



Rewriting the Metanarrative of Apartheid in the Democratic South Africa

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ABSTRACT

In the aftermath of South Africa's attainment of political freedom in 1994, the country's history has been depicted through numerous literary works. Most of these works are distinguished by a 'master narrative' that conveys the notion of apartheid's overwhelming oppression, perpetuating the unrealistic perception of constant black misery. We sought texts that depart from this single narrative to encourage more studies that strike a balance between miserable and nostalgic experiences of apartheid in several literary texts. The researchers employed a purposive sampling approach within the theoretical framework of Apartheid Studies to carefully choose four literary works and then analysed them to represent the everyday experiences of black individuals. The analyses of the four texts were categorized into five overarching themes: identity, displacement, violence, betrayal, and writing as a weapon. The findings indicate that the authors adeptly capture the daily experiences of black individuals in Apartheid-era South Africa, employing humour to depict their quest for democracy. Any narrative of South Africa's history produced in the democratic era should encompass the country's achievements and shortcomings, and accurately represent its diverse makeup.

KEYWORDS

Apartheid; democracy; master narrative; social life; texts.

INTRODUCTION

It is now trite to mention that apartheid, (Afrikaans, “aparthood”), a system of racial segregation and oppression for the black masses between 1948 and 1994, was a difficult period in South Africa (Modise, 2025). Given that literature critiques life, literary works should mirror the experiences of their setting. Consequently, several authors penned novels, poems, and other literary works that opposed apartheid in South Africa. These artistic initiatives, in conjunction with the contributions of musicians and other creatives, not only facilitated international solidarity for the oppressed but also improved their morale (Ngcobo & Roya, 2023) and encouraged activism (Manshur, 2020). The creative works of inspiration include, but are not limited to, Es'kia Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* (1959) and Alex La Guma's *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* (1972), whose uniting thread was their depiction of hardships during the apartheid era. Rian Malan's *My traitor's heart: A South African exile returns to face his country, his tribe and his conscience* (1990) and *Mother to mother* (1998) by Sindiwe Magona brought a new perspective; a white and a black protagonist who respectively own up to personal and son's transgressions during Apartheid South Africa. However, most of the past narratives create the impression that life under apartheid was always miserable for non-white people. This vision is problematic because it strips black people of agency by suggesting that their existence depended exclusively on apartheid, yet they had relationships and personal interests. Another common trope is that of a society that was divided between traitors and heroes, which is a fallacy because some people vacillated between the two categorizations. Alegi (2020, p.559) calls for a revision of the entrenched “master narrative” to include experiences of “ordinary” people during apartheid.

The post-apartheid era has also generated works of storytelling that both preserve and transmit that painful memory. The works honour the victims and promote healing and reconciliation (Ngcobo & Roya, 2023). These include works such as *Shirley, Goodness and Mercy* (2004), *Native Nostalgia* (2009), *Born a Crime* (2016) and *Song for Sarah* (2017) that have broadened literary narratives about the effect of apartheid in South Africa. Like Magona's novel, the four texts respond to Ndebele's (1986) call for representation of daily experiences of black South Africans. Ndebele's argument is that South African literature, like that of elsewhere, should reflect the lives of South Africans in their diversity to reflect their unique experiences. Worby and Ally (2013) note a shift from “romanticised” memoirs which were mainly written by liberation heroes to “a new genre of struggle nostalgia” (p.457). Burke (2020) observed an increase in stories told by ordinary South Africans. Van Wyk (2004) describes *Shirley, Goodness and Marcy* as demonstrating that “ordinary lives could also be celebrated” (van Wyk in Stoltenkamp, 2013). Citing Ngozi Adichie, Garman (2018, p.269) argues that humorous stories set in apartheid South Africa provide refreshing perspectives to the dangerous ‘single story’. She adds that authors of such works dare to provoke criticism for apparently downplaying apartheid experiences. Despite the research by Cox and Stromquist (1998) and Bender (2000) focusing on Western and Asian countries, their argument to include narratives of common people beyond

master narratives has relevance in South Africa. Moreover, they are primarily structured as childhood memoirs, thereby enhancing the credibility of their accounts due to the inherent "innocence" of children's articulation. Except *Native Nostalgia* which is largely told from an adult perspective, these texts can be described as bildungsroman¹. The publishing period for the texts of interest in this paper spans thirteen years (2004 to 2017), which provides hindsight for a sober analysis of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa.

