get off scot-free, if he makes a public confession of his misdemeanour. This again suggests that the episode can be read as an allegory of the TRC. Claims have been made that the Committee is a miniature of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission because religious rhetoric is mixed with legal rhetoric. The TRC did not aim to initiate repentance and occasionally granted amnesty without a public expression of remorse. However, as many victims expected repentance, *Disgrace* leaves the reader with contrasting ideas about remorse.

The Truth and Reconciliation process has often been considered incomplete, because many victims did not expose the truth. In addition, many perpetrators chose not to testify. Coetzee's *Disgrace* appears to draw attention to both forms of silence and concurrently draws attention to rape's complexity. Moreover, as the TRC encouraged perpetrators to acknowledge their responsibility for past atrocities, *Disgrace* to some extent discusses David's responsibility for what has happened.

Furthermore, as David wishes to reinstate justice, *Disgrace* appears to resonate with the Truth Commission's desire to restore justice. However, opponents of the TRC were determined that the government should seek retribution against perpetrators of human rights violations instead of restorative justice. They wanted retribution instead of amnesty. Therefore, the novel appears to discuss notions of retribution and revenge. For instance, the assault on Lucy could be interpreted as an act of retribution. Considering that David cannot forgive the attackers, Coetzee to some extent suggests that justice, forgiveness and reconciliation are absent in *Disgrace*. However, one could argue that Petrus reaches a kind of economic justice.

Even when he visits the Isaacs family, David appears to be unable to find redemption. Whilst he apologises to Melanie's family, he secretly desires her younger sister Desiree. Although Melanie's father suggests that conversion to Christianity might help David to cleanse himself of his sins, David seems to consider this impossible because he sees the new South Africa in a post-religious era. Here, *Disgrace* once again alludes to the religious character of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Although the TRC process hoped to encourage forgiveness and reconciliation, claims have been made that *Disgrace* fails to depict national reconciliation. Considering that Coetzee's main character does not truly atone for his actions and does not formally recognise his relationship with Melanie as wrong, the author appears to hold a negative attitude towards the future of South Africa.

## **Gun and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

Although Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun* (1998) has rarely been linked to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, I would like to argue that Gordimer's narrative is an allegory of the country's truth and reconciliation process. In doing so, this chapter does not necessarily contradict conceptions that merely link *The House Gun* to South Africa's transitional context but it endeavours to establish a relationship between the novel, the country's major turnabouts and the TRC. *The House Gun* is set in post-apartheid Johannesburg and deals with the trial of Duncan Lindgard, a 27-year-old white architect who has been accused of murdering his friend and former lover, Carl Jespersen. One could say that Duncan's crime deeply affects and alters the lives of his parents, Harald and Claudia Lindgard, because they never imagined him capable of such an atrocity. However, Duncan's guilt is unquestionable as he immediately confesses that he has shot Carl. Not surprisingly, many critics regard *The House Gun* as a courtroom drama. None of Gordimer's novels have a judicial setting, nor is she known as a writer of crime fiction. Besides, seeing that a courtroom drama is predominantly considered a film or television genre rather than a category of political literature, one could argue that Gordimer chose this popular genre because of the country's preoccupation with real-life courtroom dramas. Surely, it is possible that she randomly decided that 19 January 1996 would be the day of Duncan's crime. Yet, given that the first hearings of the TRC took place in April 1996 and Duncan only appears in court when his lawyer has had some time to prepare himself, one could also suggest that Gordimer deliberately placed her fictional trial in the early days of the TRC's public hearings. As the South African Truth Commission and the manner in which it conducted its hearings has received strenuous criticism, one could claim that Gordimer's courtroom drama subtly reflects upon the country's approach to the past.

Moreover, the narrator appears to emphasise that one should not interpret Gordimer's novel as a murder mystery. When Harald reads the charge sheet and acquaints himself with the facts of Duncan's crime, the narrator says: "This is not a detective story. Harald has to believe that the mode of events that genre represents is actuality" (Gordimer, 16). Here, the narrator seems to explain Gordimer's choice of genre; he claims that the mode of events a detective story represents, such as violence and one's search for information about what has happened and who can be held responsible, are omnipresent characteristics of post-apartheid South Africa. One could say that another reference to the Truth and Reconciliation

the TRC mainly endeavoured to reconstruct what

In addition, claims have been made that Duncan's household is a microcosm of Archbishop Tutu's 'Rainbow Nation'. The latter has often been considered a paradigm of the new South Africa in which ethnically diverse South Africans ideally live side by side. The TRC was intended as a process that would consolidate the spirit of the 'rainbow nation' (Gobodo-Madikizela, 271). According to Møller et al. Desmond Tutu therefore used the allegory of 'a rainbow over South Africa as a symbol of reconciliation and unity among all the diverse people in the nation' (Møller et al., 246). Henceforth, the new constitution demanded social equality and South Africans were encouraged to accept one another, regardless of one's colour, sex, or sexual preference. David Medalie appears to endorse this claim as he argues that Duncan, Khulu, David, Carl and Natalie represent 'in a microcosmic way, the society which the new South African constitution is making possible, one in which there is no discrimination on the basis of race, gender or sexual preference' (Medalie, 638).

One might agree that Duncan is part of a rather unconventional household, as he shares a premises with David Baker, a fellow architect, Nkululeko 'Khulu' Dladla, a journalist, and Carl Jespersen, who works for an advertisement agency. Although Duncan and his girlfriend Natalie James live at a cottage adjacent to the house, they 'more or less run the whole place together' (Gordimer, 22). Their household resembles the 'Rainbow Nation' in that the young adults constitute different ethnic groups, genders and sexual preferences. For instance, Duncan, David and Nathalie are white South Africans, Khulu is a black South African and Carl is Norwegian. Furthermore, the relationships between the characters are complicated; whereas Duncan and Natalie are involved at the time of Carl's murder as well as David and Carl, Duncan has previously been in a relationship with Carl. Moreover, the night before he fires a bullet at Carl, Duncan walks in upon Carl and Natalie, whilst they are having sexual intercourse on the sofa in the living room. Considering that *The House Gun* deals with complex sexual relationships, one might argue that the country's legacy of apartheid has had an effect on sexual identities. As a number of Gordimer's characters are homosexual and Duncan is believed to be bisexual, the narrative appears to suggest that everything is possible within the new South Africa. Duncan's black lawyer, Hamilton Motsamai, seems to think that Harald and Claudia have problems with South Africa's progressive attitude towards homosexuality. In addition, he assumes that they do not want him to ask Khulu Dladla to testify and declares that there is nothing to worry about because it is merely a sexual preference and 'nothing to be ashamed of, condemned, these days' of the new Constitution

That is so. That's the law ö (Gordimer, 116). However, concerned about the very fact that their son is bisexual, but they fear that neither a white nor a black judge will approve of his sexuality. As Claudia explains; öI was thinking of the old guard, the good Christians of the Dutch Reformed Church, some of them are surely still on the bench. But a black judge might be much the same, anyway, when it comes to thatö (Gordimer, 118).

By zooming in on the violence that is carried out in a domestic setting, Gordimer seems to allude to the persistence of violence in the new South Africa. One could regard it as a response to the country's political, economic, legal and social change. However, this violence can no longer be framed as political violence because it was neither carried out on behalf of the apartheid government nor by members of the liberation movement. Nonetheless, the narrator suggests that violence remains part of South African society: öState violence under the old, past regime had habituated its victims to it. People had forgotten there was any other wayö (Gordimer, 50).

