

## Truth as Spectacle, and Spectacle as the Inversion of Life Suffering Women, Prisoners to the Dream of Romance and Reconciliation

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### ABSTRACT

Blurring the boundaries between ethnography, fiction, and literature, this essay explores the crisis of representation through literary works of post-Apartheid South Africa: Antjie Krog's (1998) 'Country Of My Skull', and Njabulo S. Ndebele's (2006) 'The Cry Of Winnie Mandela'. Each text aims to provide a platform for testimony, record experiences of oppression, suffering, and injustice, and destabilize power imbalances; tasks which are frequently relevant to ethnographies. The authorial voice and form of their delivery, however, risks instantiating other power hierarchies and the rhetorical mechanisms that continually cast the symbolic image of suffering women as victims absent of agency. This analysis strives to highlight important hazards and power dynamics inherent to the representation of suffering and violence to offer critical insights for anthropological accounts.

### 1. Introduction

The simultaneous need for truth and reconciliation, and the impossibility of adequately recording suffering, presents a fundamental tension in representation. Invariably falling short of equivalence, representations consist of "a complex set of relations between the visible and invisible, the visible and speech, the said and the unsaid" (Rancier 2008, 92). Trauma itself is instantiated by silence, so any rendition of it involves translation, interpretation, and invention; imposing the 'crisis of representation' (Marcus & Fischer 1986) that shadows anthropology, philosophy, and literature alike. Still, paradoxically, "The force of the silence that translates the unrepresentability of the event exists only through its representation" (Rancier 2008, 92) posing the need to record the impossible. This essay draws on literary accounts of the trauma following South Africa's Apartheid, from Antjie Krog's (1998) 'Country Of My Skull', and Njabulo S. Ndebele's (2006) 'The Cry Of Winnie Mandela', to inform a critique of anthropological methods, and attend to the problem of representing suffering in ethnography, following in the historical trend of anthropology learning from literature.

The issues raised are 'incitements': intended to disrupt the "rhetoric, and politics of established representational forms" (Clifford & Marcus, 1986, 25) to pursue their further exploration. Krog and Ndebele's narratives provide worthwhile points for investigation, considering each of their efforts at leveraging the restorative power of narrative to recover truths, destabilize power, and advance reconciliation: undertakings which are commendable and frequently aspired to in ethnographies. The representation of women in both texts exhibits some risks of ethnographic authority by freezing character types and providing interpretations that may be unfaithful to the subjects' lived realities. The divisions of genres between literature, fiction, and ethnography are thereby productively eroded, revealing fundamental similarities in invention, interpretation, and narration. These authors employ techniques of multivocality, experimental writing, inter-textual narratives, and auto-ethnographic reflections which offer critical insights to anthropological accounts. In this essay I turn to literary accounts in an attempt to expose gaps in ethnographic practice, with the hope that valuable contemplations on *truth*, *reconciliation*, *representation*, and *power* can be recovered.

The tenuous balance inherent to representing the suffering of others submits the storyteller, reader, and subject to many dangers: there is no neutral or objective representation, any reiteration involves mediation, emphasis, and erasure. This demands a reckoning of how identities and power are implicated through

compositions. Both Krog and Ndebele set out with the admirable task of elevating the voices of victims and presenting the grievances of those most oppressed by Apartheid, in particular Black women, to shift *dispositifs* (Foucault, 1977) —the constitutive structures of knowledge, institutions, and legal apparatuses that uphold systems of power. Ironically, they use their own notoriety and positions, as a White woman and a Black man, for this effort; oscillating uneasily between the inside and outside of the perspectives that they are representing. Knowledge production consists of and constitutes power, so the elevation and representation of certain perspectives to address a power imbalance also runs the risk of reinforcing hierarchies. And yet, as Philippe Bourgois has warned, “radical deconstructionism makes it impossible to categorize or prioritize experiences of injustices and oppression” (Bourgois, 2002, 80), an effort which is particularly crucial in moments of profound injustice and attempted erasure.