Briefly, *Shirley, Goodness & Mercy* (2004), relives van Wyk's childhood in Riverlea, a coloured township in Johannesburg, and *Native Nostalgia* (2009), re-enacts Jacob Dlamini's upbringing in the East Rand township of Katlehong. Jonathan Jansen's *Song for Sarah* (2017) reflects his childhood in Montagu, Western Cape and *Born A Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood*, hereafter, *Born A Crime* (2016), recounts how Trevor Noah was born to a white man and a black woman. Through analyzing the four texts, this paper seeks to achieve the following objectives: (i) compare their narratives on how apartheid impacted lives of black South Africans (ii) examine factors behind each of these narratives and (iii) establish the effect of the four writers' representation of life during apartheid on contemporary South Africa.

Apartheid Studies

This study is grounded in Apartheid Studies (AS), a theory propounded by Nyasha Mboti to explain the aberrant characteristics of apartheid. Mboti (2023) argues that apartheid is ubiquitous; it thrives wherever people are oppressed through "differential rates of oppression", (ROp) various forms of oppression that different people encounter (p.58) which normalizes the practice. Instead of ending apartheid, South Africa's 'transition' to democracy created "loopholes for its progressive repetition and resurrection" (p.72) because white people remain in control of the economy whilst blacks continue to grapple with issues like unemployment, hunger and housing. This corroborates Shivambu's (2014) observation that this was guaranteed by the negotiated settlement between the apartheid government and other political party's leaders.

The National Party (NP) government cultivated the concept of "good neighbourliness" among black South Africans which restrained them from protesting society's glaring inequalities² (Mboti, p.59). The fatal shooting of 34 London Minerals (Lonmin) workers by the police during the Marikana tragedy in a 'free' South Africa, made a mockery of Nelson Mandela's vow that "Never, never and never again"³ would a South African be subjected to such brutality. Ironically, President Cyril Ramaphosa, who was instrumental in crafting the South African constitution during the transitional period and was touted as Mandela's successor, allegedly instigated the police brutality as he sat on the Lonmin board and was at the time the country's

¹ A novel in which the growth or maturity of the narrator mirrors the development of the main issues.

² Mboti (2015) dismisses the aphorism "umuntu umuntu ngabantu" (a person is a person because of other people) as a corruption of African values because it divests people of their individuality. He contends that this distortion of the concept of ubuntu contributed to what he views as docility among black South Africans who did not stage effective protests against the police after they fatally shot 34 of the striking mineworkers in Marikana.

³ Mandela's inaugural speech as South African president (SA Gvt NewsAgency, 2018)

deputy president. Julius Malema, leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), the South African opposition party, has issued a warning that residents of places such as Alexandria might erupt in unrest, given the extreme poverty they experience, which sharply contrasts with the blatant materialism of Sandton (Unfiltered, 2023).

Apartheid Studies arose out of the dearth of scholarly endeavours, such as courses, centres, and theoretical frameworks, which engage with the concept (Mboti, 2018, 2023). Nonetheless, the Apartheid Archive Project, an interdisciplinary initiative which involves collaboration between researchers from different parts of the world collecting and analysing data from 'ordinary' South Africans globally as they recount their experiences during the apartheid era had already been set up in 2008 (Stevens et al., 2010). This initiative, which inspired models and theories, probably influenced Mboti's theorization about Apartheid Studies, at least at a subconscious level.

Mboti observes that opinion leaders, such as academics, analysts and historians, mistaken apartheid for police brutality, inscriptions prohibiting black people from certain spaces, yet these are merely "clinical trials – the rehearsals–of apartheid". Equally culpable is "apartheid legal positivism", the misconception that apartheid ended with the repeal of draconian laws. Mboti (2023) also dismisses the confinement of apartheid to the period between 1948 and 1994, leaving the oppression and segregation which took place before Jan van Riebeeck's arrival in the Cape of Good Hope on the 6th of April 1652 and post-1994 incidents, like the Marikana tragedy unaccounted for. The scholar observes a tendency to wrongly trace origins of apartheid to van Riebeeck's arrival. Graham and Fevre (2022) describe how Mandela's release from prison in 1990 was misinterpreted by many people as the end of apartheid.

