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Introduction: Remembering and Forgetting in Present-day South Africa

“What is this thing you call a book?”

“It is a man’s life.”

“You can eat it?”

“You can do nothing with it.”

On the Contrary (352)

While growing up in South Africa during the final years of Apartheid,¹ nothing struck me quite as much as the tortuous relationship that South Africans had with their national identity. In spite of all the weekly flag ceremonies and daily sessions of singing the national anthem enforced at schools, the people surrounding me seemed discomfited and jittery about being South African, more than they were comfortable with it. When I began my studies in English literature at the University of Cape Town in the early 1990s, I, too, found myself wanting to avoid all things “South African,” as I was less interested in the literature written in South Africa than in the work that came from Great Britain. Held up to be an example as the “motherland,” the one true authority on the English language and the sovereign of our commonwealth, anything from Great Britain (or from anywhere else “overseas,” for that matter), was thought to be vastly superior to what our own country, at the “butt-end of Africa,” as nineteenth-century South African poet Joseph Campbell so eloquently put it, could produce. This inculcated sense of discomfort and inadequacy exhibited by white (English-speaking) South Africans was paradoxically accompanied by an unwavering feeling of entitlement, a complicated identity whose complexity (and irony) I only began to appreciate after I moved away from South Africa in 1997. Once I became intrigued by the conundrum of South African identity, however, it never left my mind, aware as I was that it would always influence the way I think about myself, in the same way that it makes an impact on the way that South Africa is represented, and continues to represent itself, today.

Remembering and Forgetting in Present-day South Africa

Ironically, the uneasiness of identity constructions noticeable within South African societies appears today to be a direct result of earnest attempts at stabilising these under apartheid. Under the regime of apartheid, South African races were classified and stratified according to a hierarchical scheme. All identity was presented as distinct and immutable.

The narrative recorded by the country’s ruling minority was endorsed as the official history of the nation and naturally excluded the experiences and histories of a large section of the South

¹ I was born in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, in 1975, one year before the Sharpeville riots, and lived there during the mid-eighties, when the State of Emergency was declared (1985), and the early nineties, when the referendum was held (1990) that, aside from a breakout of violence, also launched the interregnum government and, eventually, made way for the first free and democratic elections on 27th and 28th of April 1994, in which I voted for the first time in my life.

African population. With the collapse of the apartheid regime from 1990 onwards, South Africans had to uncover the hidden history of their population and forge a new national identity out of this. In his article, “The Problem of Identity: South Africa, Storytelling, and Literary History”, Michael Chapman defines the issue as follows:

there is...a need in societies of sharp inequalities for a humanism of reconstruction, in which damaged identities are reassembled, silenced voices given speech, and causes rooted close to home in the priorities of the local scene examining itself as it examines its relations to any international counterpart. (93)

Chapman’s “humanism of reconstruction” points to a solution for the divisions within South Africa that complements, if not surpasses, the implementation of appropriate judicial measures by means of a “narrative” with which all South Africans can identify. A paragraph later, however, he recognises that this need for self-critique and analysis as a way to “fill out” the picture of what comprises South African identity involves only one side of the predicament. The other consists of the attendance to what he calls “a hermeneutics of suspicion,” which mistrusts any and all attempts to define, and thereby dictate, what national identity should look like in post-apartheid South Africa.

Especially in light of the complicated history of identity construction, a summary superimposition of characteristics or experiences that pretend to comprehensiveness disregards the anguish of division wrought by a system of rigorous classification. The mission of critiquing a trouble-free semblance of unity Chapman sees as the more important task of literature. I would like to argue that this uneasy alignment between reconstructive and deconstructive impulses within South African historiography and literature distinguishes the works I have undertaken to study, and makes them worthy of contemplation in the context of considering South African identities. The official dissolution of imposed segregation has deep implications for the maintenance of social identity and the creation of a new sense of community among South Africans. For this reason, my study will examine questions of identity and community in post-apartheid South Africa and will consider the ways in which history and memory are mobilised as means of accessing a new and inclusive identity for the divided population.

