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## An analysis of the effects of history in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission poetry

**Magezi Mabunda** 

Department of English Studies, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

**Cindy Ramhurry** 

Department of Languages, Cultural Studies and Applied Linguistics (LanCSAL), University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

cindyr@uj.ac.za

Scholars raise 2 salient questions regarding poetry in post-apartheid South Africa. One is whether new poetry emerged in the post-apartheid South Africa, and the other is whether poetry produced during and after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is capable of capturing the imagination of the reading public without resorting to the bigotry of Black versus White. Literature highlights the need for South African poets to move away from using historical facts as the basis for making literary representation. We acknowledge that the use of historical facts as the basis for literary representation of societies may be seen as insensitive to the victims of the injustices of the past practices in highly politically polarised communities. At the same time, we argue that historical narratives with positive ideological intent can heal wounds and unite a nation. To justify this position, we adopted a 2-fold perspective: firstly, we investigated the effects of using history as the basis for literary representation and, secondly, we examined the extent to which post-apartheid South African poets may use history as a necessary tool to enforce unity and a sense of forgiveness.

**Keywords:** apartheid; forgiveness; poetry; racism; truth

### Introduction and Background

The debate on whether history serves as the basis for literary representation has long preoccupied the minds of critics. Before the Dutch settlers came to South Africa, there was a significant black presence, history, and culture. The original San hunter-gatherer groups inhabited the southern regions of Africa long before the arrival of the Europeans (Adhikari, 2010:21). Although different theories exist regarding the San people's arrival in Africa, there is agreement that they were the first ethnic group to interact with the Dutch. The colonial control that came along with South Africa's occupation by the Dutch, led to the decimation of African societies through land expropriation, massacres, forced labour and cultural repression (Adhikari, 2010:19).

These discrete narratives collectively mythologised into a grand narrative of common experience (Brink, 1998; Moslund, 2003). It also served to portray the subsequent demarcations between the races as authentic and primordial (Brink, 1998; Moslund, 2003). In this case, the ideological intent in the use of history developed into a collective account of the past that went beyond descriptions or evaluations of the past. It developed into an account which reinterpreted the past in a moral way describing it in terms of an opposing framework of agents of good and agents of evil. Contrary to the above, we share the view of Pring-Mill (1987) who argues that literary writing is not designed merely to serve as a tool for political condemnations and resistance to political oppression between two opposing forces. Rather, it ought to be regarded as an artistic expression capable of projecting hope for the day when the oppression will be no more. We further contend that ignoring this fact restricts the scope of creative expression in the sense that poets, for example, may be forced to conform to specific ideological standards for validation. Poets should instead frame their poetry in nuanced ways, thereby acknowledging the complexity of social matters and opening up spaces for poetic expression which work to challenge dominant narratives and promote social change.

Historical evidence regarding Black poetry in South Africa produced during apartheid reveals a considerable attempt by contemporary poets to bear witness to, and document, the historical facts of the country's political events. We argue that such an approach to artistic representation presents Black South African poets as literary artists with a desperate need to articulate an alternative politics for the Black majority whom apartheid barred from access to democratic representation (Ndebele, 1994, 2006; Nkosi, 1981). This tendency, furthermore, branded Black poets under the rule of apartheid as artists significantly preoccupied with the polarised conflict of the people versus the state (Moslund, 2003).

Those who have written about the nature of artistic works produced by Black writers during apartheid, argue that they mainly told stories reflecting the deficiencies of a Black literary practice that prioritised documentation (For example, Ndebele, 2006 & Nkosi, 1981). They argue that South African literature produced by Black writers during apartheid "exploits the ready-made plots of racial violence, social apartheid, interracial love affairs which are doomed from the beginning, without any attempt to transcend or transmute these given 'social facts' into artistically persuasive works of fiction" (Nkosi, 1981:146). This perception challenges claims by literary critics such as Mutloatse (1988), Mzamani (1977) and Seroke (1988), all of whom argue that Black South African artists need a writing that records the situation within which they find themselves. Clearly, for these scholars, Black poetry, which centralised apartheid in South Africa, furthered the political objectives of the Black majority who suffered political injustices.