The NP government's selective archival of events undermined documentation of atrocities (Shepherd, 2019). Ngugi identifies the need to 're-member' the 'dismembered' African memory of oppression (2009, p. 108). Likewise, Mboti realizes that apartheid has been "badly delexicalised, neglected and underused" and seeks "to relexicalise it". Despite differing in terminology, he reasons, scholars must be united in seeking an antidote for oppression (2018, p.11). Likening South Africa to a 'crime scene' whose police tape has been removed, Mboti touts Apartheid Studies as the forensic detector which will expose atrocities committed to black South Africans so that justice can be served (2018b, p.1).

Bhabha (2012) argues that, though past and present events are separated by time, progression of calendar days does not signal a complete break from the past. The prefix 'post' in 'post-apartheid' indicates that "the beyond is neither a new horizon nor leaving behind (p.2). Despite losing their stranglehold on power, oppressors always devise new strategies to regain control (Nkrumah, 1965; Gramsci, 1971). In 1964, when almost thirty African countries had achieved political independence, Delavignette noted that, "independence has not meant the end of the old colonial framework" (1964, p. 119). A year later, Nkrumah wrote that "old-fashioned colonialism is by no means entirely abolished" (1965, p5) which was confirmed by

Ramose: “decolonisation has neither abolished nor diminished the will to dominate on the part of the condescender” (1999, p.6). Mbembe (2006, p.6) states that “the defeat of legalized white supremacy has not ended the struggle for racial equality” and Mahlatsi (2018) points to whites’ retention of dominant access to quality health, education and economic activities.

Quijano (2000) coined ‘coloniality’ to explain the highly mutative nature of colonialism. Apartheid is “autopoietic”, renews itself (Mboti, 2023, p.3); it uses aspects such as democracy (Ramose, 1999; Mboti, 2023) and human rights (Mbembe, 2006) as a digression from rectifying economic imbalances. Mbeki reckons that this has been aided by African nationalists who are driven by a desire for inclusion so when the ANC succeeded the NP in 1994, it created a small group of black elites to join white elites. Mpofu-Walsh has similarly asserted that “apartheid did not die; it was privatised” (2021, p.1) concurring with Shivambu (2014).

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines apartheid as “an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime” (1998). The fact that this definition, published four years after South Africa's official abolishment of apartheid, makes no mention of the Southern African nation underscores the practice's transcendence of temporal and geographical limitations. Mboti, therefore, asserts that apartheid “was neither limited to South Africa nor abolished” (2023, p.58) which echoes Ngugi’s (2009) sentiments that oppression exists wherever there are people. United Nations special rapporteur, Michael Lynk, said occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel since 1967 which privileged Jewish people and stripped Palestinians of human rights constitutes apartheid (United Nations, 2022).

The pervasiveness of apartheid is encapsulated in its application in different forms of segregation. Israel’s placement of a wall (which Palestinians call ‘wall of apartheid’) and checkpoints to limit movements of Palestinians around the West Bank, is equated to confinement of Africans to “Bantustans” in Apartheid South Africa. (Sochs, 2011, p.147). Activists coined “vaccine apartheid” to describe western countries’ reluctance to share ideas and resources to fight COVID-19 with poor countries (Prasad et al., 2022, p.1). Stull, Bell, and Ncwadi (2016) define "environmental apartheid" as the act of relegating Black people to the least productive areas. The trio observes that, “environmental apartheid and its consequences continue to oppress Black South Africans, with devastating implications for their health, livelihoods, and ecological integrity” (p.369). This vindicates Nixon’s assertion that industrial pollution is mainly produced in areas that are inhabited by poor people, regardless of race. This explains why Israel is accused of apartheid despite its denial on the basis that Palestinians and Israelis are ‘one people’.

METHODS

The study was guided by its three research questions: to (i) How do the four texts reflect on how apartheid impacted lives of black South Africans ? (ii) What are the factors behind each of these

narratives? and (iii) What is the effect of the four writers' representation of life during apartheid on contemporary South Africa?