The historic change that took place in South Africa in the last decade of the twentieth century has made issues of national identity and history topical in both a South African and a larger, international context. To paraphrase the Afrikaans poet and journalist Antjie Krog: South Africa’s past has become front-page news. Krog dedicated an entire novel to the workings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which convened from 1995 to 1996 and formed part of the official attempt to reconcile South Africa’s past with its new national identity. The TRC encouraged

people who suffered the atrocities of the Apartheid system to tell their story in a public setting. The perpetrators of Apartheid rule who were accused during these narratives were also asked to come forward and give their account of past events. In this way, the Government of National Unity hoped to empower the narrators by allowing them to reclaim their past and ask for retribution for wrongdoings. The Government justified the establishment of the TRC by identifying it as a collective aid to South Africans who needed to come to terms with the country's past in order to progress to the future, and, in the process, re-establish their identity as South African. As an initiative that emphasised the importance of a national identity based on the sharing of narratives of experience, the concerns of the TRC were closely aligned to those of the country's writers.²

Much of South Africa's literary output can be said to parallel the procedures of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in attempting to accomplish a "reconciliation" as well, but not (only) between the country's different social or political factions, but, also between each person and their position in relation to the imaginings of the nation of South Africa as a whole. By confronting the process of telling stories it may be possible to read the features that are taken as typical of the postcolonial, postmodern novel, such as their a-chronology and deliberate inaccuracy and contradiction, in terms of a purposeful repositioning or even reshuffling of individual and national histories, so that the one no longer needs to exclude or displace the other. In order to launch this confrontation, it may be helpful to determine which of the aims and procedures of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, held between 1996 and 1998, can be characterised as useful for such an understanding.

"This land was told into existence": The Role of Literature

Creating a dialogue with the past, that is, engaging the past not by trying to reproduce, correct or improve it but by means of challenge and provocation, appears to be the aim of both the TRC and Brink's (post-1990) novels. The procedures of the TRC, although much contested and critiqued for being insufficient in achieving what it set out to achieve, namely the "healing" of a nation, had a unique status. The hearings concerned themselves with the stories of individuals that could be told and, perhaps more importantly, could be heard without restriction or requirement from "above." By viewing the Commission as an initiative that narrativised and revised personal and national histories, it can be considered a qualified success. Some South African writers have regarded the

² Many critical studies have been written on the effects of the TRC. See, for example, the edited volumes by Posel and Simpson (*Commissioning the Past*, 2002); Wilmot and Van de Vijver (*After the TRC*, 2000) and Villa-Vicencio and Verwoerd (*Looking Back*, 2000) for some excellent treatments, both positive and negative. The inevitable creation of a South African community in terms of the "community-as-object," aware of its united identity in the face of media scrutiny from around the world, made for an interesting side-effect of this initiative. For an in-depth analysis of the implications of such community formation outside of a specifically South African context, see, for example, Laine 2007, especially 65-76.

official measures to achieve national reconciliation based on respect for the historical record as inadequate by themselves, and have taken up the challenge of expanding on them (Kok in Nuttall & Coetzee 58).

When being interviewed as a candidate for the TRC, poet and playwright Adam Small, for example, expressed his doubts with regard to the efficacy of the committee's methods: "Only literature can perform the miracle of reconciliation" (Krog 18). André Brink phrases his reservations about public healing by suggesting that "unless the enquiries of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are extended, complicated, and intensified in the imaginings of literature, society cannot sufficiently come to terms with its past to face the future" (Nuttall & Coetzee 30). Literature is the medium in which the debate on the role of history for formulating a cultural identity will be sustained most productively. Precisely because the utilisation of memory and history in South Africa's literature reflects that used by the country's cultural and political initiatives, I believe an examination of contemporary literature contributes to the debate in a significant way.