Furthermore, as the title of Gordimer's text suggests, a shared gun is used to commit a crime. More specifically, Duncan kills Carl with a gun that is shared by the members of their household. One could argue that the very fact that Duncan's unusual household collectively owns a gun in order to protect themselves symbolises the violence that still troubles post-apartheid South Africa. Nadine Gordimer seems to disapprove of the easy accessibility of guns. In addition to *The House Gun* her short story öThe Moment Before the Gun Went Offö (1988) encompasses remarks about the ubiquity of guns. Although it was written years before apartheid was dismantled, it draws attention to the same problem, as the narrator says: öAn accident, there are accidents with guns every day of the week ó children playing a fatal game with a father's revolver in the cities where guns are domestic objects, nowadays, hunting mishaps like this one, in the countryö (Gordimer, 2575). Not surprisingly, the narrator of *The House Gun* considers guns to be öthe tragedy of our present time, a tragedy repeated daily, nightly, in this city, in our country. Part of the furnishings in homes, carried in pockets along with car keys, even in the school-bags of children, constantly ready to hand in situations which lead to tragedy, the guns happen to be thereö (Gordimer, 267). With regard to *The House Gun*, one could therefore argue that the gun is a microcosmic equivalent of the country's culture of violence. In this particular context, Duncan's trial appears to be a parallel of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Whilst the public hearings of the TRC dealt with the violence of the apartheid regime, Gordimer's fictional trial deals with the harm caused by the gun.

hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the country's major turnabouts. According to Hamber, the TRC was created to assist in smoothing the political transition from authoritarian to democratic rule (Hamber, 9). Whilst it helped people come to terms with painful past experiences, the Truth Commission facilitated change in South Africa. Clearly, South African society required change, because a common future for black, white and coloured South Africans could not be built on racial imperatives. Considering that *The House Gun* repeatedly points out a reversal of former roles – such as the fact that a white man is now defended by a successful black lawyer, – one could say that Gordimer strongly wishes to accentuate this need for change. In this particular context Harald and Claudia can be seen as representative figures in the new South Africa, which has to contemplate and reassess its past in order to discover its future (Killam, 151). Hence, the Lindgards need to come to terms with their involvement in past and present violence in order to co-exist peacefully with blacks and coloureds in the new South Africa.

Few scholars appear to endorse that the TRC finds a certain resonance in *The House Gun*. However, Isidore Diala puts Gordimer's novel alongside the TRC in seeing that in addition to *None to Accompany Me*, *The House Gun* touches upon intense discussions of the new South African constitution, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and appropriate immigration laws (Diala, 136). Similarly, Sue Kossew claims that 'the unspoken but clearly-present backdrop to the narrative is the process whereby the whole society is on trial: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission' (Kossew, 134). To support her claim, Kossew addresses themes that often arose during the truth and reconciliation process, such as truth, justice, guilt and forgiveness. Along these lines, she draws a parallel between Gordimer's text and South Africa's process of reconciliation:

In tackling questions about justice, truth, and coming to terms with the past in the more private, intimate, and self-contained space of a middle-class white family whose son has been accused of committing a murder, Gordimer is presenting a kind of microcosm of the wider political process of remembering, forgetting and reconciling that was being played out in the Commission hearings. (Kossew, 134)

Hence, Kossew seems to suggest that the way in which Harald and Claudia deal with their son's murder represents the way in which South African society handles the TRC process.

*The House Gun* seems to illustrate in what way politics intrudes into personal lives. As Cheryl Stobie points out, 'from the outset, the novel sets up a dialectic between, on the one hand, private and personal shocking news, and on the other, national and political disasters' (Stobie, 65). One might suggest that Gordimer's characters develop throughout the trial. Like

Starting point seems to be one's confession; Duncan's act of violence clearly ravages the lives of his parents, one could argue that their personal suffering gradually becomes political. Whereas the novel initially deals with Harald and Claudia's misconceptions about themselves and about their son, Duncan's murder trial provides them with the insight that change is necessary. Moreover, they come to reconsider the country's past and present violence and realise that they can no longer depend on what they previously held on to. Although Gordimer divided *The House Gun* into two parts, one could also differentiate between four phases.

This chapter endeavours to demonstrate that Gordimer's *The House Gun* can be considered an allegory of South Africa's truth and reconciliation process. In order to examine to what extent the novel reflects upon the themes that dominated the TRC process, the chapter distinguishes between four stages; the period in anticipation of the trial, its rescheduling, the hearings in a court of law and the consequences of the trial. Whilst Gordimer's main characters are awaiting Duncan's trial, the novel mostly appears to deal with the way in which Duncan's violence affects their personal lives. Subsequently, when the trial is postponed, the personal and the political seem to interact as the characters are challenged with the country's new constitution. One could suggest that the trial truly touches upon politics, as it relates Duncan's murder to the country's climate of violence and the easy accessibility of guns. Moreover, after the exact details have been exposed and Duncan has been sentenced to seven years in prison, the only question that remains appears to be whether reconciliation has been achieved.

#### 4.1 Awaiting the Trial

One could say that Harald and Claudia Lindgard live a quiet life in Johannesburg until Julian Verster, a friend and colleague of their son Duncan, comes to their house and tells them that their son has been arrested for murder. Duncan has appointed a black lawyer, Hamilton Motsamai, and does not want his parents to come visit him. During the period in anticipation of the trial, the narrative mostly focuses on the way in which Duncan's crime disrupts his parents' relationship and social life. The Lindgards have never been to court before. Moreover, the idea of murder seems to fill them with repugnance: "So long as nobody moved, nobody uttered, the word and the act within the word could not enter here. Now with the touch of a switch and the gush of a breath a new calendar is opened. The old Gregorian cannot register this day. It does not exist in that means of measure" (Gordimer, 5). Harald and Claudia are engrossed in their own sorrow and fail to understand how violence has entered their safe environment. It appears to be something they had protected themselves against,

safe within their townhouse complex with grounds entrance (Gordimer, 3). When the country abolished its apartheid regime, the Lindgards feared that their dog was no longer able to protect their house against blacks. Ironically, their highly secured townhouse complex does not provide refuge, as the violence currently comes from within.

#### 4.1.1 Truth

Gordimer's *The House Gun* appears to search the truth. Its very portrayal of Duncan's trial and his family's response to his murder, encourages one to think that it is not about pleading guilty or not guilty but about confession. Similar confessions were made throughout the country's truth and reconciliation process. By means of public acknowledgements of perpetrators' guilt, the TRC disclosed the suffering of individuals and attempted to construct a shared history. Although truth can be considered one of the main objectives of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it was regarded as a confusing and problematic aspect of the TRC hearings. As touched upon in the Introduction, one could never be certain whether someone was telling the truth. Gordimer appears to play with this puzzling notion of truth by inserting different narrative voices. Whereas Harald, Claudia, Duncan and Motsamai occasionally speak their mind, there appears to be an omniscient narrator. For instance, as Claudia and Harald are repeatedly identified as "He/she" and the narrator occasionally refers to Duncan's girlfriend as "Natalie-Nastasya" it is often unclear who speaks. Consequently, one does not know who one is supposed to sympathize with (Durst, 300).

Moreover, one might argue that Gordimer's refusal to use quotation marks, here as well as in other books such as *The Pickup*, underlines this puzzling notion of truth. It appears not to matter whose thoughts or words are revealed, because she does not use quotation marks in order to identify speech:

What must he think of us!  
Think of us?  
Well, what did we say to him? So cold, matter-of-fact. (Gordimer, 32)

According to Stobie, all this refers to a lack of communication between different parties: "Gordimer's well-known avoidance of quotation marks for speech, combined with her use of interior monologues for the main characters, act to blur the difference between thought and speech, and call into question the process of communication" (Stobie, 65). Stobie's suggestion appears to make sense as the novel mentions this lack of communication; "hostility had sucked all communication into its vacuum" (Gordimer, 105).

characters are awaiting the trial, the text zooms in on the . The narrator conveys how they feel about what happened and how they attempt to find an explanation for Duncan's violent behaviour. Although their son's guilt is indisputable, they have no idea whatsoever about his motivation for the murder. Hence, the novel can be considered a whydunit instead of a whodunit. Whereas some attention is given to Duncan's state of mind, the novel remains somewhat vague about Duncan's motives, as it rarely offers an insight into Duncan's thoughts. Consequently, John Brenkman considers Duncan "a puzzle the other characters struggle to comprehend" (Brenkman, 288). Moreover, the narrator repeatedly wonders why Duncan is not in this story, as he is "vortex from which, flung away, around, are all: Harald, Claudia, Motsamai, Khulu, the girl, and the dead man" (Gordimer, 151).

When Harald and Claudia visit Duncan in prison, he cannot or does not wish to explain his behaviour. He initially remains silent about what happened and does not cooperate with his lawyer. Clearly, the right to remain silent about one's misdeeds was often addressed during the public hearings of the TRC. Yet, one could also interpret this inability to explain Duncan's violence as "an exact reflection of the inability of the society to explain fully the reasons for its violence and the inability of officialdom to contain and remove it" (Killam, 151). Although Claudia initially appears to resent Duncan's lawyer because she is afraid of the consequences of Duncan's crime, Senior Counsel Motsamai urges Harald and Claudia to get involved in the process. He asks them to convince Duncan that it is necessary to trust his lawyer with the truth. They manage to persuade Duncan to confide in his lawyer, but he still does not want to tell his parents what has happened. Not surprisingly, it is Motsamai who eventually provides Harald, Claudia and the reader with a better understanding of Duncan's intentions as he determines Duncan's motive and "explains Duncan's confession as a type of suicide for Duncan after his humiliation and fall from grace" (Durst, 305).