To obtain a representative sample, purposive sampling was used to select four primary texts which take a different trajectory from portraying Apartheid South Africa as an entirely miserable period for black people by showing their agency in dealing with the oppressive system. *Shirley, Goodness and Mercy* was released in 2004 when South Africa marked a decade of freedom, *Native Nostalgia* was published in 2009, a decade and a half after the momentous occasion, *Born a Crime* (2016) and *Song for Sarah* (2017) came out two decades after the official abolition of apartheid.

Due to the severity of the repression that was meted out to Black South Africans by the apartheid government, many authors tend to focus solely on the pathetic experiences. This has not only resulted in the predictability of apartheid-related stories, but it somewhat erases important memories, which is a travesty to the resilience and creativity of Black South Africans who found creative ways of dealing with oppression. Although apartheid is officially terminated, we considered it essential to analyze works reflecting on post-apartheid experiences to assess continuities and discontinuities across the epochs. We selected qualitative research because it facilitates a thoroughgoing analysis by observing phenomena and examining underlying reasons. In order to achieve this, the four texts were subjected to repeated readings, with an emphasis on key vocabulary and occurrences, leading to a thematic evaluation designed to identify shared and distinct features, while also examining the influence of structural elements, organization, and word frequency on the overall narratives.

Secondary sources such as articles, book chapters, conference proceedings, literary texts, among others, were used to provide a thoroughgoing exegesis. Themes and writing styles in the four texts were evaluated to establish their projection of black South Africans' experiences of apartheid. The quartet includes childhood anecdotes which provide vital, unfiltered social commentary, just as Charles Dickens' novels, William Blake's "The Chimney Sweeper" to name a few, which criticized exploitation of children. Unlike the texts under study which reenact experiences of Black South African childhood, Blake and Dickens' texts are set in Europe during the Industrial Revolution when young (black) boys were forced into hard labour. Like *Shirley, Goodness and Mercy*, *Native Nostalgia*, *Born a Crime* and *Song for Sarah*, these works are written in a light-hearted manner though they focus on issues which not only affected children but the entire society. After collating themes from the four literary texts under study, conclusions were made from which recommendations were made as well as suggestions for further research.

The authors were chosen because of their reputation, storytelling and story writing prowess. Van Wyk edited for Ravan Press, Staffrider, co-founded *Wietie* magazine with Fazel Johannesburg and wrote an abridged version of Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* for children. He gained prominence with his poem, "In Detention", a satire on spurious reasons which were given by the police as causes of deaths for some political prisoners. Dlamini is a

historian, author and journalist who is currently working as an assistant professor of history at Princeton University; Noah is an internationally acclaimed comedian who hosted *The Daily Show* from 2015 to 2022 and has hosted the last three Grammy Awards. Jansen is a distinguished professor in education at Stellenbosch University, a renowned educationist, author and newspaper columnist who, in 2009 became the first black vice chancellor of the University of the Free State.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

To elucidate the "interplay between fiction, social reality, and moral-political understanding" (Gagiano, 2006, p.97), significant matters concerning the repercussions of apartheid on black South Africans were identified and presented as five subordinate themes in the four texts. To avoid repetitive mention of the titles, we employed a coding system that runs from Text 1 to Text 4 based on the publication dates. We designated Shirley, *Goodness and Mercy* as 'Text 1' and assigned 'Text 4' to *Song for Sarah*, which was published in 2017 after the other three texts.

Identity

Fanon (1963) observes that oppressive societies like Apartheid South Africa are hierarchical. The National Party (NP) government wielded so much power that it determined a person's 'being' so if a police officer confiscated someone's passbook, they had to follow the officer because "you are nothing without it" (Text 2, p.7). The four texts under study indicate that in terms of perceived superiority, whites were followed by coloureds and mixed race whilst blacks occupied the lowest level. Chris considers himself black, but official forms classify him as coloured. He states that "nobody actually tells me, but I'm beginning to understand that, according to the law, I am not as good as a white person" (Text 1).