In moments of systemic oppression, state brutality trickles down and accumulates, disproportionately affecting those in already subaltern positions —Black women in the case of South Africa’s Apartheid. Women are often used symbolically to express national identities, honor, measure the extent of oppression, freedom, or resistance of a country, and inspire a sense of loyalty and protection. Stories of women are therefore convenient to inspiring national integrity: a relevant and urgent task in post-Apartheid South Africa as the country tries to clarify historical narratives, and reimagine and refashion a collective identity. The faithful Penelope, waiting for the return of Odysseus for 20 years, inspires stories of patience, loyalty, and forbearance. Those who wield symbolic control over women risk substantiating the power discrepancies that continually recast them as victims, disregarding their individualities, struggles, and agencies.

Krog and Ndebele each attempt to recover historical dimensions through the voices of women victims with the aim of redefining a national identity and imagining, articulating, and designing a future for the country that they want. Ndebele describes this as a ‘dialectical’ approach to writing history, expressing the dynamic nature of past events and their effects on the present political moment. He advocates for the reclamation of past narratives through a ‘fluid’ realism that he calls ‘ordinariness’ (Ndebele, 1991): a kind of fictional realism that attempts to unearth the society that *should be* out of the society that *is*. This spirit resembles the ‘striving as becoming’ that Naveeda Khan describes in its constructive tendency towards experimenting with “temporal registers of possible pasts and futures” (2012, 1). Ndebele positions this genre of historical fiction striving as a “living example of people reinventing themselves through narrative” that rises to the challenge of resisting the “epistemological structures” of Apartheid, ‘freeing’ and ‘invigorating’ the social imagination (Medalie, 2006, 52). To this end, Ndebele aims at a kind of ‘Radical hope’: crafting something that can not yet be articulated within current epistemological or linguistic configurations (Lear, 2006). This exercise involves reshaping, envisioning, and preparing for the desired social state. This subtle act of agency through fiction refuses to entirely compose itself to current social, cultural, or political constraints and instead invites a leap in imagination (Medalie, 2006, 54).

But ‘The Cry of Winnie Mandela’, falls short of unearthing this new order; while Ndebele illustrates the womens’ solidarity and gestures at its potential force, he remains more focused on the victimhood that unites them. He stages the stories of ‘Penelope’s descendants’: four women who have been left by their husbands during Apartheid, and Winnie Madikezela Mandela. Their stories are ultimately structured to foreground the painful absence of their husbands, and the end address by Mandela reiterates the significance of their shared loneliness, framing it as part of their sacrifice to fighting Apartheid. This ultimately infantilizes and diminishes Mandela’s other political, intellectual, and cultural struggles in dismantling Apartheid. Ndebele’s narrative exhibits the risk of ethnographic authority that interprets and represents the perspectives of subjects in ways that are unfaithful to

their lived realities. Although he makes a valuable attempt at highlighting the so often invisible domestic and emotional labour that make political struggles possible, in his misappropriation of it, he does a disservice to both men and women. These narratives infantilize women and exclude them from the other struggles against apartheid, and leave men to bear risks alone. As Khan cautions, this experimentation “means also attending to the risks courted by such becoming, notably the risk of alienation from one’s world or the estrangement of others within it” (2012, 7). Indeed, both authors maintain an alienating distance that deprives an important intersubjectivity, and in their preoccupation with historical and future registers neglect certain obligations to their present subjects. While the orientation of their texts make it clear that they feel committed to rectifying the injustices that they detail, they fall short of opening avenues for true emancipation.