The current belief that the narration of experience contributes to the restoration of a sense of self in society is widely and variously discussed. In *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self*, Nicola King proposes that, in most narrative accounts, "the 'I' of the present has been constructed out of, but also continues to rewrite, the 'I' of the past" (2000: 40). The construction of identity out of narrative serves to explain the self to oneself, as well as to others, by conferring meaning on experience that creates a bridge from the past self to the present self. In the mid-twentieth century, French psycho-analyst Jacques Lacan identified a split between the self who tells the story and the self who is presented in the story (as found in *Death and Desire*). This bequeaths all speakers with an identity that is of necessity discontinuous. By incorporating later knowledge into a (reconstructed) past, a sense of continuity is created between the self of the present and the self of the past, which is necessary to our survival because it creates a continuous identity. In this way, narrative plays a central role in (subconsciously) sustaining our sense of self.

It is not by coincidence that South Africa's writers in particular have taken up the debate surrounding a new and inclusive cultural identity for the nation. The professional regard that writers feel for language and storytelling qualifies them to examine aspects of a nation's narratives as a comprehensive expression of its cultural identities. At the same time, the medium of literature is particularly well suited to tangling with complex social discourses. Martin Trump, in his introduction to *Rendering Things Visible*, postulates that "[l]iterary works and their study offer particularly complex ways of describing society," because "...[t]he hybrid, polysemic discourse of literature includes and might even be said to enlarge the epistemological realm of other discourses" (1990: x).

In addition, the heterogeneous nature of the novel makes it a suitable medium to represent the gaps, silences and dislocations experienced by the restrained subjects of an oppressive government, a fact to which a number of post-colonial novelists have attested. African-American author Toni Morrison claims that “the consequences of slavery only artists can deal with” (King, 2000: 153), suggesting that the reintegration of history into society be achieved more successfully by the imaginings of literature than by other channels. It is in the literature of André Brink that I choose to trace the meanders of these attempts.

Looking on South Africa: André Brink

André Brink’s work provides an apt example of the way in which social and political values are represented in South African culture. Not only is Brink a critical author who has written extensively on the significant political role of literature in both the “old” and the “new” South Africa, but one of his earliest novels played a substantial role in the opposition to apartheid.³

His 1974 *Looking on Darkness* (originally published in 1973 as *Kennis van die Aand*) is a novel ostensibly about the forbidden love between a “coloured” theatre-producer and a “white” literary scholar, and had the dubious distinction of being the first novel in Afrikaans to be censored by the country’s Publications Advisory Board. Much critique has been levelled at this work, ranging from accusations that it was “too political” and not literary enough, to claims that it was not sufficiently political.⁴ Regardless of this, the way in which this work engages with the South African political context asserts a role for literature as participant in the country’s power debate. For this reason, I feel it may be informative to use this watershed novel as a prism through which the motifs and images in later novels can be seen, in order to study the difference in the pre- and post-1991 conceptualisations of South African national identity.

Several themes touched upon in Brink’s early novel *Looking on Darkness* return in his later works. *Looking on Darkness* is characterized as a typical “early” work of Brink’s, marked by a head-on confrontation with the injustices of the apartheid system on the one hand and a fascination with existentialist ideas of finding freedom, while fully acknowledging the hopelessness of this desire, on the other.⁵ The figure of the tragic (or even “absurd”) hero desperately opposing a totalitarian force that this and other early novels established, was abandoned in Brink’s later novels

³ “Old” and “new” has come to stand for “pre-” and “Post-Apartheid” South Africa in the national imaginary. The introduction of Attridge and Jolly’s *Writing South Africa* makes mention of the importance of Brink’s contribution in this context, as does Nuttall and Coetzee’s *Negotiating the Past* (both published in 1998).

⁴ See, for example, Nadine Gordimer’s discussion in “English-Language Literature and Politics in South Africa” in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2. (Apr., 1976). 131-50.