Various scholars discourage the use of history as the basis for representation because it bears the potential of setting communities against each other in destructive and violent ways. Moslund (2003:27), for example, describes this as an act of “splitting the population into fixed categories of *Us* versus *Them*.” Such scholars warn us to use history in poetry with sensitivity. Their argument is that when history in poetry is used to reiterate myths and stereotypes of the past, it merely serves as a validation of a society’s identity and becomes a way to reinforce past prejudices. Malkki (2012:36) explains this practice as a “mythico-history”, where “the past in some communities is ingeniously manipulated and the historical narrative exploited so as to legitimize the oppressive, aggressive or intolerant political practices, systems and ideas.” Scholars who concur encourage the use of history to study the intricacies and nuances of the past, in ways that challenge our assumptions and extends our understanding of history (Moslund, 2003). A sense is conveyed that poets should use history to illuminate the present or facilitate an engagement with contemporary issues. In this way, the varied perceptions and realities that have shaped the world, are duly acknowledged.

Contemporary poetry in South Africa remains under the influence of apartheid-era writing. As such, it bears the character of three dominant extremes: (a) it focuses heavily on political matters, (b) its scrutiny given to resisting oppression and, most importantly, (c) its preoccupation with race (Ndebele, 2006). This observation concurs with Nkosi’s (2002:253) assertion that the legacy of apartheid still shapes the thematic choices of South African literary artists. In his writing, Nkosi (2002) analyses texts that have been published after the end of apartheid, noting the preoccupation of Black and White writers with different themes. Nkosi notes that some “Black writers remain somewhat stunned by this sudden change, seeming for the most part without a subject...” (Nkosi, 2002:253). Other Black writers have focused on the way in which the past has shaped the present. Nkosi (2002:253) continues to point out that there are two predominant camps when it comes to White writers. One group wishes “to explore their own sense of guilt about the years of racial oppression carried out in their name” and others “who see the end of apartheid as the occasion for inventing Black villains whose function is to serve as pawns in a game in which roles are suddenly, conveniently, reversed.” Nkosi’s (2002:253) point is that the earlier “White exploiters are transformed suddenly, and for the occasion, into victims, and former Black victims become the new exploiters.” Nkosi’s (2002) observation highlights the difficulty that both Black and White poets face when they attempt to represent current issues without

exclusively drawing on historical facts and narratives.

In South Africa’s historically racially polarised period, literature often served the purpose of providing natives with an appreciation of the greatness of Western cultures. In a sense, it engaged them as grateful participants or as Culler (1997:36) puts it, a “historic civilizing enterprise.” From this perspective, poetry in South Africa “served to give the natives a stake in the culture that, materially, relegated them to subordinate position, encouraged disinterested appreciation and provided a sense of national greatness” (Culler, 1997:36). This view suggests that poetry served as a way to create a fellow feeling amid the classes. Its ultimate purpose was to replace religion, which appeared to be unable to create a togetherness in society.

In this article we raise the problem that poetry published in South Africa in the post-apartheid period does not appear to take into account the impact of historical facts as the signifiers of the power and influence on human behavior. We contend that we should produce poetry and consume it for itself, to enjoy and appreciate the literary creativity. Our aim, therefore, is to show how poetry produced in post-Apartheid South Africa can serve as a means of inspiration and a tool which fosters a greater sense of community. We aim to demonstrate how, through poetry, cultural traditions and histories can be documented and a sense of identity and pride can be promoted in local communities.

We further argue that as a developing economy, post-apartheid poetry may go beyond serving as a resource for political arguments and become a source of understanding humanity. We argue that, in an emerging economy that has witnessed a host of socio-political challenges, poetry is what can promote the voices of South African poets, helping to inform and educate global audiences about the history and culture of South Africa. Poetry provides global readers with the means to connect with others’ emotions and experiences in ways that are personal and meaningful. In a sense, a window is provided into experiences which are different to our own, facilitating new perspectives. In addition, the language and imagery of poetry can serve as effective tools by poets to create deep emotional impact, often enabling the bridging of cultural and linguistic barriers. In these ways, poetry may serve post-apartheid South Africa optimally in gaining empathy, understanding and compassion from a global audience.