Like the TRC, *The House Gun* suggests that telling the truth is valuable. One could say that Gordimer regards storytelling as "a form of liberation and a shield against forgetting or the repetition of past sins" (Durst, 311). Harald and Claudia appear to appreciate the trial, as it provides them with all the facts about the murder their son committed and concurrently helps them to cope with it: "There is something salutary, necessary, for Harald and Claudia, perhaps even for their son himself, in this plain setting out of facts that, within themselves, have been so overgrown by emotion and entangled out of comprehension by distress" (Gordimer, 253). Despite the fact that truth is highly valued, Claudia seems to fear that the truth does not always count. "Our son is not mad" is an often-heard expression. This might be

. However, it seems more likely that she is concerned  
Motsamai, Hamilton, could relay some answer? ó does  
the truth count? Can the truth save you?ö (Gordimer, 257), it seems more likely that it refers  
to her concerns about his fate.

#### 4.1.2 Individual Guilt

It has often been suggested that the TRC attempted to achieve justice through shared  
accountability. As seen in Chapter 1, the very fact that the Truth and Reconciliation  
Commission was willing to hold the entire country responsible for what happened under  
apartheid, has caused fierce controversy. Besides those involved in the TRC process, scholars  
appear to disagree whether atrocities constituted individual responsibility or collective guilt.  
As Medalie summarises the dilemma; öwhat degree of autonomy, in other words, is to be  
granted to the private choices of a private life, especially in a country where the majority of  
the population has had so little control over their own livesö (Medalie, 639). The novel raises  
a similar question, as it appears to blame individuals but also develops a notion of shared  
guilt. This paragraph mostly focuses on the characters' individual guilt.

It seems to be indisputable that Harald and Claudia feel guilty about Duncan's crime.  
In order to find out what might have been of influence, they reassess Duncan's upbringing.  
The opening line of *The House Gun* reveals that something terrible has happened. An  
identical line is used to describe a suicide that happened at Duncan's boarding school years  
ago. Although Harald and Claudia were obviously concerned when they heard that one of  
Duncan's classmates had killed himself, they did not consider their safe environment invaded  
by the boy's suicide. They failed to detect how it influenced their son's life, until they  
identified it as öthe forgotten other time, first time, they were invaded by a happening that  
had no place in their kind of life, the kind of life they believed they had ensured for their sonö  
(Gordimer, 69).

Whereas Motsamai considers it natural that Harald and Claudia blame the girl, Harald  
appears to hold himself and his wife responsible because they conceived him: öHarald knows:  
us. On us. Harald and Claudia, who made himö (Gordimer, 73). Furthermore, one could say  
that he endeavours to find a justification in literature in order to remove himself from the  
terrible reality of having a son who is on trial for murder. Moreover, when he visits Duncan's  
cottage in order to pick up some books and clothes, he comes across a notebook. Given that  
Harald deeply values one's right to privacy, he thinks it inappropriate to glance through his  
son's notebook. Clearly, Harald does not wish to interfere in Duncan's relationship with  
Natalie but he desires to attain the truth: öHarald is what is known as a great reader, which

is ambitiously called the truthö (Gordimer, 27). One passage of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* provides him with an insight into Duncan's relationship with Natalie: "Harald recognized with the first few words, Dostoevsky, yes, Rogozhin speaking of Nastasya Filippovna. "She would have drowned herself long ago if she had not had me; that's the truth. She doesn't do that because, perhaps, I am more dreadful than the water"ö (Gordimer, 47). He learns that Duncan feels responsible for Natalie. Dostoevsky's words suggest that Natalie would have killed herself, had Duncan not saved her. Only later does Harald discover that Duncan did indeed save Natalie from drowning and attempted to do protect her on other occasions. Given that Nathalie had a history of depression and already tried to kill herself once, Duncan might have considered it necessary to kill Carl in order to save her from being exploited by Carl. Although Duncan had been unable to save the boy from boarding school, he managed to rescue Natalie. Giving her a reason to stay alive, possibly made him feel good about himself. Hence, murdering Carl was not so much an act of jealousy, but an attempt to protect the girl from another depression or suicide. Duncan's true motivation for the murder is eventually revealed. Here as well as in other novels, Gordimer seems to hint that there is a truth but it is hard to discover.

Harald and Claudia repeatedly wonder where they have gone wrong. "This sentimental searching back to what he was is something each, Harald and Claudia, is alert to in the other, not because each seeks the weakness of comfort from the other, but because something vulnerable, incriminating to either, might be revealed. Someone must be to blame"ö (Gordimer, 66). Claudia appears to blame everyone ó the police, the lawyers, the gardener, the army ó but her son. For instance, as she feels hard done-by and does not consider her son capable of murder, she considers him a victim of the system: "If you can't prove your innocence, you are guilty, isn't that what Duncan's come to"ö (Gordimer, 44). Moreover, she supposedly has reservations about the trustworthiness of the witness as he is a gardener; "a man who doesn't even have a watch, can't say what time all this was"ö (Gordimer, 44). In addition, Harald and Claudia seem to hold the army responsible as the latter taught their son how to use a gun. Hence, "that was where the life-ethic the son had absorbed from his parents was reversed"ö (Gordimer, 67). One might agree that Claudia somewhat blames herself as she asks Duncan whether she has ever done something wrong: "Duncan, do you think I've had any particular influence on you? Anything I did"ö (Gordimer, 100). Although Harald and Claudia expect to be accused or judged by Duncan, he merely says that they loved him. As they do not think of this as really helpful, they blame each other and ask one another what it was he or she did to him that the other did not do.

When the trial is postponed, they hear that there has been a postponement. Duncan's lawyer appears to be pleased with the postponement as it provides him with extra time to prepare his defence. He mainly wishes to enlarge the Lindgards's confidence in him and especially desires Claudia's support, because he needs her account of Duncan's childhood. Motsamai hopes that she will help his argument by telling him what might have influenced Duncan. Moreover, he wants Duncan to be tested by a psychiatrist because he wishes to prove that Duncan momentarily lost the capacity to distinguish between right and wrong (Gordimer, 91).

#### 4.2.1 Reversal of Roles

When Duncan's trial is postponed, the personal appears to grow political. Harald and Claudia are still immersed in their own anxieties but they try to cope with the country's reversal of roles. As Gordimer suggests in *Living in Hope and History*, Harald and Claudia are truly challenged with the topsy-turvy social reality of post-apartheid South Africa when they find themselves dependent upon a distinguished black lawyer to defend their son (Gordimer, 89). Hence, Harald and Claudia slowly realise that this black man will act, speak for them. They have become those who cannot speak, act, for themselves (Gordimer, 89). Consequently, Cheryl Stobie notes that *The House Gun* alludes to change: "In the democratic South-Africa, the tables have been turned, and Hamilton Motsamai wields power in the legal system" (Stobie, 170). One could say that the insight of change is mostly conveyed through Duncan, because his crime and the trial that follows set the process off. Gordimer seems to suggest that things have changed between blacks and whites by the dismantling of apartheid. Like the TRC was presided over by Archbishop Tutu and the majority of the commissioners were black and coloured judges, Duncan needs to appear before a black judge and his defence is carried out by a black lawyer. Given that Duncan is white, Gordimer appears to suggest that it is predominantly concerned white South Africans who had to appear in courtrooms or before the TRC and were at risk of being persecuted. Moreover, bearing in mind that many blacks were deprived of their rights and voices under the apartheid regime, Harald and Claudia currently lose their voice to Hamilton Motsamai.

One could argue that Harald and Claudia become aware of other changing realities. Clearly, South Africa's new constitution aimed for social equality. Although many lands and institutions were still owned by white South Africans after apartheid, the situation slowly improved. When Duncan's friend Khulu visits the Lindgards, he tells them about the changes that occur throughout the country. Khulu seems pleased with what has so far been achieved

whether it will actually change his economic situation. As with inattentive zest while talking about the changes in ownership of newspapers with the acquisition of a group by blacks. He is proud of this; and sceptical about the advancement of his career that Claudia suggested it would mean for him (Gordimer, 288). Given that considerable discrepancies between the living standards of blacks and whites continued to exist after apartheid, Gordimer here seems to suggest that the new government failed to establish equal opportunities and living conditions for blacks.