⁵ This tendency of Brink’s early novels to idealize a resignation to the hopelessness of fighting a totalitarian system has been subject to much criticism. See, for example, Isidore Diala.

in favour of figures who were less straightforward in their interaction with their South African context.⁶

Joseph Malan, the coloured protagonist in Brink's famously-banned work, confident enough as he is imprisoned and awaits the death-sentence after a long career of opposing the country's censors, asserts that he has arrived (and remained) at "a final, possible glimpse of truth" (8). Through his commitment to the South African situation, Malan is able to bear any hardship that the oppressive government subjects him to, because he perceives himself as answerable to a higher, moral authority that supersedes the transience and ignobleness of the apartheid machine. At the same time, there is a split in his perception of "South Africa" as a state that is oppressive and keeps its people segregated; and as a country whose almost-sublime geography binds people together as "true" South Africans in their participation of the "South African experience." This frequent split in conceptualising South Africa by Brink's protagonists, I argue, is what gives rise both to their feelings of alienation from the country and their determination to belong. On the one hand, the practices of repression in the colonial- and apartheid-eras fosters an attitude of renunciation, whilst, on the other, the inherent "magic" of the country makes it impossible to disown. The duality inherent in national identification with which Brink's characters struggle, is engaged differently in each of his works. The reverential attitude towards South Africa as a land fosters, for example, the Gothic sensibility of the sublime. This link with the Gothic in perceptions of the individual's place within the landscape in Brink's *Imaginations of Sand* will be more fully explored in chapter two.

The difference between the two conceptions of South Africa with respect to language in *Looking on Darkness*, makes use of a Nietzschean distinction between the conceptualisation of a culture as a system of codes and as a collection of aphorisms.⁷ Aphorisms represent the "wisdom" of lived experience rather than (book) "knowledge"; and they oppose the longevity of understanding gained from practice to the fleetingness of imposed (and thus unnatural) laws. The opposition between the two, in which the former ultimately, and romantically, gains the upper hand, plays a central role in Brink's *Rights of Desire* (2000), which I will discuss in chapter five. Malan, in Brink's pivotal resistance novel, sees a different conceptualisation of the use for language as a "code." The phrase "on the contrary notwithstanding" that closes the novel expresses resistance as

⁶ "Absurd" refers here to Camus's conceptualization of the resigned hero as one who is not so much resigned as exhilarated at finding purpose and strength in ostensible meaninglessness. In his "The Myth of Sisyphus" (1955, from the French "Le Mythe de Sisyphe" published in 1942), Camus discusses in the final chapter how Sisyphus is a hero that is absurd, in the sense that he is dedicated to a hopeless undertaking, yet nevertheless content, because "[h]is fate belongs to him." Sisyphus, Camus states, realises that "[t]he struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart," and that therefore "[o]ne must imagine Sisyphus happy" (123).

⁷ In *Human, All too Human* (1878), Nietzsche makes use of the aphorism as a means of critique for the first time, a method he subsequently adopted in many of his later works. For Nietzsche, the aphorism, as a one-off that does not operate by means of classifying and fitting in with existing categories of thought, could point to new ways of thinking instead of building on existing thought patterns. For an enlightening account of Nietzsche's use of aphorisms, see Daniel Fidel Ferrer's *Philosophical Aphorisms* (2004).

well as relishes the beauty of words. This delight carries political implications, as a common interpretation sees it as making a case for oppression and censorship as finite, and art as enduring. Literature is given the burden of reinforcing the durability of the human spirit, even in the face of physical persecution. This juncture of aesthetic delight in language with an awareness of its (politically) liberating qualities returns in Brink's 1993 *On the Contrary*, which, in a way, takes Malan's departing phrase as its starting point and runs off with it, as will be discussed in more detail in chapter one.