#### Literature Review

The paradigm shift in African literature has undergone substantial scrutiny. For example,

Harrow (1993) critiques the use of history as the basis for literary narrative and representation of post-colonial communities. The above critique highlights the way in which literature is positioned in post-colonial societies, and on the authors' depiction of their cultural and historical experiences. Harrow (1993) advises a shift in focus of representing new social realities in poetry rather than remaining fixated on the past. Harrow (1993) insightfully provides South African poets with a range of new possibilities to focus on. These extend poetry which is ecologically sensitive to gender conscious.

Gikandi (2003) and Ndebele (2006) share Harrow's sentiment. Both writers argue for literature, in its various forms and genres, becoming contemplative and less reliant on totalising symbols of good and evil. This position calls for fiction to embrace the ordinary; to encourage analysis and inner thought; and, most importantly, to notice the details of life's processes. In Ndebele's (2006) view, such methods facilitate a significant growth in consciousness. This, according to Ndebele (2006:49), is how South African poets may shift the ideological intent in their use of history "from protest to benign poetry"—a "direct object of change."

Gikandi (2003) highlights the need to shift focus in poetic and/or literary representation in post-colonial societies. Ibinga (2006:para. 4) echoes this view pointing to a style of writing in South Africa called "honeymoon literature" or "a literature of celebration" which was typical after the decline of apartheid. He explains that a prominent feature of this writing was the way it praised the emergence of the "rainbow nation", a description subsequently given to the country's ideal of building multiracial harmony. The main emphasis in this form of literature, as exemplified by Athol Furgad's and Mbongeni Ngema's works, was to describe the feeling of euphoria after the official defeat of apartheid. This form of literature, Ibinga (2006:para. 4) argues, promotes "the themes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)" and was intended to encourage "forgiveness and reconciliation between the victims and perpetrators of violence." Ibinga (2006) confirms that since the fall of apartheid, South African literature reflects an awareness of an important shift in focus. Ibinga (2006:para. 12) asserts that the "rediscovery of the ordinary" through literature that Ndebele (2006:143) predicted, has become immediate. From this perspective, the post-apartheid Black poet had to start searching for a new voice while the White writer had to question the relevance of his or her voice within the national debate. This observation suggests that South African creative writing in all its types took a shift in focus, and writers realigned

their roles as literary artists in a democratic South Africa.

However, it is important to mention that much of post-apartheid poetry is still influenced by apartheid-era writing and is predominately characterised by features of apartheid such as racial and gender inequality and oppression. For example, novels such as Farrida Karodia's (2000) *Other Secrets* and JM Coetzee's (1999) *Disgrace* address the rape issue, a topic which still dominates public debate. Both writers position the topic of rape within the apartheid-era theme of racial determinism, in which the villains stand on the other side of a racial divide (Ibinga, 2006). Thus, despite the major socially and political changes that the country has undergone, the impact of apartheid is still very apparent in South African fiction.

Considering the above, we acknowledge that it is problematic to use historical facts and narratives as of basis of representing poetry. We acknowledge the compelling arguments of scholars such as Moslund (2003) and explores the use of history in poetry to illuminate the present and facilitate an engagement with contemporary issues. We use two poems as case studies to explore the question of whether contemporary poetry does forge a new reality.

### Methodology

To address the question of how poetry forges a new reality, we used a literary analytical approach. A critical analysis of the following two poems was conducted: *For All Voices, For All Victims*, by Antjie Krog and *The weeping: A pain that Heals*, by Ingrid de Kok (2002).

Lanham (1981) presents a compelling argument for the literary analytical approach when reading literary text. Lanham (1981) promotes this approach because it facilitates a critical engagement by readers where they employ cognitive strategies in cyclical processes to construct their own interpretations and meanings. In support of this approach, researchers such as Balfour (1998), Reid (1982) and Singh (2003) have also employed the literary analytical approach when dealing with literary art as a unit of analysis. Balfour (1998), for example, successfully conducts a literary analytical approach of *South African Short Stories* in Miriam Tlali's *Fud-u-u-a!!* (1989), *Violence* (1978), *Ahmed Essop*, and *The Sister* (1990) by Pauline Smith. In these cases, the literary analytical approach facilitated in-depth scrutiny of complex issues including such as patriarchy, oppression, poverty and gender stereotyping. The literary analytical approach fits well with our aims and purposes and is therefore used to analyse the selected set of poems.