In Ndebele’s writing, the details of the womens’ narratives seem at times realistic, but the use of an omnipresent intertextual narrative removes the novel from the conventions of realism; it is at once realistic and clearly fictionalized. He uses the stories to highlight the womens’ disparate responses to similar states of loneliness and frustration after being left, abandoned, or betrayed by their husbands. This range of characters reads as an effort to complicate a homogenous or stereotypical notion of victimhood. By privileging the women’s perspectives, Ndebele compels his audience to sympathize with them and attend to their side of the story. He features their internal lives, dialogues with one another, and descriptions of their conditions in a valuable effort to be sensitive and empathetic. This mode of address offers insights on the internal reasoning and lives of the subjects, and displays an irony at the heart of ethnography, of attempting to render the unfamiliar, familiar. This inversion simultaneously offers the most moral potential and most liability (Appadurai, 1988). At times, Ndebele’s attempt to familiarize the women and draw on the readers’ empathy assumes an unchecked license over their supposed internal states.

Krog, by contrast, inserts self-reflective accounts in her journalistic account. She positions herself in the narrative observing, recording, and reiterating the testimonies at the Truth Commission, punctuating the report with reflections on her own fraught, contentious position as an Afrikaner, a poet, and a reporter, and the morally loaded implications that each of those identities entail. She writes, “I look at the leader in front of me, an Afrikaner leader. And suddenly I know: I have more in common with the Vlakplaas five than with this man”; We are so utterly sorry. We are deeply ashamed and gripped with remorse. But hear us, we are from here. We will live it right -here - with you, for you” (125). In reading these reflections from a settler colonial state that continues to prosper off the erasure and oppression of its Indigenous inhabitants, I feel suspended with Krog in these moments of culpability and moral weight. She declines to offer comfort or conclusions, instead leaving the reader to ‘sit’ in moments of ‘confused moralities’ (295) with her. The implication here is that continual revision and engagement with these questions is vital, and that these grievances will not be reconciled or rectified in a way that is satisfying for the settlers’ moral identity. And yet that “[f]or all its failures, [South Africa] carries a flame of hope that makes me proud to be from here, of here” (364). Krog calls on us to not cower from the discomforts that these engagements demand, but to work continuously for imperfect improvements. These techniques of autoethnography are one of the biggest strengths of the text. Krog is critically self-reflexive and conflicted in a moving and intimate prose. They also, however, present new hazards. At times these techniques undermine the profundity of suffering that she is trying to convey. Her discomfort is brought to the fore, while the testimonies are aggregated to the background (see Laura Moss 2006). Throughout the text, she slips uneasily between a reporters’ authoritative voice, poetry, national allegory, and personal reflection, and is often ambivalent as to how her readers should be interpreting the text: as a memoir, political journalism, historical documentation, or a fictionalized interpretation.

In a journalistic tone, Krog provides a more explicit platform for the voices of victims, delivering them in uninterrupted sequence and often, presumably, verbatim. In chapter sixteen, 'Truth is A Woman', Krog hosts a series of testimonies delivered by women from Mdantsane as they detail intensely brutal personal accounts of violence, sexual violence, and rape. In this section, she foregrounds voices that have been neglected or marginalized for so long and systematically denied—through various, violent personal and political mechanisms—the capacity to speak for themselves. By privileging the victims' accounts in the first person, Krog again puts the reader momentarily in a position of complicity, as though they are being addressed directly by the victims. This is an evocative, unsettling technique which elicits discomfort in a clear demand that readers confront, and be affected by, the testimonies. It also, however, momentarily removes Krog's 'interpretation' and seems to offer verisimilitude, uncontaminated and unhampered by her mediation. This form of direct anecdotal evidence to support claims to capture other places, stories, perspectives, and voices is characteristic of what Arjun Appadurai describes as Anthropology's special brand of "double ventriloquism" (1988, 16) which, as he insists, "needs constant examination" (1988, 20). To be clear, the truth of these women's stories is not what requires scrutiny, but rather Krog's political leveraging of them, which gets eclipsed by the format in which they're delivered. Similar to any ethnography, Krog's account is necessarily an interpretation, and it is her responsibility as an author to maintain clarity over that fact.