Although Harald and Claudia do not think of themselves as racists, their behaviour occasionally suggests otherwise. For instance, they wonder whether it is an advantage or a disadvantage that Duncan is represented by a black lawyer. Hence, to establish whether Hamilton Motsamai is the most competent lawyer to defend his son, Harald asks one of his company's legal advisers about Motsamai's competency. The adviser is convinced that Motsamai is an exceptional Senior Counsel who excels in cross examination. However, he appears to understand Harald's doubts with regard to Motsamai's colour because of the country's former policy of racial segregation:

It is a fact, incontrovertible fact, that due to racial prejudice in the old regimes, black lawyers have had far less experience than white lawyers, and experience is what counts. They've had fewer chances to prove themselves; it's their disadvantage, and you would not be showing racial prejudice in seeing that disadvantage as yours, if entrusting defence to most of them. If you were to say to me, now, that you still would prefer to have a white counsel – that's a different matter. I should have no comment. You are the one who has the grave burden. I can simply say: with Motsamai you are in good hands. (Gordimer, 38)

Moreover, Harald and Claudia appear to be bothered when Motsamai launches first-name terms, as he does so "without bothering to ask permission from them" (Gordimer, 86). Due to the discriminatory policies of the apartheid regime, whites were previously addressed by their surnames. In so doing, Motsamai points out that things have changed: "He has complete authority over everything in the enclosure of their situation. Motsamai, the stranger from the Other Side of the divided past. They are in his pink-palmed hands" (Gordimer, 86). One could say that it remains unclear whether these are merely thoughts of the narrator or derogatory claims made by Harald and Claudia. Yet, it appears to be significant that they did not stand up to the country's former policy of racial segregation. Notwithstanding their professions, "he works for an insurance company and she is a doctor" – neither of them has taken a political stand towards South Africa's segregated order. She treats people of different ethnic groups and he religiously believes that all humans are children of God. Nonetheless, "neither had joined movements, protested, marched in open display, spoken out in defence on

they allude to their professions in order to justify their racist government: "He did not risk his position in the corporate establishment. Claudia worked at clinics to staunch the wounds racism gashed" (Gordimer, 86). However, they can no longer deny their complicity in the past political system of racial oppression.

#### 4.2.2 Religion

One could argue that the violence that was carried out in the struggle over apartheid completely demoralised the country. Hence, many black and white South Africans could do with some comfort and support. Considering that South Africa has always been considered a highly religious nation, faith was believed to enhance reconciliation and nation-building. Moreover, the TRC's religious character was believed to promote an understanding of the past. For instance, it allowed for a transcendent meaning of suffering (Shore and Kline, 316) and promised that there could be hope and reconciliation despite pain. One could therefore claim that religion was used as a means to establish a more positive attitude between blacks and whites. Shore and Kline consider religion in the truth and reconciliation process "a necessary step in a peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy. Though neither a miracle nor a model, the TRC stands as an example, however flawed, of a transitional justice body that found a religious dimension of a people vital to a successful transition" (Shore and Kline, 328-329). Hence, Motsamai appears to link Harald's Catholicism and Claudia's humanism "the two sets of moral precepts the whole world relies on" in order to establish a better future. As the narrator points out,

What a strong argument for the Defence a dramatist like Motsamai could make of that: the force of perversion and evil the woman Natalie must have been to bring this accused to fling aside into a clump of fern the sound principles with which he was imbued: one, the sacred injunction, Thou Shalt Not Kill, two, the secular code, human life is the highest value to be respected. (Gordimer, 98-99)

Moreover, as the country's major power shifts represented enormous change, one could suggest that people's values and certainties were strongly challenged. Similarly, when Harald and Claudia find themselves in a terrible crisis because of Duncan's murder, they try to fall back upon the ideologies they previously held on to. Whereas Harald is a devout Catholic who regularly attends mass, Claudia is a humanist. Whilst they are trying to find an explanation for Duncan's murder in these ideologies, her humanism appears to challenge his religion. For instance, Claudia provokes Harald by arguing that Harald does not accept his faith, because he considers murder the ultimate crime before God and man, and therefore does

... out by confession, repentance, forgiveness from Up

In addition, the TRC's Amnesty Committee argued that perpetrators of apartheid's horrors should get a chance to improve their lives. Hence, they were given the opportunity to express their remorse and act on it by being a better Christian. Considering that Motsamai divides much attention to telling the judges about the moral principles which were instilled in Duncan's mind, one could say that he uses these ideologies in order to explain why Duncan deserves a life after his imprisonment.

#### 4.2.3 Collective Guilt

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the Truth Commission strove to attain justice through collective responsibility. As Llewellyn and Howse suggest, the entire community needs to participate in the TRC process. More specifically, it "must include not just the individuals who were perpetrators and victims in the conventional sense, but those in their communities who were supporters and silent witnesses and those painfully affected by the incident" (Llewellyn and Howse, 380). Although this chapter previously dealt with individual guilt, this paragraph endeavours to give an idea of the characters' notion of shared guilt.

With regard to *The House Gun*, one might say that Duncan's parents gradually come to confront their involvement in past atrocities because of their son's crime. Up to Duncan's arrest, the dismantling of apartheid had not really changed their lives. However, now they find themselves in a terrible crisis, they somewhat identify with those who have experienced similar or even worse hardships in the past. They seem unable to liberate themselves from collective white guilt, because they never did anything to change South African society. In due course, they learn that the fact that they have been bystanders of past atrocities is what makes them accountable. Schaffer and Smith seem to support this by claiming that Harald and Claudia "could understand themselves as complicit with some aspects of perpetrator violence or acknowledge the ways in which they directly and indirectly benefited from the suffering of others" (Schaffer and Smith, 1578).

One could interpret the pain of the murder committed by their son, as the price Harald and Claudia pay for their reluctance to act against South Africa's former regime of oppression. According to Stobie, Duncan is therefore "the scapegoat who carries the symbolic weight of the history of violence and oppression" (Stobie, 170). However, Nadine Gordimer appears to suggest that the Lindgard's pain cannot compare to the pain that was caused by the apartheid regime:

[Click Here to upgrade to  
Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

ty enacted in the name of that State they had lived in, so interrogations, a dying man driven across a thousand an; common-law criminals singing through the night before the morning of execution, hangings taking place in Pretoria while a second slice of bread pops up from the toaster ó the penalty unknown individuals paid was not in question compared with state crime. None of it had anything to do with them. (Gordimer, 126)

Moreover, these lines appear to point towards another reversal of roles. Whereas the Lindgards previously thought that these acts of violence had nothing to do with them, ó but defined the lives of other people, presumably blacks ó they currently realise that injustice affects the entire society.

Harald and Claudia initially seem to deal with questions of guilt individually. Their different ways of coping with the past stand between them and disrupt their relationship. When Motsamai invites the Lindgards over to a party at his house, there is a distance between Harald and Claudia. Harald assumes that she uses the party in order to get away from him, because she had never spent time amongst black or coloured families before: óHe had the curious feeling she wanted to move away from him, away among others choosing their food, among them, these strangers not only of this night, but of all her life outside the encounters in her profession, the dissection of their being into body partsö (Gordimer, 170). One could argue that Claudia merely tries to enjoy herself, as she has not been able to do so for a while. However, Diala considers Motsamai's party as an eye opener to both of them by claiming that óthe Lindgards experience at Motsamai's house a distinctively African fellowship and conviviality that is a revelation to themö (Diala, 65). Hence, most important is that they gradually appear to grow closer again, when they recognise that they are in the same position. Despite different interpretations of their child and the crime he committed, they seem to share a crime themselves: óRevulsion was their crime, committed against their own child and they were in it together. The seals of silence there had been between them were brokenö (Gordimer, 120).

### 4.3 The Trial

One could argue that South African politics is truly attended to when Duncan is brought before the judges in a court of law. Whilst Motsamai and the Prosecutor carry out their interrogations and Duncan's fate is decided, issues such as the country's culture of violence and the availability of guns, and the debate about capital punishment are addressed. Motsamai pleads that Duncan is not guilty because of extenuating circumstances. When he calls Natalie and starts his interrogation, he informs the reader how Duncan saved her from committing

pregnancy and the fact that she does not seem to care manages to emphasise her indifference to Carl's death, Duncan's future, and the direct consequences of her intercourse with Carl. Natalie says it is nobody's business but hers. Moreover, she is very negative about Duncan. For instance, she claims that he is a manipulative character who controls her entire life and argues that he is afraid of her. Furthermore, she taunts him about his middle-class background and describes him as chaotic. Motsamai cleverly uses her behaviour and her negative attitude towards Duncan to prove that she has had her share in what happened to Carl. Although Duncan might have been driven by his love for Natalie and his feelings of responsibility for the latter, he appears to agree with Motsamai that she has been of influence, because he says that Carl's murder "was something made possible in me by her" (Gordimer, 181).