Delight (and faith) in language, particularly in literary language, recurs in all the post-1991 works that I focus on in this study. The forthright assurance of conviction evident in Brink's early heroes, however, is absent in all of Brink's subsequent protagonists. *On the Contrary*'s Barbier is a self-confessed colonial liar and opportunist. Kristien and Ouma Kristina in *Imaginings of Sand* are equally uncomfortable in laying claim to the role of "rightful heirs" to the land, and, instead, frame their perception of themselves as "true South Africans" as the assumption of a Gothic anxiety and uncertainty. Similarly, *Devil's Valley*'s Phillip Lochner is portrayed as outright stubborn in his refusal to endorse his rights to a South African identity by painting an overly flattering picture of himself, and Ruben of *The Rights of Desire* abdicates all significance by losing himself in citations while criticizing this practice for being spiritless. It is maybe only with *The First Life of Adamastor*'s T'kama, or the Cupido Cockroach of *Praying Mantis*, that a Brink protagonist is represented as confident in his South African identity. Intriguing in this regard is the noticeable distinction between these and the less self-assured protagonists with regard to their racial identification. T'kama and Cupido are Khoi characters, and their ethnicity appears, at least, to safeguard them from supersedence by other interest groups present in South Africa. The way in which the question of national identification is problematised in all non-Khoi characters, however, in both these and the other works, suggests that it is not simply the question of origin and primacy that is implicated in here. One larger element that is involved is the relationship between South African "authority" (whether it be the colonial administration or the Apartheid government) and the South African individual. It is this arduous relationship in particular that is explored over the course of Brink's prolific literary career.

J. M. Coetzee, in his essay on Brink in *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship* (1996), identifies the difference between Brink's early and later literary responses to government control as a move from the antagonistic to the dialogical (205). In the first model, so Coetzee argues, the oppressive state is depicted as an insurmountable evil force, against which the literary hero is inevitably powerless but morally victorious. The "greater power" of the moral high occupied by the hero is represented as lasting but ultimately materially useless. Isidore Diala, in an article on Brink's use of the "tragic" in his early works, concurs with Coetzee's analysis, and relates the sense

of triumph that is nevertheless reached at the end of novels such as *Looking on Darkness* to the “exhilarating optimism of tragedy” (2003)⁸ Diala appears to conflate this sense of the “tragic” with that of Camus’ absurd hero, who revels in the insight that the meaninglessness of life makes for better living. His critique of this conception of the hero opposing apartheid as a tragic one, lies with its perpetuation of the idea that the apartheid system is precisely that: a “system” that is impersonal, and therefore blameless, and unyielding, and therefore invincible. The only victory in this scenario is a moral victory, and all hope for political change is negated.

Both Coetzee and Diala perceive a difference in the way the South African situation is framed in Brink’s earlier and later works. In *On the Contrary*, the first novel published under the country’s interregnum government, Brink’s concern is still with the silences inherent in South Africa’s texts, but now he looks at the tension that exists between what is said and what has been left out. In his article in Attridge and Jolly’s 1998 publication *Writing South Africa: Literature, apartheid and democracy, 1970-1995*, Brink discusses the silences in the South African master-narrative in terms of what they offer to the South African author:

I recognise the regenerative powers of South African literature: not simply to escape from the inhibitions of apartheid but to construct and deconstruct new possibilities; to activate the imagination in its exploration of those silences previously inaccessible. (27)

“Those silences” refers to those “other forms and ways of living,” that “different kind of reason” that Barbier, in *On the Contrary*, considers employing in trying to make sense of the South African land and its people, acknowledging that existing (Western) modes of reason prove inadequate in describing the South African situation (268).

In both his fictional and theoretical work, Brink advocates a multifarious approach to the past that allows for a re-imagining of history in terms of the perceptions, stories, beliefs and experiences of all South African people. The majority of South Africans witnessed the exclusion of their stories and experiences from the nation’s master-narrative during the apartheid years. Paradoxically, the previous exclusions of the official record has made it possible to freely imagine what could have filled those silences as it has become impossible to recover exactly what has been left out of the country’s history. This negates any obligation to accuracy with regard to historical fact. The silences inherent in the official record embody the potential for allowing these stories to be, not merely re-inserted into the national narrative, but freed from the necessity of fitting in with anyone’s specific idea of truth.