The testimonies she chooses to frame and the length she lends them are necessarily, directed by her account and agenda. She attempts to provide a transparent medium for these narratives, but eventually invokes the same "analytical inventiveness of [anthropologists]" (Appadurai, 1988) and grasps at an objective voice that abstracts and generalizes over its subjects in an aim to partially free itself from the confines of its present. Thus the 'dilemmas of place' that Appadurai describes play out in spatiotemporal compression, beyond 'talking and listening' to 'reading and writing' as Krog's dialogue is precariously positioned between her accountability to subjects and readers across time and space, and impossibly tries to fulfill dues to each simultaneously. Although she is clear-eyed and genuine about her own position, these obligations at times require her to be more transparent in her interpretive strategy in order to avoid "the illusion of the panopticon" (Appadurai, 1988, 20).

While the perspectives of victims are temporarily elevated they remain ultimately sidelined to Krog's personal account and her psychological development of the perpetrators. There is very little information revealed about any of the women, effectively categorizing and essentializing their identities. The flattening of victims' stories throughout the text is eventually disconcerting. It dismisses them as subjects, continuing to deprive them of the agency they were denied in the initial encounter, and thereby extinguishing potentials for emancipation. Krog's elaboration on their lives and backgrounds is sparse, and when evident, it generally serves to illustrate them as victims. The exception of Rita Mazibuko proves the rule: "The picture of Rita Mazibuko in her brown dress, beige cardigan, and neatly knotted kopek is in stark contrast with her story of rape, torture, and rejection" (Krog, 1998, 240). The 'stark contrast' that Krog observes in Rita's inconsistency here proves that Krog is receiving the testimonies expectantly: presupposing the individuals' victimhood, as well as relying on a typology of rape victims. Krog, unlike Ndebele, offers little speculation to the victims' psychological state, in effect rounding them out considerably less than she does the characters of the perpetrators.

Her conjecture over the perpetrators' psychology punctuates the book. She speculates on their states of trauma, the accuracy of their memories, and (dis)honesty, pleading at one point "[h]elp me make sense of the five cops" (125). As she reveals, the doubt over their psychological states presents concerns for the committee since it is unclear whether perpetrators are 'genuinely traumatized' or



‘deliberately hiding information’ (125). Officer Benzien for instance, gets described as “a victim of his inhumane working conditions” who “suffers from a severe form of self-loathing” (98). The schizophrenic state of another perpetrator, Eliot, is also a source of debate as it seemed to have been ‘under control’ but ‘erupted’ following his arrest, making him less fit for testimony (277). Krog limits any similar analysis on the internal lives and psychology of the victims, seemingly out of respect and ethical diligence. I appreciate this reluctance and recognize that internal speculation and psychoanalysis is unwelcome and unfit here. However, at times this does result in the stories of victims having very little individual shape.

The successive summaries of victims’ stories abandon the reader with the challenge of picking up the pieces, making sense of them, and refining the characters in their own imaginations. In representing the perpetrators and victims through unequal psychological development, she makes a disquieting implication: there is less at stake to be understood and developed; the victims’ stories are ultimately of less interest and less complexity than that of their perpetrators; and their psychological state is damned, universal, and interchangeable. As Laura Moss contends (2006), this effectively, silently, works to maintain the inequality of the traumatic events to which they have just testified.

I do not consider this intentional on Krog’s part. In fact, I suspect that she was attuned to this potential implication but considered the hazards of unsolicited psychological analysis greater, and saw the need for an analysis of the perpetrators that could be fulfilled by someone in her position. From an ethnographic perspective, I think what is missing in Krog’s account is a more explicit acknowledgment of this imbalance, and the ethical reasoning that undergirds it.