In Text 3, Trevor assumes different personas to benefit from the racial classifications. He revels in receiving special treatment, especially by the elderly who mistaken him for a white person and respect him so much that they flout cultural norms at funerals which he attends. His grandmother spares him when she beats other grandchildren due to the sensitivity of his white skin. His grandfather, Temperance, calls him 'mastah' and enjoys driving him around. To protect himself from abuse when he is jailed, Trevor masquerades as a coloured gangster, speaks Afrikaans "with a thick coloured accent" and befriends a white inmate (p.276). Even grown-ups capitalize on the loopholes: Chris' grandfather, who he describes as not racist, stands in a shorter queue reserved for whites on pensioners' day (Text 1). Dlamini's mother is Sotho but she "identified herself as Zulu", the biggest ethnic group in South Africa (Text 2, p.53).

Most coloured people embraced their assigned racial classification, dissociated themselves from black people and saw themselves as similar to whites because of their assigned racial classification (Text1, Text3). In what Du Bois termed "double consciousness", a split personality, Chris notes that in his real self, Allan Walburgh respects black people so when he denigrates them it is as if he speaks with his parents' tongues (Text 1, p.132). Allan objects to Chris referring to his family's black helper as Aunt Agnes, arguing that she is not married to his

uncle. It is ironic that the Walburghs discriminate against a fellow person of colour yet a white Wits University volunteer tutor rejects any special treatment at Chris' other friend Keith's family house, preferring to use utensils everyone uses.

In a development which shows the absurdity of racism among non-white people, Chris and Benjy Francis discover that their colleague in the black consciousness movement (BCM), Fikile, violently opposes their membership because they are not quite 'black' (p.253). That Fikile rejects Francis, who, like Chris, is South African since he is a South African 'Indian' who was born and bred in Durban whilst he relates well with Piero, an Italian who owns an apartment in town shows his hypocrisy.

Colourism, discrimination among people of a similar ethnic group based on the shade or hue of someone's skin is a symptom of an acute inferiority complex. Dlamini claims that long before getting into contact with white people, many learners already "did not want to be dark-skinned" (Text 2, p.83). One cannot, however, dispute that this was heightened by the hierarchization of race by apartheid. So ingrained is "shadism" among black people that Mr Nhlapo, one of Dlamini's best teachers at primary school derogatively refers to two dark-skinned girls in his class as Mantsho "Sotho for darkie" (p.83). Chris in Text 1 fails to understand how teachers who witnessed the June 16, 1976, student uprising could refer to black learners as 'darkies'. Light-skinned people were subjected to insults like 'Boesman guitar' a derogative term often used for people of mixed race. Trevor is taunted by coloured boys at a Mulberry tree who call him "Bushie" and "Bushman" (Text 3, p.144). After he taunts the squint in Chris' eye in full view of the class, Chris retaliates by addressing Melvin Langrich as a "kaffir".

However, there are few incidences in which black people do not conform to the race-based classifications. Unlike the Walburghs who separate Janet's utensils from theirs, the van Wyks share everything with their helper, Agnes (Text 1). Chris' mother questions Allan's objection to Chris calling Agnes aunt because she is not married to his father's brother but he calls her aunt yet she is not married to his uncle. In Text 3, though many people would readily accept prestigious status, Bongani corrects his friends that East Bank where he resides, is not an affluent area but a location like theirs.

Displacement

Although apartheid created the impression that coloureds were 'better' than blacks, most of their challenges were like those faced by black people. Text 4 portrays the displacement of the Johnsons, Jansen's maternal family, along with other families of colour, from their idyllic Montagu rural homestead. The new destination, the Cape Flats, stands in stark contrast with its lack of amenities and unfavourable conditions. The Walburghs were similarly moved from Albertsville to Riverlea which is nicknamed Zombietown because of its lifelessness (Text 1, p75). Chris lives in another part of Riverlea called Tomato Yard because of "rotting tomatoes and vegetable peels around the over-full dustbins" (p.1). Dlamini describes how the apartheid government consigned black people to homelands like Transkei, Ciskei, Qwaqwa and

KwaNdebele which existed as 'consulates' that rendered Africans to "sojourners in 'white' South Africa" (Text 2, p.47).