We use selected poems as case studies because poetry is the ideal medium to understand a first-person experience of the trials in question. In

the words of Dlamini-Qwesha (2020:para.1), poetry can “capture intuitive nuances that ordinary language can constrain.” Apart from conveying the emotional experience involved, it also embodies the potential of literature in general to reconcile. As McWilliams (2004:9) writes, “...as we explore the complex elements of a poetic text, analysing them so that the text reveals itself, we as readers also reveal our own selves in all of our complexity and contradiction. This deep, intense focus that poetic works demand makes poetry the ideal genre for raising general awareness of both internal and external realities.” We also used poems as case studies because they embody historical values, “namely things related to a historical event, political value, which is related to a political issue and political development...” (Kasau, Maryaeni & Siswanto, 2020:726). In sum, we regard poetry as “a philosophical vehicle” (Khan, 2013:252), a means to convey an array of emotional states generated through South African history.

### Discussion

For All Voices, for All Victims by Antjie Krog  
[in response to stories at the TRC]

- 1) *But I want to put it more simply. I want this  
hand of mine to write*
- 2) *It. For us all; all voices, all victims:*
- 3) *because of you*
- 4) *this country no longer lies*
- 5) *between us but within*
- 6) *it breathes becalmed*
- 7) *after being wounded*
- 8) *in its wondrous throat*
- 9) *in the cradle of my skull*
- 10) *it sings, it ignites*
- 11) *my tongue, my inner ear, the cavity of my heart*
- 12) *shudders towards the outline*
- 13) *new in soft intimate clicks and gutturals*
- 14) *of my soul the retinal learns to expand*
- 15) *daily because by a thousand stories*
- 16) *I was scorched*
- 17) *a new skin.*
- 18) *I am changed for ever, I want to say:  
forgive me  
forgive me  
forgive me*
- 19) *You whom I have wronged, please*
- 20) *take me*
- 21) *With you.*

(Antjie Krog, 2013, in Carolin, 2014:6)

The poem, *For All Voices, For All Victims* (Krog, 2013, in Carolin, 2014:6), gives poetic expression to the painful experience of guilt felt by certain people in post-apartheid South Africa and the purgative effect of the TRC. The poet’s choice of words has a deeply therapeutic effect on the reader’s mind. She combines brevity and detail, giving the reader open access to her mind, enabling us to authentically connect with her. In post-apartheid South Africa, the TRC served as a platform for telling the truth and seeking forgiveness from those who had suffered from the

evils of the separatist regime. White amnesty applicants recounted their historical, personal involvement in the varieties of crimes committed against the Black victims. In this poem, Krog expresses her response to the testimonies relayed by the perpetrators of crime and offences against humanity in the TRC.

Krog’s poem embodies the vision of a new purged relationship with the victims of apartheid in South Africa. She does this through a skilful interplay between the three pronouns: “us”, “I” and “you” (Krog, 2013:lines 1–3). She gives herself agency in “I” to represent the voices of the victims, in a sense bringing “us” together as a collective. The poet’s choice of the pronoun “you” (Krog, 2013:line 21) suggests the external factor – the cause of the pain. Thus, rather than providing a recount that splits the community into fixed categories of Us versus Them, the poet conveys a collective feeling of guilt on the part of the perpetrators for the sins done to others during the apartheid era. Refusing to see the country as a separation of people, “between us” (Krog, 2013:line 5), she chooses to picture the country as “within us.” She clarifies this when she writes, “because of you this country no longer lies between us but within” (Krog, 2013:lines 4–5). The speaker alludes to a new country that experiences a peaceful co-existence (“breathes becalmed”) after the violation (“wounded”) it experienced in the apartheid era. Her reference to “all voices”, “our victims” (Krog, 2013:line 2) bridges the issues that separate people; bringing everyone into dialogue so that they could attempt to understand things from each other’s perspectives. She suggests a space “within” (Krog, 2013:line 5), alluding to an inner consciousness or acknowledgement of the wrongdoing by the oppressor, and a conscious movement towards a mutually respectful position.