Krog presents many of the atrocities voiced in the context of the commission, sometimes choosing to close them in quotation marks, and other times leaving them up to the reader to frame. In her imitation of the structure-less, fragmented, abrupt nature of the commission, she also allows the testimonies to be ‘derailed’ by external discussions. This gives the impression that Krog, along with the commission and present psychologists, are in the practice of intellectualizing over these accounts. Dwelling on seemingly simple questions like :“What is rape?”, reflecting on men’s unwillingness to use the word when they testify, or exploring the “ambiguity surrounding sexual torture” (1998, 239-240). While these subjects are indeed of interest and deserving of public discourse, they are in this case, perhaps ill-timed. They read to me in this form—as someone who did not live through Apartheid nor attend through the seven years of the Truth Commissions—as preemptively distanced and dispassionate considering the vulnerability being demanded by those testifying. These interruptions invite the reader to undertake the same exercise: applying misplaced semantic musings, meticulous analytics, distanced discourse, and generalizations as they overhear the testimonies.

The repetitive, sequential reiteration of the stories in both texts also threatens to amalgamate the voices into a one-dimensional character, and reduce individual testimonies into a pattern. Krog assimilates testimonies into a repertoire of trauma rhetoric, which she uses to her literary advantage in order to make a moral and political statement. The overall, final effect of each text is to ratify the embodied symbol of a suffering woman: in Krog’s case a woman victim, and in Ndebele’s case the revival of Homer’s Ulysses’ ideal of a lonely woman in waiting. In the nature of their delivery, both texts invite their readers to draw parallels and similarities in the women’s accounts, categorize, and theorize over them. In this sense, the representations of the women are problematic as they reinforce the women as objects to be examined, studied, and fit into larger trends, perpetuating a degree of symbolic violence, subjugation, and erasure of identity that produced and naturalized some of the atrocities in the first place. Ethnographies conducted from institutionalized settings need to be particularly vigilant against the risks of maintaining power asymmetries in research. We can not be justice oriented and

continue to leave the exploitative means of knowledge production intact. This is a call then, to interrogate the scaffolding of knowledge production that is rooted in systemic injustices.

In this light I would like to raise a similar objection to each of their narrative techniques which risk employing testimonies as timeless metaphors for humanity. In Krog's aim to reflect on the larger political context she illustrates an archetype of women's suffering, and in Ndebele's aim to complicate a stereotype he inadvertently relies on other parables, both of which support a more general theme of victimhood. The value of this endeavor is debatable. The legitimacy of the women's status as victims is not in question or under scrutiny; the extent of their suffering is indubitably valid. To be sure, uncovering these narratives and making a space for them to be revealed was an important effort of the Truth Commission, but is arguably less so in literature that sets out to reimagine a different national identity and status for women. Ethnography often alleges to address the daunting double task of providing historical record and an emancipatory analysis. The effort at this point should be directed to empowering them as survivors and creating places for them to regain agency and respect, rather than to dwell on their victimhood. In fact, dwelling on their victimhood, in both cases, is inconvenient to this now more pressing and relevant objective. Medalie draws on Ndebele's (1991) text, 'Rediscovery of the ordinary', to offer that:

Some of the keenest expressions of the suffering produced by apartheid, he [Ndebele] suggests, may for all their sincerity and good intentions, lead to an obfuscation of the conditions that produce that suffering, even as they are it is impossible to envisage (and thus work towards) a viable alternative:

The oppressed need only cast their eyes around to see a universal confirmation of their status. ... The mere pointing of a finger provides proof. In this situation, the rhetorical identification of a social and political evil may easily become coincident with political and intellectual insight. (Rediscovery 61-62)

(Medalie, 2006, 52, on Ndebele, 1991, 61)