The apartheid government did not prioritize construction of standard roads in non-white areas. The Johnson's new area of residence is tarred (Text 4), unlike Flinders Street in Riverlea (Text 1). Dlamini recalls that, "Like most streets in Katlehong at the time, ours was not tarred" (Text 2, p.54). Though it has better houses than those found in black areas, Eden Park, a coloured area where Trevor and his mother stay for some time has "the same dusty red-clay dirt and dirt as Soweto" (Text 3, p.63).

Forced removals caused psychological and physical problems for some of its victims. In Text 4, the dispossession of Jansen's maternal grandparents from their rustic home in Montagu led to his grandfather's loss of sight. In the same vein, Trevor attributes the divorce of his grandparents to their forced removal from Sophiatown. Apparently, Trevor's grandfather, Temperance Noah, was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, and as a result, he lost his cultural values, became abusive towards his wife Frances, and gained a reputation as a womanizer at his advanced age.

Chris attributes "squalor, crime, unemployment and alcoholism" in Riverlea as "natural consequences of apartheid" (Text 1, p.291). By the same token, Jansen describes alcohol abuse as "one of apartheid's most devastating legacies" which began with the "dop system" in which wine workers got "cheap, leftover wines" as payment. Valley (2014) concurs that the "dop system" or "tot system" induced alcohol addiction. Farm workers imbibed "to forget forced removals, the grinding poverty, the job discrimination and the humiliation of everyday racism" (Text 4, p.34).

The demand for beer saw shebeen owners experiencing brisk business; Chris observes that parents who operated shebeens adequately provided for their children's needs. Nonetheless, the popularity of shebeens corresponded with deterioration of social values. Ms enticed Chris, a minor, with twenty cents to buy beer for her from a shebeen. Apart from flouting the law, this could increase a desire for money and possibly alcohol, in the minor, with disastrous consequences. After the death of his mother when he was still very young, Abraham's father "lived and died an alcoholic" (Text 4, p.45). Even the usually reserved Chris discloses to Kathy that the country's oppressive conditions have led him and many of his peers to abuse alcohol (Text 1). Despite high expectations for teachers to lead exemplary lives, they are not exempted from the alcohol problem as Dlamini mentions how some teachers at Ponogo would report to work in drunken stupors (Text 2, p.88). Harber (2011) has also noted how some of South Africa's political activists "fell victim to drink" during the liberation struggle (p.3).

Furthermore, Trevor notes an increase in muggings and burglaries in black townships and links this to the expensive cost of alcohol and drugs which have gained usage. He adds that poor people bear the full brunt because they do not afford adequate security. Chris' father survived by a whisker after he was assaulted and left for dead but his teacher, Mr Brown and another drunkard were not so lucky as they were only discovered after they had already been murdered.

Dlamini laments what he sees as disrespect for the dead as the body of a person who was murdered lay for hours before it was covered with a blanket. (Text 2, p.56). This suggests that murders have become commonplace. In *Khayelitsha: Umlungu in a Township* (2012), Steven Otter realizes that criminal activities are mainly driven by economic challenges.

To make ends meet, Noah and his friends sell bootleg, sell and mix CDs, perform at parties and concerts, trade stolen goods and avoid law enforcers though they suffer a major setback when a policeman shoots at their system during a live performance. He explains that Alexandria is known as Gomorrah due to the prevalence of illicit activities there. Chris in Text 1 p.123 also notes the corrupting nature of black townships as he cites Kalomo Kids, a noble initiative which ended with members “using Okapi knives for gangster activities”. Similarly, in Text 3, G swops criminal life for an honest job but gets dismissed and Trevor feels that he deliberately got himself dismissed after being taunted in the “hood” (location). In Shirley, even ‘decent’ people like Chris’ mother engage in gambling. Fahfee, a lottery-like form of gambling which is pervasive in Sophiatown is just as popular in Dlamini. However, Dlamini argues that township dwellers should not be defined by their problems because they have a life outside these problems.

Violence

In a preface to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963, p.i), Sartre writes that “the status of ‘native’ is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonized people with their consent”. Apartheid South Africa was punctuated by a vicious circle of violence as everyone vented their frustrations from the oppressive system. Trevor contrasts the constant presence of heavily armed police vehicles in poor black townships like Soweto symbolizing repression with the occasional presence of an unarmed, friendly senior policeman in white suburbs (p.35). In Text 4, due to the location of the Jansens’ house at the corner of the street, it is close to scenes of violence ranging from muggings to sexual assaults which often require Sarah’s intervention.