Krog infuses her poetic output with the need to change her identity because of the guilt she feels. From the outset, the poem is marked with imagery, which rejects the poet’s old identity and pleads for acceptance in a reborn state. The poem comes across as an embodiment of a confession – in an unmistakably religious way: “forgive me ... forgive me ... forgive me...” (Krog, 2013:line 18).

The tonality of the first stanza concretises the confession, which she perceives will give way to a “rebirth.” The persona in this case wishes to go through a purging – a process in which she sheds the “skin” of her previous existence as one of the perpetrators of violence and develops a new skin that will identify her with the victims. The reference to skin here is striking, in relation to both skin colour and her oeuvre (Toerien, 2001). The new skin would be a sign of a re-birth into a new lineage, free from the guilt, which entangled it. As a well-known Afrikaans poet who also served as a reporter on the TRC for the South African

Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) Radio, Krog, the poet, is perhaps acknowledging her Whiteness, her Afrikaner heritage and her perceived connection with a large number of the amnesty applicants (Graham, 2009). The speaker expresses a desperate need to be one with the victims in the last stanza. Her request, “please take me with you”, expresses her fear that someone may place her in the same category as the White oppressors. She sets herself apart from the oppressor, distinguishing herself as one who “has changed forever” (Krog, 2013:line 18). Perhaps these lines serve to persuade the Black victims to take the speaker along on a path together to a rainbow nation.

The themes underpinning the poem embody the poet’s deep desire for release from the bondage of sin. The imagery in the second stanza particularly alludes to the conscious acknowledgment of the poet’s guilt, which in turn serves to release her from her bondage. Images of sounds permeate the stanza: “it sings, it ignites my tongue, my inner ear ... intimate clicks and gutturals” (Krog, 2013:line 13). The poet conveys the idea of her guilt as a “voice” (Krog, 2013:line 2) that originates in her consciousness (“cradle of her skull”), forces her to listen (“inner ear”), then to articulate it (“throat”) and then “igniting” or burning a trail of pain as it moves to her “heart” (Krog, 2013:lines 10–11). One gets the sense that the persona realises that she has to experience the pain of the victims before she is relieved of bondage from sin. The newfound voice stands in stark contrast to the victims who had no voice during the apartheid era and felt instead a silent pain in their own hearts, singing their own voiceless song.

This analysis shows that the TRC has served as a deep source of inspiration for the poem. The poem offers an unexpected and honest display of emotions in relation to the crimes of the era of apartheid. In accordance with the tone of the message, appeals made, as well as the ideological intent underpinning the use of historical facts, one clearly sees that the poet tries to take ownership of, and acknowledge the crimes, mistakes and wrongs committed by her people. We may argue that the TRC, like the apartheid museums and other political monuments, is a state of relegation that offers official remembrances, which enable a general forgetting (Graham, 2011).

#### The Weeping: A Pain that Heals

*The Archbishop Chairs the First Session*

By Ingrid de Kok (2002) *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission*,

April 1996, East London, South Africa

- 1) *On the first day*
- 2) *after a few hours of testimony*
- 3) *the Archbishop wept.*
- 4) *He put his grey head*

- 5) *on the long table*
- 6) *of papers and protocols*
- 7) *and he wept.*

- 8) *The national*
- 9) *and international cameramen*
- 10) *filmed his weeping,*
- 11) *his misted glasses,*
- 12) *his sobbing shoulders,*
- 13) *the call for a recess.*

- 14) *It doesn't matter what you thought*
- 15) *of the Archbishop before or after,*
- 16) *of the settlement, the commission,*
- 17) *or what the anthropologists flying in*
- 18) *from less studied crimes and sorrows*
- 19) *said about the discourse,*
- 20) *or how many doctorates,*
- 21) *books or installations followed,*
- 22) *or even if you think this poem*
- 23) *simplifies, lionizes,*
- 24) *romanticizes the mystifies.*

- 25) *There was a long table, starched purple vestment*
- 26) *and after a few hours of the testimony,*
- 27) *the Archbishop, chair of the commission,*
- 28) *laid down his head, and wept.*