Krog's personal political imperatives ultimately mediate and frame the testimonies, so her retelling of them is crafted by a specific agenda. What is missing in this account is awareness and transparency over her interpretation, and clarity and sincerity to her reader audience. She stages stories that are deeply private and arguably not desired to be public, as Mthintso reveals: "While writing this speech, I realized how unready I am to talk about my experience in South African jails and ANC camps abroad. Even now, despite the general terms in which I have chosen to speak, I feel exposed and distraught" (Krog, 1998, 236). This form of incidental coercion of the exploitation of information not intended to be public, amounts to a kind of 'symbolic violence' which Paul Rabinow writes "is inherent in the structure of the situation" of 'field experience' (1977, 130). Krog's decision to include these accounts anyways raises significant concerns over the issue of consent. She assumes no small amount of authority and power in staging these accounts, risking a troublesome breach of privacy. I think there is a sound criticism to be made of Krog for using these narratives to formulate a national allegory that is convenient to the dramatization and foregrounding of her own misgivings and guilt. And at times this personal imperative and agnostic process ultimately, ironically, relies on preserving the status of these women as victims.

Notwithstanding his aim to complicate the stereotype of a woman victim, Ndebele also conditions a 'type' of woman and woman experience among his characters. He may add nuance to aspects of their victimhood, but nevertheless perpetuates other assumptions of womanhood, sexuality, desire, and notions of a *woman in waiting*. Given that this is a work of fiction, Ndebele wields full control

over the representation, development, and impressions of each character. This incidentally highlights some risks of ethnographic authority that objectify in the attempt to excavate patterns. By drawing out their differences he accentuates the similarities that string all of their narratives together. He maintains the focus on their separation, “their unending spells of anxiety, loneliness, longing, wishing, desiring, hoping, doubting” wherein “day to day life becomes an effort of continuance: endurance without consolation” (Ndebele, 2004, 7). Ndebele presents Winnie announcing that “Departure. Waitings. Returns.” are the “three pillars of a South African woman’s life” (Ndebele, 2004, 104) declaring with undue conviction that these features define and structure their lives. He proceeds to group them into the congregation offering that “Yes, there’s something generic about them” (Ndebele, 2004, 39) and draws out their commonalities as if they represent the experience of a contained, coherent demographic. Although there is surely an element of truth to this generalization, reenactments and representations of it only serve to entrench its effects, demonstrating the liability of ethnography to exert demographic typologies and historical suspension. This form wields the performative power of language described by John Austin (1950), to create tangible effects through *affective utterances*, in effect crafting the conditions and subjects it describes. Ndebele is not merely describing the women’s circumstances, but reenacting and reconstructing them: puppeteering their performances and formations.

Ndebele describes the women, first and foremost, in terms of men in their lives. The first, second, and fourth descendants’ stories start explicitly with their relations to men: “A woman lives with her husband” (Ndebele, 2004, 36); “A man of thirty five obtains a scholarship to go overseas to study to become a doctor. He leaves behind his beautiful young wife” (Ndebele, 2004, 17); and “Lejone Mofolo finally yields to strong pressures to leave his family” (Ndebele, 2004, 10). Through each representation Ndebele naturalizes the state of the domestic sphere: every scenario involves the woman staying and waiting at home, looking after children, and keeping the house. While he describes each of their husbands leaving for political, economic, or educational reasons, he effectively denies women access to any of those realms. By contrast, he promotes associations with an aloof, homey comfort: “she remembers only the floating feeling, the medium of forgetfulness and shelter”; “she has skills that enable her to make extra money: catering at weddings and parties, sewing, knitting. It keeps her going.” (Ndebele, 2004, 16-17). Even in his representation of Winnie, he accentuates the domestic aspects of her life and her relationship with Nelson. He doesn’t hesitate to depict Winnie’s internal state as she reflects on Nelson’s influence: “I’m truly reminded of the power of things unseen: like my husband, in his absence. Not seen, but there. Making me do things. Working inside of me. Taking control” (Ndebele, 2004, 102). In the delivery of each story, he represents the woman’s husbands as a centrifugal force in their lives; bequeathing them with meaning and fulfillment, or a solidarity in their founded and common lack thereof.