Members of the Noah family reflect violence in the society at family level. Trevor’s mother, Patricia, has been at the receiving end of many beatings from her mother, who was regularly battered by her husband, Temperance. Trevor’s mother is regularly physically assaulted by her husband Abel who attempted to kill her when he shot her twice, on the leg and in the head. Patricia’s brother-in-law, Dinky, an otherwise fine gentleman, habitually beats his wife Sibongile to fulfil society’s misplaced belief that doing so symbolizes love and asserts a man’s authority as a husband. Unlike Chris’ aunt in Text 1 who flees from her abusive husband, Trevor’s aunt fights back, threatening to scald Dinky with boiling water.

Dlamini reveals how many teachers displayed sadism in the name of disciplining learners. A teacher moved around with a fan belt which he employed “liberally” whilst others used sticks, rulers and waist belts. These reactions by adults, are, however, likely to have brought more trauma than instil discipline to the hapless children. When corporal punishment was eventually outlawed after student protests, a female teacher cried because she did not know how to teach

without beating some students (p. 88). In Text 1, Mr Block thrashes his six-year-old son, John until he bleeds, for starting a visitor's car though no damage is caused to the car or the young culprit. The Jansen family's strict disciplinary history in Text 4, is demonstrated by an incident in which Sarah's father-in-law forcibly placed her youngest sister-in-law's hand on a hot stove "to teach the naughty child a lesson" (p.45). Jansen's mother Sarah seems to be a perfect fit to marry a Jansen. Descriptions like "warrior woman" (p.32); "Sarah-iah law" (p.58), "Sarah wore the pants" (p.57) and the disclosure that she had authority "also over her husband" shows how strong Jansen's mother was despite her small physical frame.

Trevor recounts how the apartheid government sponsored violence between the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and ANC's predominantly Zulu-speaking and Xhosa-speaking leaderships respectively, resulting in many deaths. This tribal tension plays out at the beginning of the novel when the Zulu-speaking driver hurls insults at Trevor's mother, who he adjudges to be disrespectful and promiscuous because she is Xhosa. The culture of violence was also reflected in turf wars between Zulu tax organisations and others owned by residents which were triggered by the deaths of seven students and a teacher at Katlehong High School in May 1990 and culminated in over two thousand deaths and more casualties (p.133).

Betrayal

Betrayal manifests itself at different levels: within the family, between friends, demography, among others. Just as Trevor (Text 3) and Sarah (Text 4) are accused of forsaking their home languages, Patricia estranges herself from her family by choosing to work and stay in the city. Chris' decision to continue with school angers some of his peers who have dropped out in droves over the poor curriculum.

Two writers, Dlamini and Mtutuzeli Matshoba represent the clash between the old generation which generally conforms to morals and the law and the liberal, young generation. Dlamini's mother beat him after he argued with a policeman just as Matshoba's mother and her friends physically assaulted him for undermining a policeman. It did not matter to the mothers that Dlamini's arrest was unjustified, and a police officer had demanded a bribe from Matshoba because they maintained that police officers represent the state so their instructions must always be followed. In another incident, Dlamini's mother beat him for arguing with an elderly person, though he told her that Mr Cumudgeon had insulted her. Patricia feels let down by the justice system when the police downplays her complaint that her boyfriend beat her as a family affair and the court's decision to grant him bail and reinstate his custody of the couple's two children. In Article 3, Chris is disappointed when no one is charged after no one is charged for severely assaulting his father and his mother weeps after Mr Kirk who she entrusted with her son flogged him. To Chris, Kirk represents the ultimate puppet of apartheid.

Dlamini argues that contrary to the common trope of a dichotomous relationship between heroes and traitors in Apartheid South Africa, there has always been a fine line between heroes and villains since the Anglo-Boer War. He cites Joe Mamasela, an ANC member

whose collaboration with the apartheid regime led to the deaths of many freedom fighters (Text 2, p.15).