- 29) *That's how it began.*

*The Archbishop Chairs the First Session*, by Ingrid de Kok, paints a vivid picture of the nature of the traumatic and painful revelation made before the TRC. The first stanza of the poem reveals touching scenes where Archbishop Desmond Tutu<sup>1</sup> breaks down on the very first session of the hearings and confessions. This is highlighted where the lyrical speaker says, “...after a few hours of testimony the archbishop wept” (De Kok, 2002:lines 26–28). The specific details captured by the poet reveal the extent of the pain associated with the stories relayed. The poem clearly shows that the nature of the unexpected, honest painful confessions were beyond any man’s control. The poem is also unsympathetic about the touching episode of the hearing as it shows how the merciless “national and international cameramen” (De Kok, 2002:lines 8–9) continue to film the weeping Archbishop with his “misted glasses and sobbing shoulders” (De Kok, 2002:lines 11–12). Given the emotional picture presented in this poem, one realises the extent of the pain experienced by both the victims of the crimes as well as the human rights abusers when presented with vivid memories of what they had experienced years before the demise of apartheid.

De Kok (2002) accurately portrays the situation as it unfolded, highlighting that the painful truth was very difficult for everyone to bear. Her descriptions include all participants in the experience: the dignitaries such as the archbishop himself, the academics, the professionals, the perpetrators of violence and the victims of such

abuses. We view the intensity of the pain that the individuals experience as a collective and not as singled out or isolated experiences. The poet makes this clear in the third stanza where it states, “It doesn’t matter what you thought of the archbishop before or after ...” the session in particular and/or the whole process in general, the fact remains that these were painful historical facts (Vogt, 2008:25). We note in particular how De Kok (2002) underscores the need to move away from personalised depictions of pain. In the lines extracted below, we bear witness to how De Kok (2002) directs the group’s energy towards some synergistic collective outcome. These lines embody the metaphor of the “rainbow nation”:<sup>ii</sup> “... even if you think this poem simplifies, lionizes, romanticizes, mystifies...” (De Kok, 2002:lines 22–24), the whole process was highly emotional to discharge the unexpected, unbelievable fact that the archbishop who was , “chair of the commission” (De Kok, 2002:line 27), “laid down his head, and wept” (De Kok, 2002:line 28).

Rather than presenting the TRC as a futile exercise, as described by many, the above statement dispels any suggestions that the TRC was merely an attempt to get the perpetrators, many of whom acted secretly, to expose and disclose any criminal activities that have for so long been hidden under certain ideological beliefs. Additionally, rather than presenting “the TRC’s processes of bearing witness as a kind of circus sideshow, as aquatic/diving metaphors ... ” to use Graham’s (2011:66) exact words, the poem concurs with the notion of the talking cure – one in which confessions through narrative play a role in creating a new identity. The closing sentence of the poem, “That’s how it began” (De Kok, 2002:line 29), conveys a double meaning. It conveys one idea of how the victims of the crimes and other human abuses and injustices of the past have come to terms with the long, endured ordeals. Another meaning is that of how the perpetrators may begin a journey of seeking forgiveness from all those Black victims whom they have wronged – presenting a suggestion of hope for the ideal of a “rainbow nation.”

### Conclusion

The critical analyses conducted on the two poems selected as case studies reveal that post-apartheid poets are capable of changing: they have the power to adapt their poetry to the activities that have succeeded the demise of imperialism, colonialism and apartheid. Informed by the analysis of the two poems produced under the same theme of “new poetry” in post-apartheid South Africa, we conclude that the use of historical facts as the basis for literary representation does have the potential to unite the country’s citizens.

The first poem, *For All Voices, For All Victims*, by Antjie Krog is focused on the importance of acknowledging and taking ownership of the wrongs and crimes committed in the past as a way of seeking a general forgiveness from the victims. The second poem, *The Archbishop Chairs the First Session*, by Ingrid de Kok shows how opening up old wounds may be too painful to bear. Although the TRC was a purported healing process, it did, as evidenced by the sobbing Bishop, bring to life very painful moments of injustices on the part of the victims of crime. The poem gives us insight into the depth of the psychological (and possibly psychosocial) effects that apartheid had on its victims, especially considering that the Bishop was one of the many victims given his identity and race, both of which made him the embodiment of the Other. At the same time, both poems give us insight into how “*literature can be a catalyst*” (Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 1986:44) generating therapy.