One could argue that Motsamai's approach to the crime and his interrogation of Natalie produces a feeling of sympathy for the perpetrator. This rarely occurred during the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as those involved in the process usually sympathised with the victims. Motsamai explains that Duncan was deeply hurt by seeing Natalie and Carl. He believes that Duncan felt emasculated (Gordimer, 262), because of the humiliation of seeing his present and former lover together. Upon his discovery, Duncan immediately left the house and stayed in the cottage all next day. Motsamai claims that Duncan was finally drawn to the house, when he went outside to feed the dog. He states that his client did not plan to take revenge, but suddenly found himself standing in the doorway, at the same spot where he saw Carl and Natalie the night before. Carl's answer; "O dear. I'm sorry, Bra" (Gordimer, 155) disturbed Duncan because it made him think about the end of their relationship. Moreover, Carl's nonchalance and lack of shame supposedly paralysed him:

Jespersen's unexpected presence on the very sofa where the degrading spectacle had taken place, Jespersen's incredible lack of shame, his assumption that it could just be brushed aside between men who were brothers, once even been lovers, over a drink together "this was a second terrible shock on top of the first. Equalling the force of a blow to the head, psychiatric evidence bears out, such shock has the effect of producing blackout. (Gordimer, 246)

Carl's expression of remorse does not seem sincere, but he expects to get away with it, as was often the case during the hearings of the Amnesty Committee. He seems to have underestimated the effect of his act, because he unashamedly deems it all unfortunate and wants Duncan to have a drink with him. Subsequently, something appears to snap within Duncan's mind. He momentarily loses control of himself and shoots his friend.

Duncan's murder points towards South Africa's high levels of crime and violence:

In a society where violence is prevalent the moral taboos against violence are devalued. When it has become, for whatever historical reasons, the way to deal with frustration, despair or injury, natural abhorrence of violence is suspended. Everyone becomes accustomed to the solution of violence, whether as victim, perpetrator or observer. You live with it. (Gordimer, 226)

In addition, Durst claims that Motsamai draws attention to the violence that wreaks havoc in South Africa as the lawyer invokes the climate of violence, the actual presence of the gun at the house as a possible result of the societal disequilibrium (Durst, 308). It seems indisputable that the crime was committed with a gun that was handy (Gordimer, 215). Hence, this expression once again draws attention to the inevitability of guns in contemporary South African society. One could say that Motsamai therefore relates the murder of Duncan to the country's culture of violence, and the house gun to the omnipresence of guns in South African society: 'the climate of violence bears some serious responsibility for the act the accused committed, yes; because of this climate, the gun was there' (Gordimer, 271). This seems to fit in with the Truth Commission's call for collective accountability; besides Duncan, other things are to blame for Carl's murder.

#### 4.3.2 Justice.

As elaborated on in Chapter 1, the TRC offered restorative justice in order to re-establish South Africa's social equilibrium. Hence, it wished to restore the balance within South African communities and prevent vengeance and future violence. Although the country attempted to move towards justice, violence nevertheless remained a dominant characteristic of post-apartheid South Africa. According to Stephen Clingman, Gordimer's text illustrates that Johannesburg is founded on murder: 'Murder underlies the foundations of Johannesburg, and in an extended way South Africa is a country that in some sense has been built on murder. The murder in this novel is also the past of an inscrutable past whose essence will not finally be interpreted, understood, or redeemed' (Clingman, 156).

*The House Gun* clearly struggles to establish whether justice is possible within the new South Africa. On the one hand, Motsamai appears to achieve justice as he arranges that Duncan receives a lenient punishment; his 'effective lawyering not only secures Duncan's conviction on the least serious charge, guilty of murder with extenuating circumstances, with the minimum sentence of seven years, but leaves all concerned with some sense, that justice has been done' (Durst, 308). On the other hand, Harald seems to believe that 'justice is a

pointed out in the introduction of this thesis, some critics for reconciliation. One could argue that Harald supports this idea, because he believes that justice cannot be achieved in a court of law. More specifically, justice appears to be irrelevant because he believes that Duncan will be judged, no matter whether or not he is sentenced to death: “In the air of the country, they are calling for a referendum; they, not the Constitutional Court will have the Last Judgment on murderers like Duncan. (í ) The malediction is upon him even if the law does not exact it. No performance; this is reality” (Gordimer, 241).

#### 4.3.3 Retribution

Bearing in mind that *The House Gun* has often been characterised as a courtroom drama, one could suggest that the narrative to some extent reflects upon means of punishment. It seems indisputable that Duncan deserves to be disciplined for committing murder. However, Duncan’s parents seem to be anxious about the outcome of the trial before it has actually begun. Although capital punishment was considered unconstitutional in June 1995 (Bae, 49), the possibility of putting a criminal to death appears to be officially recognised at the time of Gordimer’s fictional trial. One could argue that Gordimer chose to incorporate the death penalty into her novel, because the public debate about capital punishment continued unabated after it was abolished. Whereas the ANC strongly opposed it, many other parties repeatedly asked to reinstate capital punishment, because they thought it would serve as “a deterrent to violent crime” (Bae, 61). Although Gordimer’s last few pages reveal that “the Last Judgment of the Constitutional Court has declared the Death Penalty unconstitutional” (Gordimer, 284), the characters’ previous concern about capital punishment seems therefore justifiable.

Moreover, in this manner, *The House Gun* seems to identify another reversal of roles. Whereas many blacks were hanged under apartheid, the novel presently has a white man and his relatives worry about the death penalty. Furthermore, the novel sheds an additional light upon the ignorance of whites. As Isidore Diala points out, Harald never faced up to the possibility of the death penalty: “Harald had given no serious thought to the current Constitutional Court debate on capital punishment until his discovery that that debate had an implication for the life of his son” (Diala, 54-55).

As the country wished to set the right example, the Truth Commission discouraged retributive notions of punishment. Similarly, Gordimer’s novel appears to prefer rehabilitation to retribution. For instance, Motsamai believes that one should not punish but rehabilitate. He is certain that the death penalty will therefore be abolished: “I am confident the Court will rule

olished. Finished and done before we get sentence  
TRC clearly wished to do away with gross human rights  
violations. One could argue that the death penalty could be judged a similar violation of  
human rights. As Bae points out, "the experience with capital punishment under apartheid has  
shaped the values and ideas of the leadership on what they now consider as a relic of a  
barbarous past and having no place in a civilised legal system" (Bae, 49). However, Harald  
appears to think that capital punishment can never be abolished for some people: "he hears  
them, those callers for the death cell and the rope, early mornings with the hangman in  
Pretoria. (í ) the only reconciliation there is for them, lies in the death of one whose act took  
one of their own, or whose example threatens other lives" (Gordimer, 241). As Harald  
believes that only God can bring true justice into one's life, he does not wish to retain the  
death penalty. Nevertheless, he thinks that some people will always call for the death penalty.

#### 4.4 After the Trial

The judges decide that Duncan has to serve seven years in prison. Although he does not  
receive total amnesty, his sentence is considered the most lenient punishment the judges could  
impose. As suggested before, some critics argue that the TRC was not successful in bringing  
about reconciliation. Regarding the correspondence between *The House Gun* and the Truth  
and Reconciliation Commission, one might therefore wonder whether Duncan's trial leads to  
reconciliation. In order to answer this question, one must assess whether the characters  
forgive themselves and one another, as reconciliation could only happen through forgiveness.