The Stockholm Syndrome finds expression in several incidents. Despite his abusive behaviour, Patricia sold her house to finance Abel's workshop, but he squandered all the business funds on alcohol. Despite this, she remains sympathetic to Abel who she says needs love, leaving Trevor heartbroken (Text 3). Mr Kirk, Chris' Afrikaans teacher, compels students to pay for a dictionary which describes a gentleman as a well-behaved white man. Although he is coloured, Mr Kirk does not question this definition but states that the books will be kept by the school for use by future learners. The Walburgh family mourns Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid, who they praise for looking after coloured people and when Chris says he built them houses that are inferior to whites', Allan responds that at least they are better than the ones which were built for blacks.

Writing as a weapon

Oppression galvanized many black South Africans, like E'skia Mphahlele, Fazel, among others, to use education to present their experiences. Fanny Klenerman acknowledges Mphahlele's determination after he euphemistically says he left her bookshop with books under his armpit. The title, *Born A Crime*, satirizes the apartheid legislation for criminalizing infants. The Immorality Act of 1950 outlawed interracial marriages and sexual relationships meaning Trevor Noah was a product of an illegal union between his white father and black mother. Dlamini's unique multivocal narrative strategy, which incorporates documentary, historiography and excerpts from interviews, helps him to bring different perspectives to what apartheid means for black people which he describes as a political act (Text 3, p.111). Jansen dismisses media's stereotypical depiction of coloured women as violent and sex-obsessed just as Text 1 seeks to counter the apartheid media's tendency to give prominent coverage to 'black faces' only when they have 'dramas'. One is tempted to agree because there is always an element of selective inclusion of information deliberately or subconsciously which obfuscates critical analysis. In Text 3, after buying a stolen camera, Trevor realizes that the gadget is "more than just a camera" but a repository of memories.

Writing is therapeutic and liberating. Through poetic license, writers lambast architects of apartheid and provide retrospection and introspection. Jansen and Chris include poems in their novels, and Jansen and Dlamini include lists of references at the end of their writings. So powerful are van Wyk's writings that they get him in the crosshairs of state security agents, but his activism in the black consciousness movement helps him to cope with threats and reject the offer to be an informer. Nonetheless, several writers including Chris' battles with alcoholism humanises them by highlighting that no one is spared by the oppression during apartheid. Like Garman's (2018) study, this paper focused on texts which reflect on childhood experiences of Black South Africans during apartheid. and Medalie (2016) examined Dlamini's *Native Nostalgia* (2009) and Chris van Wyk's two memoirs, *Shirley, Goodness and Mercy* (2004) and *Eggs to Lay, Chickens to Hatch* (2010). Garman analysed two of this study's subjects, *Born a Crime* and *Other*

Stories, Native Nostalgia and Shirley, Goodness and Mercy. This study, therefore, added Song for Sarah to bring a perspective of childhood from a racially highly hybridized family. This text and Born A Crime were not analysed by Medalie so this paper brings together different perspectives in a single study.

CONCLUSIONS

The focus of this paper was to explore how the four selected texts reflect the endeavours of South African writers to portray the consequences of apartheid on the black population during the country's three decades of freedom. The four texts provided perspectives from people who represent different groups based on age, gender, ethnicity, among others through a combination of humour, pragmatism and fiction. With settings which straddle the official apartheid and post-apartheid eras, the paper observed that South African citizens need to cooperate to fight challenges like unemployment, crime, inadequate housing, service delivery among others. South Africa remains racially polarized and the gap between the rich and poor people which is still largely defined along racial lines. As some political parties have found a way of uniting under the banner of the government of national unity, the rest of the country ought to ensure that racial demographics are reflected in different organisations. This should, however, be based on merit. Since the last of the four texts under study was published in 2017, this effectively means the research covers South African literature about apartheid which was written in the first quarter century after South Africa gained political freedom. Therefore, there is a need for research on texts that cover issues such as loadshedding, COVID-19, Climate change among others. The study also urges writers to aim to provide exposure to different perspectives to avoid being blatantly biased, resulting in rejection of otherwise well-meaning ideas. Writers should be driven by a passion to positively transform society, not to seem vindictive, prejudicial or aloof about certain groups of people.

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