Literature extensively documents the use of poetry as therapy. Various literary writers make a compelling argument for the integration of the goals of psychoanalysis with the goals of poetry to offer the reader a form of therapy (Williams, 2007). The basis of regarding poetry as therapy is that the reader shifts from focusing on the meaning of a text to deeply experiencing a text. Change is an intricate part of the therapeutic process. As Hynes and Hynes-Berry (1986:44) write, “In poetry therapy, literature is a catalyst ... The therapeutic effect depends on the response to the literature as it is facilitated through the dialogue, and the change takes place in the respondent.” From the perspective of poetry as therapy, we embrace the potential of poetry to provide important psychological benefits to the individuals who perpetrated and experienced violent crimes and injustices. This increases the ultimate possibility of creating a unifying impact on South African society.

Mazza (2003:17) speaks of the “symbolic/ceremonial” component of poetry as therapy, “focusing on the value of ritual, metaphor, and storytelling as they can function as helpful ceremonies and symbolic acts for the client. After a loss, for example, one may read out loud a poetic elegy that may serve as a symbolic statement of acceptance.” The poems analysed here allow us to “experience” what happens to witnesses and the perpetrators as they re-live their stories and/or come face to face with their crimes and families whose relatives they have killed or witnessed dying. In the case of the second poem, the TRC serves symbolically as a platform for acceptance. We bear witness to the way in which poetry can offer readers a way to recognise emotional states, especially negative emotions that are painful,

uncomfortable, or shameful.

We support Williams' (2007:4) view that "poetry provides a vehicle to move one toward the ultimate goal of transcending negative and debilitating emotions, thoughts, and schemas by offering possibilities for renewal of self and reparation of personal relationship schemas." Poetry as therapy opens up vast possibilities for healing in South Africa, on both the individual and societal level. For the individual, the possibility exists for personal renewal through an increased self-awareness of the pain of others and a willingness to undertake reparation. Through reparation, "a new self emerges" (Williams, 2007:3) opening further possibilities of continued renewal and discovery of new sides to themselves. Thus, through poetry as therapy, reparation helps South Africans to become more aware of the other – we become more empathetic and ultimately more productive in our social relations.

The analysis of the poems undertaken here bears testimony to the significance of the role of historical evidence in effectively highlighting the wrongs and crimes committed with the view to seeking forgiveness rather than to reminding the victims of the horrendous crimes committed against them. In view of the above discussions, we argue for the use of historical evidence as a critical entry point into making literary representation. The ideas that have emerged from this critical analysis gives weight to the stance of Boehmer (2005) and Moslund (2003) who appeal to South African writers to avoid using historical facts for the sole ideological intent of recreating and revising the unpleasant past – often so obvious in some post-colonial communities.

Informed by the above background, we argue that post-apartheid South African poetry can highlight alternative themes that are less overtly colonialist, less explicitly racist, historically reformist rather than revisionist, and more in tune with the political changes of the country and the world in general (Ibinga, 2006; Ndebele, 2006). In an emerging economy poetry is what can serve post-apartheid South Africa to gain the empathy and support from a global audience.

We argue further that poetry produced during and after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its representation of South African society carries the potential to highlight truths that emerge from ordinary people than from those who have been victims of politics (Ndebele, 2006). As Silverman (1977:24) writes "Truth is unquestionably one of the purest and truest of poetical themes, and through truth in poetry we are led to perceive a harmony where none was apparent before." Moreover, we argue for an appreciation of post-apartheid South African poetry because it constructs a narrative aimed at tackling issues contemporary to the society it seeks to change. This

shift in focus and ideological intent reveals ways through which contemporary poets in South Africa may use history as the basis for establishing social cohesion and, in the process, promote forgiveness in a country that is deeply associated with racial hatred.

### Authors' Contributions

The initial writing of the manuscript was done by MM with CR contributing to the methodology, analysis and discussion. CR completed all the corrections required and reviewed the final article.

### Notes

- i. Archbishop Desmond Tutu was a South African social rights activist and a retired Anglican bishop well known for his fight against apartheid injustices.
- ii. "Rainbow nation" is a term coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu to describe post-apartheid South Africa after the official defeat of the Afrikaner, nationalist government in the 1994 general election.
- iii. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence.
- iv. DATES: Received: 30 June 2021; Revised: 2 May 2023; Accepted: 17 October 2023; Published: 30 November 2023.

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