##### 4.4.1 Forgiveness

As noted in the introductory chapter, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission encouraged  
forgiveness by means of ubuntu. This ancient African philosophy holds that a person is a  
person through other people, and that one should therefore treat one another with respect.  
Perpetrators were often forgiven in the spirit of ubuntu, because many South Africans  
believed that their community would have no future without forgiveness. Both Duncan's  
friend Khulu Dladla and his lawyer Hamilton Motsamai seem to be committed to the  
country's future and appear to forgive Duncan in the spirit of ubuntu. Whereas Motsamai is  
undoubtedly professionally motivated, Khulu appears to be a true friend. For instance, he  
visits Duncan in prison and is present throughout the trial. Additionally, his account of what  
happened is crucial, as he is regarded as a black character who has been able to overcome past  
prejudices and support a white friend. Khulu helps Motsamai's defence by testifying that  
Natalie tortured Duncan and swears on his own life that it was not in Duncan's nature to kill  
(Gordimer, 225).

relationships Harald and Claudia develop with Motsamai and Khulu seem to represent hope. For instance, Motsamai arranges that Duncan can continue his work as an architect from prison. Moreover, when Khulu visits the Lindgards at the end of the novel, he convinces them to do something about the child. Consequently, they decide to provide for Natalie and the baby as some sort of reparation. Khulu appears to be their surrogate son; considering that "they part that night with the intimacy of court days restored" (Gordimer, 290). Khulu seems to appreciate that they do not judge him because he is black and gay. However, he recognises that they are significantly different from blacks as they are appalled by the idea that they might need to take in Duncan's baby. That would be different for blacks, because they would just adapt themselves and argue that "children belong, never mind any doubts about their origin, in the family" (Gordimer, 290).

#### 4.4.2 Reconciliation

Despite the fact that continuing violence suggests that reconciliation is not truly achieved, Gordimer appears to be positive about South Africa's future, because her characters seem to acknowledge their guilt and forgive one another. Moreover, to some extent they are in fact reconciled with the past. For instance, one could say that Harald's religion taught him how to forgive but he seems to think that nothing can be exchanged for forgiveness. "So Harald is able to believe his son did it and that he must be punished. No confession (already made), repentance in exchange for forgiveness possible" (Gordimer, 105). Nonetheless, he somewhat seems to achieve reconciliation because he establishes a new relation with God. "Out of something terrible something new, to be lived with in a different way, surely, than life was before? This is the country for themselves, here, now. For Harald a new relation with his God, the God of the suffering he could not have had access to, before" (Gordimer, 279). Moreover, after Duncan has been imprisoned, Claudia wants another child. Eventually, she does not get a baby, but Khulu advises them to provide for Duncan's baby. According to Stobie, Duncan's unborn child represents hope: "Natalie has a child who may be Duncan's or Carl's, but whom all accept, with varying degrees of difficulty, as an emblem of reconciliation and of hope for the future" (Stobie, 169).

Duncan confesses but he never seems to explain his actual motivation nor does he register remorse. The former is merely constructed by Senior Counsel Motsamai. Moreover, Duncan appears to think that there is no point in saying sorry, because he places remorse "beyond mere performance" (Diala, 56):

[Click Here to upgrade to  
Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

them, what they have a word for. How could they know about. Harald and Claudia, my poor parents, do you have tears to say I am sorry? Will it all be mended, a window I smashed with a ball? Shall I be a civilized human being again, for the one, and will God forgive and cleanse me, for the other. Is that what they think it is, this thing, remorse. (Gordimer, 281)

Like his father he seems to find salvation in literature. He has been granted permission to work in the prison library. Whilst he reads Homer's *Odyssey*, he comes across a literary passage which appears to explain Duncan's murder as an act which binds Duncan, Carl and Natalie together: 'Carl acted, I suffered him, I acted, Natalie suffered me, and that night on the sofa they acted and I suffered them both. We belong to each other' (Gordimer, 282). Although Duncan does not really forgive himself, he eventually realises that life and death become one:

Or throw away the gun in the garden. That was a choice made. Can you break the repetition just by not perpetrating violence on yourself. I have this life, in here. I didn't give it for his. I'll even get out of here with it, some year or other. The murderer has not been murdered. My luck, this was abolished in time. But I have to find a way. Carl's death and Natalie's child, I think of one, then the other, then the one, then the other. They become one, for me. It does not matter whether or not anyone else will understand: Carl, Natalie/Nastasya and me, the three of us. I've had to find a way to bring death and life together. (Gordimer, 294)

Hence, Duncan thinks about new relations and supposes that the child could possibly bring Carl's death and his life together: 'It's absurd for the murderer to outlive the murdered. They two, alone together, as two beings are together in only one other human relationship, the one acting, the other suffering him, to share a secret that binds them forever together. They belong to each other' (Gordimer, 282).

#### 4.5 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has sought to explain to what extent Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun* can be considered an allegory of the South African process of truth and reconciliation. *The House Gun* has often been considered a courtroom drama. Hence, it seems likely that Gordimer chose this popular genre because the country was at that time preoccupied with real-life courtroom dramas. One could say that she deliberately placed her fictional trial in the early days of the TRC's public hearings. Like the TRC, her narrative furthermore seeks the truth about what has happened. In addition, Duncan's household can be considered a microcosm of the new South Africa, the gun a microcosmic equivalent of the country's culture of violence and Duncan's trial a paradigm of the TRC. Considering that the TRC promoted change in South Africa, Gordimer underlines the country's need for change.

appear to support these claims and regard the Truth  
er's narrative.

Truth was considered a confusing and problematic aspect of the TRC hearings. Gordimer appears to play with this puzzling notion of truth by inserting different narrative voices. Moreover, she does not use quotation marks, neither here nor in other books, and this adds to the novel's puzzling notion of truth. Although Duncan confesses to the crime, he initially does not wish to tell what happened. According to Killam, this reluctance to explain his violence resembles the incapability of South African society to give details about their past (Killam, 151). Yet, as Duncan eventually trusts his lawyer with the truth, *The House Gun* appears to suggest that telling the truth is valuable, because it seems to liberate both Duncan and his parents.

There has been much debate as to whether violence constitutes individual responsibility or collective guilt. Hence, whilst the Lindgards are awaiting Duncan's trial, Gordimer mainly deals with the characters' individual guilt. She points out that Harald and Claudia hold themselves responsible as well as each other. However, Claudia also seems to point a finger at the police, the lawyers, the gardener and the army.

When Duncan's trial is postponed, Harald and Claudia attempt to deal with the country's reversal of roles. Duncan's trial resembles the hearings of the TRC in that a white man needs to appear before a black judge and his defence is carried out by a black lawyer. The latter also gives voice to Duncan's relatives. Moreover, the novel suggests that discrepancies between the living standards of blacks and whites continued to exist after apartheid. Harald and Claudia appear to symbolise white South Africans who are unaware of their racist thinking.

Bearing in mind that the hearings of the TRC were carried out in a religious atmosphere, claims have been made that religion was used as a means to establish a more positive attitude between blacks and whites. One could therefore argue that Motsamai uses Harald's Catholicism and Claudia's humanism in order to establish a better future for their son. After the dismantling of apartheid, people's values and certainties were strongly challenged. Whilst they are trying to find an explanation for Duncan's murder in these ideologies, Claudia's humanism appears to challenge Harald's religion. Motsamai argues that Duncan deserves a life after his imprisonment, like the TRC's Amnesty Committee argued that perpetrators of apartheid's horrors should get a chance to improve their lives.

Clearly, Harald and Claudia have had tremendous trouble to confront what has happened. However, they finally acknowledge their guilt, when they understand that the fact

nders of past atrocities is what makes them and many  
Moreover, they recognise that the state South Africa is in,  
bears resemblance to their own.

Duncan's murder appears to point towards South Africa's high levels of crime and violence. Consequently, Motsamai links Duncan's murder to the country's culture of violence, and the presence of their house gun to the easy accessibility of guns in South Africa. He argues that the South African context can be held responsible for Carl's murder. Gordimer's text illustrates that Johannesburg is founded on murder.

Claims have been made that the TRC sacrificed justice for reconciliation. Not surprisingly, *The House Gun* clearly struggles to establish whether justice is possible within the new South Africa. Whereas Motsamai appears to achieve justice in getting Duncan a relatively lenient punishment, Harald believes that justice cannot be achieved in a court of law.

One could argue that Gordimer chose to incorporate the death penalty into her novel, because the public debate about capital punishment continued unabated after it was abolished. Moreover, in this manner, *The House Gun* seems to identify some other reversals of roles. Whereas many blacks were hanged under apartheid, the novel presently has a white man and his relatives worry about the death penalty. Considering that Motsamai calls for the abolition of capital punishment and supports the TRC's device of no retribution but rehabilitation, one could say that the novel disapproves of retribution. However, Harald appears to think that capital punishment can never be truly abolished. Although it is not something he wishes to hang on to, he thinks that some people will always call for the death penalty.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission encouraged forgiveness by means of ubuntu. Hence, Khulu and Motsamai appear to forgive Duncan in the spirit of ubuntu. Despite South Africa's continuing violence, Gordimer appears to be positive about South Africa's future because reconciliation is somewhat achieved. Harald appears to establish a new relationship with God, Claudia finds hope through caring for Duncan's child and Duncan finds peace when he realises that the child binds him, Carl and Natalie together.