Ndebele also conjures up the women for the most part as being pathological and miserable. He articulates a consistently unflattering state in his subjects, which Medalie describes as a “morbid and claustrophobic subjectivity”; “they seem condemned to return obsessively to it in ways which suggest a disabling sensitivity, a form of subjectivity grown pathological” (Medalie, 2006, 57). This overwrought, self-reflective, self-loathing subject is evident in the expression of fourth descendant, Mara, being “disgusted with herself” after her husband dies, reconciling with the fact that “he had become a rag towards which she no longer felt any emotion. But dare she articulate this truth? In time, she couldn’t even say it to herself.” (Ndebele, 2004, 37-38). Her self-deprecation, shame, and denial emerge from an intense, but irrational loyalty and longing that Ndebele bestows in all the women characters: ‘driven’ by a common “blind but determined hope” (2004, 14). Similarly, the third descendant Mamello Molete, concludes “perhaps I’m just

jealous. Another feature of my insanity”; “I’m fine, but insane” (Ndebele, 2004, 34-35). These representations of psychiatric subjects wield what Foucault described as the ‘microphysics’ of power that illustrate insane subjects: this works to simultaneously relay Ndebele’s power and undermines the women’s’. In this rendition they do not have clear access on their own psychiatric states, as Foucault describes, the constitution of madness “bears witness to a rupture in a dialogue” so psychiatric language invariably involves “a monologue by reason about madness” (Foucault, 1961: xxvii) fixing Ndebele as the *reasonable* and the women as the *mad*.

Ndebele speculates freely on all of their internal states, lending a transparency to each of their characters. He doesn’t hesitate to depict them as tortured by compulsion and desire, irretrievably miserable. He only privileges Mamello and Winnie’s narrative in the first person. On one hand this lends them an increased internal complexity and subjectivity, and on the other it is exploitative in an ultimately invasive narrative authority. Ndebele uses the first person for each of these women to convey his own interpretation of their internal afflictions and distress under a more credible prose. He writes Marara arguing to her fellow descendants that: “our conversations are the most wonderful thing that ever happened to us” (Ndebele, 2004, 43). This reinforces the otherwise miserable state that he has subjected them to and solidifies the idea that the only possible sense of fulfillment and purpose in their lives is contingent on men, or the lamentation and solidarity over their absence. This statement also implies that things happen *to* them which again, serves to deny them agency even within their own stories. The omnipresent delivery of the texts also works to subject the women to a kind of narrative determinism: stifling their resistance as “they strain at the writer’s leash, wanting to assume individuality of character” (Ndebele, 2004, 40). The representation of women as psychologically, financially, and emotionally dependent on the men in their lives and pathological, self-contradictory, and self-deprecating themselves, through the use of a deterministic meta-narrative, ultimately serves to undermine their characters and deny them any agency as subjects. Ndebele fails to offer any ways in which power discrepancies between genders might be addressed or rectified. His representation eventually serves to fix his subjects in an alternative status of victimhood. Similarly, his literary aim to create a malleable, provisional, imaginative space for reclamation is undermined by his perpetuation of other patriarchal tropes. Krog similarly casts a permanent and immobilizing state of victimhood over her subjects through her cursory and successive representation.

Throughout each of the authors’ representations of suffering, and attempts to disrupt and shift power, they neglect to interrogate their own positions or agendas or leave room for their subjects to reclaim any agency. This complacency calls for a close critique of representations that arise from a fundamentally unequal power encounter and inadvertently work to maintain it. In their endeavours for justice and emancipatory literature, Krog and Ndebele are subject to many of the same hazards of ethnography - from historical suspension, demographic typologies, complacency to the asymmetries of knowledge production, and exertion of ethnographic authority - and provide valuable lessons for Anthropology accordingly. This rehearsal of critical theory to literary works is intended to clarify potential risks of representation and anticipate how they might be circumvented. This follows the important recognition that each of these authors had ethical and historical motivations that should continue to be aspired to in ethnographies, but which require constant revision. The questions and cautions I raise throughout this essay are necessarily partial and ongoing, but nonetheless indicate a commitment to continue crafting more emancipatory methods of representation for anthropology.



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