## 5. Conclusion

[Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* Krog gives a personal account of the hearings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It functions as a microcosm of the TRC, and the wider South African context. As I argued in the thesis, Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun* can to some extent also be considered allegories of the country's truth and reconciliation process.

One could say that Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* explicitly deals with the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, because of the characters' direct involvement in the TRC. For instance, Dangor's main character Silas Ali works as a mediator between the ANC government and the TRC. The novel demonstrates how Silas's involvement in the TRC helps him to confront the rape of his wife Lydia. Not surprisingly, he thinks it best if his wife Lydia testifies before the Commission in order to forgive and forget. However, Silas is unable to convince Lydia of the necessity to face the painful memories of the past and she chooses to remain silent. Hereby, Dangor eventually suggests that it is impossible to let bygones be bygones, because some things cannot be forgotten and forgiven. One could say that Lydia's reluctance to testify aggravates the past, because it drives her son, who also suffered because of her abuse, to a violent act of vengeance.

Coetzee's *Disgrace* appears to allude to the Truth Commission less directly, and perhaps Gordimer's *The House Gun* even less so. However, the trials of David in Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Duncan in Gordimer's *The House Gun* bear a strong resemblance to the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. For instance, both trials are held in order to establish whether perpetrators of violence should be punished. Furthermore, they emphasise the need to publicly disclose the truth and the social desirability of some expression of remorse. One could argue that Coetzee's novel responds to frequent criticism of the TRC. For instance, it addresses the Commission's religious character, its incompleteness and its willingness to grant amnesty in exchange for public confession. Similarly, Gordimer's *The House Gun* to some extent reflects upon the TRC. Moreover, it struggles to establish whether justice is possible within the new South Africa, as Duncan's household can be considered a microcosm of the new South Africa. and the gun he uses to kill Carl Jespersen, as a microcosmic equivalent of the country's culture of violence.

### 5.1 Truth

Clearly, truth was considered a confusing and problematic aspect of the TRC hearings. The three novels appear to agree that many South Africans feared that disclosing this truth would

gh the hearings helped victims and perpetrators to  
e TRC could not easily decide whose truth counted when  
a victim's truth clashed with a perpetrator's truth. Whereas *Bitter Fruit* and *Disgrace* seem to  
question the need for public confession, *The House Gun* appears to suggest that telling the  
truth is valuable, because it liberates both Duncan and his parents. Furthermore, like the TRC,  
the three novels agree that many voices remained unheard because a significant number of  
victims and perpetrators did not testify.

### 5.2 Guilt

Whilst South Africa endeavoured to create a collective memory of its history of apartheid, it  
was not reluctant to attribute blame to both white and black South Africans. There has been  
much debate as to whether violence constitutes individual responsibility or collective guilt.  
Due to the country's former regime of apartheid, black and coloured South Africans were  
more likely to be regarded as victims and whites as perpetrators. Not surprisingly, Coetzee  
and Gordimer address what has often been called the white man's guilt. However, as  
Dangor's characters are coloured and victimised by apartheid, the novel does not so much  
portray their collective responsibility for what happened. One could say that Dangor mostly  
deals with the responsibility of the individual. Yet, the author seems to consider Mikey's act  
of vengeance as a consequence of the circumstances of his birth and Lydia and Silas's  
secretiveness about the past. Hence, as Lydia and Silas's behaviour seem to result from their  
suffering in the past, he somewhat seems to hold the country's history of apartheid, and all  
those who were part of it, responsible. Coetzee and Gordimer seem to deal with the country's  
collective guilt more clearly, as they address questions of complicity and atonement.  
Naturally, they also deal with individual guilt.

### 5.3 Religion

The TRC has regularly been criticised for its religious character. For instance, critics argue  
that Tutu's religious explanation of reconciliation can be considered a political means to  
convert the entire nation. Not surprisingly, *Disgrace* and *The House Gun* reflect upon the  
TRC's religious atmosphere. For instance, Coetzee suggests that the University's Committee  
of Inquiry is a paradigm of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission because it mixes  
religious rhetoric with legal rhetoric. However, Coetzee appears to suggest that one cannot  
simply convert one to Christianity, because his main character fails to find redemption.  
Moreover, *The House Gun* suggests that religion can be used as a means to establish a more  
positive attitude between blacks and whites, as Duncan's lawyer uses Harald's Catholicism  
and Claudia's humanism in order to provide a better future for their son.

has sacrificed justice for reconciliation, as it sought to achieve restorative justice instead of retributive justice. In so doing, it embraced the concept of ubuntu. Perpetrators were often forgiven in the spirit of ubuntu, because many South Africans believed that their community would have no future without forgiveness. Although Dangor's characters do not seem to forgive the perpetrator, Gordimer's characters seem to forgive and be forgiven. Coetzee's characters more or less manage to forgive, because Lucy forgives her perpetrators, Petrus achieves some economic justice and Melanie's father seems to forgive David. However, Coetzee's main character appears unable to forgive his daughter's rapists, which leaves the reader with the idea that there is no forgiveness and thereby no justice. Although the three novels agree that change is required, they clearly struggle to establish whether justice is possible within the new South Africa.

### 5.5 Retribution

*Bitter Fruit*, *Disgrace* and *The House Gun* appear to discuss different notions of retribution and revenge. Whereas the rape carried out by Du Boise, the gang rape of Lucy and the murder committed by Duncan could all be interpreted as acts of retribution, only *Bitter Fruit* seems to depict South Africa's need for retribution, as Mikey takes the law into his own hands and murders his mother's rapist. As Dangor and Coetzee's perpetrators get away without being prosecuted, they seem to hold a negative attitude towards the future of the country. Gordimer's *The House Gun* seems to be more positive, because Duncan is not granted amnesty but given a lenient punishment.

### 5.6 Reconciliation

Some critics argue that the TRC was not successful in bringing about reconciliation. Hence, none of the three novels suggest that South Africa successfully accomplished its process of truth and reconciliation. Moreover, Dangor, Coetzee and Gordimer seem to suggest that violence persists in post-apartheid South Africa. As *Bitter Fruit* and *The House Gun* are set in post-apartheid Johannesburg, and *Disgrace* is situated in Cape Town and in the countryside of the Eastern Cape, it does not seem to matter whether one resides in the city or in the countryside; one clearly cannot escape this violence. It has become a characteristic of South Africa.

Whereas Dangor and Coetzee seem to regard the TRC process as flawed and are therefore relatively negative about South Africa's future, Gordimer appears to be more positive. She also criticises the Commission to a great extent, but eventually holds a more positive attitude towards the new South Africa.

that these writers of post-apartheid South African criticism of the TRC. In so doing, their novels provide a space for continuing the discussion. For instance, through literature, questions of truth and guilt are addressed. Dangor, Coetzee and Gordimer attempt to capture postcolonial identities and portray whether the struggle against apartheid is actually over. Despite the fact that Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, Coetzee's *Disgrace*, and Gordimer's *The House Gun* are fiction and Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* is non-fiction, one could say that they collectively contribute to documenting the aftermath of apartheid and give voice to those who remained silent.

## References

- Anker, Elizabeth S. "Human Rights, Social Justice, and J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 54.2 (Summer 2008): 233-267.
- Attridge, Derek. "J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*: Introduction." *Interventions* 4.3 (2002): 315-320.
- Attwell, David. "Race in *Disgrace*." *Interventions* 4.3 (2002): 331-341.
- Bae, Sangmin. "The Right to Life vs. The State's Ultimate Sanction: Abolition of Capital Punishment in Post-Apartheid South Africa." *International Journal of Human Rights* 9.1 (Spring 2005): 49-68.
- Boehmer, Elleke. "Not Saying Sorry, Not Speaking Pain: Gender Implications in *Disgrace*." *Interventions* 4.3 (2002): 342-351.
- Boehmer, Elleke. "Sorry, Sorrier, Sorriest: The Gendering of Contrition in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*." In: *J.M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*. Ed. Jane Poyner. Ohio: Ohio UP, 2006. 135-148.
- Bonnici, Thomas. "Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) and Postcolonial Power." *Acta Scientiarum Maringá* 23.1 (2001): 87-92.
- Bozzoli, Belinda. "Public Ritual and Private Transition: The Truth Commission in Alexandra Township, South Africa 1996." *African Studies* 57.2 (1998): 167-195.
- Brenkman, John. "On Voice." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 33.3 (Summer 2000): 281-306.
- Buikema, Rosemarie. "Literature and the Production of Ambiguous Memory: Confession and Double Thoughts in Coetzee's *Disgrace*." *European Journal of English Studies* 10.2 (August 2006): 187-197.
- Bundy, Colin. "The Beast of the Past: History and the TRC." In: *After the TRC: Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*. Eds. Wilmot James and Linda van de Vijver. Claremont: David Philip, 2000. 9-20.
- Clingman, Stephen. "Surviving Murder: Oscillation and Triangulation in Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 46.1 (2000): 139-158.
- Coetzee, Carli. "They Never Wept, the Men of My Race: Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* and the White South African Signature." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27.4 (December 2001): 685-696.
- Coetzee, John Maxwell. *Disgrace*. London: Vintage Books, 2000.
- Cornwell, Gareth. "Realism, Rape, and J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*." *Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 43.4 (Summer 2002): 307-322.

n: Atlantic Books, 2004.

- J. M. Coetzee, and Andre Brink: *Guilt, Expiation, and the Reconciliation Process in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. *Journal of Modern Literature* 25.2 (2001): 50-68.
- Diala, Isidore. "Nadine Gordimer: The Mandela Myth and Black Empowerment in Post-Apartheid South Africa." *English in Africa* 32.2 (October 2005): 135-154.
- Driver, Dorothy. "Truth, Reconciliation, Gender: the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Black Women's Intellectual History." *Australian Feminist Studies* 20.47 (July 2005): 219-229.
- Durst, Ilene. "The Lawyer's Image, The Writer's Imagination: Professionalism and the Storyteller's Art in Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*." *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature* 13 (2001): 299-322.
- Frenkel, Ronit. "Performing Race, Reconsidering History: Achmat Dangor's Recent Fiction." *Research in African Literatures* 39.1 (February 2008): 149-165.
- Gibson, James L. "The Contributions of Truth to Reconciliation: Lessons From South Africa." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50.3 (June 2006): 409-432.
- Gobodo-Madikizela, Pumla. "Healing the Racial Divide: Personal Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission." *South African Journal of Psychology* 27.4 (December 1997): 271-272.
- Gordimer, Nadine. *Living in Hope and History: Notes from Our Century*. London: Bloomsbury, 1999.
- Gordimer, Nadine. *The House Gun*. London: Bloomsbury, 1999.
- Gordimer, Nadine. "The Moment Before the Gun Went Off." In: *The Norton Antology of English Literature*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. 8th ed. Vol. 1. London: Norton & Company, 2006. 2575-2578.
- Graham, Lucy Valerie. "Reading the Unspeakable: Rape in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29.2 (June 2003): 433-444.
- Gready, Paul. "Novel Truths: Literature and Truth Commissions." *Comparative Literature Studies*, 46.1 (2009): 156-176.
- Hamber, Brandon. "Have No Doubt It Is Fear in the Land: An Exploration of the Continuing Cycles of Violence in South Africa." *Zeitschrift für Politische Psychologie* 7 (1999): 113-128.
- Hamber, Brandon. "The Burdens of Truth: An Evaluation of the Psychological Support Services and Initiatives Undertaken by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission." *American Imago* 55.1 (1998): 9-28.

ths: *Facing the Challenge of Truth Commissions*. New

- Hever, Hannan. "Facing *Disgrace*: Coetzee and the Israeli Intellectual." *Scrutiny* 2 7.1 (2002): 42-46.
- Horrell, Georgina. "J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*: One Settler, One Bullet and the 'New South Africa'." *Scrutiny* 2 7.1 (2002): 25-32.
- Killam, Douglas. *Literature of Africa*. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004.
- Kamwangamalu, Nkonko M. "Ubuntu in South Africa: A Sociolinguistic Perspective To a Pan-African Concept." *Critical Arts* 13.2 (1999): 24-41.
- Kosew, Sue. "Something Terrible Happened: Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun* and the Politics of Violence and Recovery in Post-Apartheid South Africa." In: *Re-imagining Africa: New Critical Perspectives*. Eds. Sue Kosew and Dianne Schwerdt. Michigan: Nova Publishers, 2001. 133-164.
- Kosew, Sue. "The Politics of Shame and Redemption in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*." *Research in African Literatures* 34.2 (Summer 2003): 155-162.
- Krog, Antjie. *Country of My Skull*. London: Vintage Books, 1999.
- Laakso, Jen. "In Pursuit of Truth, Justice and Reconciliation: The Truth Commissions of East Timor and South Africa." *Social Alternatives* 22.2 (April 2003): 48-54.
- Llewellyn, Jennifer J. Howse, Robert. "Institutions for Restorative Justice: The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission." *University of Toronto Law Journal* 49 (1999): 355-389.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. "The Truth According to the TRC." In: *The Politics of Memory: Truth, Healing, and Social Justice*. Eds. Ifi Amadiume and Abdullahi A. An-Na'im. London: Zed Books, 2000.
- Medalie, David. "The Context of the Awful Event: Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 25.4 (December 1999): 633-644.
- Meiring, Piet. "The Baruti versus the Lawyers: The Role of Religion in the TRC Process." In: "Healing the Nation": Medicolonial Discourse and the State of Emergency from Apartheid to Truth and Reconciliation. Ed. Giuliana Lund. *Cultural Critique* 54 (Spring 2003): 88-119.
- Miller, Ana. "The Past in the Present: Personal and Collective Trauma in Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*." *Studies in the Novel* 40.1 (March 2008): 146-160.
- Minow, Martha. "Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission." *Negotiation Journal* 14.4 (October 1998): 319-355.
- Moffett, Helen. "These Women, They Force Us to Rape Them: Rape as Narrative of Social

- Møller, Valerie. "Quality of Life In South Africa: Post-Apartheid Trends." *Social Indicators Research* 43 (1998): 27-68.
- Møller, Valerie, et al. "South Africa's 'Rainbow People': National Pride and Happiness." *Social Indicators Research* 47 (1999): 245-280.
- Nagy, Rosemary. "The Ambiguities of Reconciliation and Responsibility in South Africa." *Political Studies* 52 (2004): 709-727.
- Poyner, Jane. "Truth and Reconciliation in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*." *Scrutiny* 2 5.2 (2000): 67-77.
- Posel, Deborah. "History as Confession: The Case of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission." *Public Culture* 20.1 (2008): 119-141.
- Quayson, Ato. "Symbolization Compulsion: Testing a Psychoanalytical Category on Postcolonial African Literature." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 73.2 (Spring 2004): 754-772.
- Ross, Fiona C. "The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission On Having Voice and Being Heard: Some After-Effects of Testifying Before." *Anthropological Theory* 3 (2003): 325-341.
- Sanders, Mark. "Disgrace." *Interventions* 4.3 (2002): 363-373.
- Sarkin, Jeremy. *Carrots and Sticks: The TRC and the South African Amnesty Process*. Antwerp: Intersentia, 2004.
- Saunders, Rebecca. "Disgrace in the Time of a Truth Commission." *Parallax* 11.3 (2005): 99-106.
- Schaffer, Kay. Smith, Sidonie. "Human Rights, Storytelling, and the Position of the Beneficiary: Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*." *PLMA* 121.5 (October 2006): 1577-1584.
- Segall, Kimberly Wedeven. "Pursuing Ghosts: The Traumatic Sublime in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*." *Research in African Literatures* 36.4 (Winter 2005): 40-54.
- Shore, Megan. Kline, Scott. "The Ambiguous Role of Religion in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission." *Peace & Change* 31.3 (July 2006): 309-332.
- Stobie, Cheryl. "Discourses of Alterity in Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*." In: *The Changing Face of African Literature*. Eds. Bernard de Meyer and Neil ten Kortenaar. New York: Rodopi, 2009. 167-177.
- Stobie, Cheryl. "Representations of 'the Other Side' in Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*." *Scrutiny* 2 12.1 (May 2007): 63-76.

[Click Here to upgrade to  
Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

usive Bodies: Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*.  
(2005). 17 Sep. 2009.

<http://postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/view/436/836>.

Vora, Jay A. Vora, Erika. "The Effectiveness of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Perceptions of Xhosa, Afrikaner, and English South Africans." *Journal of Black Studies* 34.3 (January 2004): 301-322.

Williams, David R., et al. "The Impact of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Psychological Distress and Forgiveness in South Africa." *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 43.6 (June 2008): 462-468.