There is no single model narrative that could complete or correct the biased records composed under South Africa’s colonial or apartheid rule. The idea propagated by André Brink, and

⁸ See Isidore Diala’s “André Brink and the Implications of Tragedy for Apartheid South Africa” (2003).

authors like him, is that such correction of the narrative of apartheid should not be the goal of contemporary writers at all. Any new text that is produced should engage with existing texts and interrogate them in an imaginative way, but should not set itself up as a new improved master narrative that would merely repeat the hierarchical ideology of the past, as Chapman warned earlier. In her introduction to *Negotiating the Past*, Sarah Nuttall echoes Chapman in her statement that:

The task of memory should...not be to reconstitute and make whole, a whole which needs to lie about the fracture; instead the task of memory is to reconstitute turbulence and fragmentation (1998: 5).

National identity as cultural artefact: approaching the topic

In analysing the way in which the trajectories of South African identity construction are imagined in Brink's recent works, I make use of the approach of cultural analysis. Cultural analysis takes off from the assumption that the cultural artefacts produced within a community reveal much about the ideologies upheld within that community. A critical reading of such artefacts therefore often provides clues with regard to the inconsistencies of presumptions made by these ideologies. The cultural artefact that I unpack in this study is that of South African identity represented in (a distinct and limited corpus of) South African literature.

In the following chapters, I frame the conceptualisation of South African national identity, and that of "the nation" of South Africa, from the point of departure supplied by Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities: On the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (first published in 1983). This not only because his work has been generally regarded as the standard text on the topic of the nation and nationalism, and his definition of the nation as the one most commonly used when considering these concepts, but precisely because he conceives of the nation *as* a cultural artefact. Anderson often joked in interviews that he was probably the only person writing about nationalism who did not think it was a bad thing. In comparison with numerous critiques that positioned nationalism as an ideology, and therefore a form of aggressive imperialism thinly disguised as nationalist sentiment, Anderson conceives of the nation and of nationalism not as an ideology, but as an experience, or a phenomenon.⁹

By treating South African national identity as a cultural artefact that came about because of certain historical forces, it becomes possible to contribute to a cultural inquiry into its workings by looking at the way that is conceived of in the public imagery. Anderson's conceptualisation of the nation as an "imagined community" frames it in terms of the imagination and, in particular, in terms

⁹ This comes close to the way in which George Orwell thought of nationalism in his famous *Notes on Nationalism* of 1945, where he states that: "The nationalist not only does not disapprove of atrocities committed by his own side, but he has a remarkable capacity for not even hearing about them – he abandons his moral faculties and places the nation beyond good and evil" (7).

of a public imaginary, as personified in, for example, the print media. The nation is “imagined” in the sense that it is invented - it does not depend on face-to-face contact or even previous acquaintance of others, but functions on an awareness of absent others that nevertheless goes together with a sense of being part of a larger whole. This larger whole has to be imagined because it cannot be perceived through direct experience. The act of imagining, for example in literature or in newspaper discourse, therefore brings the nation into being. In this regard, literary representations of South Africa become more than an expression of national identity and serve as the condition for its existence. For this reason, an inquiry into how South Africa is imagined as a national community simultaneously examines its very existence.

As Mieke Bal explains in the introduction to her *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis*, revealing something is, at the same time, an act of performance, the putting forward of one’s own argument (2). This puts the subject of the argument on display as much as it does the object, and allows for an investigation into the dialogue held between them. This dialogue, in the form of narrative discourse, is the true subject of my analysis. In my analysis of the various post-1991 novels of André Brink, I do not only look at the image of national identity that they present in terms of the historical or social context in which it is framed, or the feelings that are engendered towards it, but I also examine the structure of the narrative that performs this image.

In using narratology as a tool for analysis, I pay close attention to the narrative’s formal aspects, such as the structure of the narration, its language-use, temporality or spatial indications. In this way, the relationship between what is told and how it is told is laid bare. This makes it possible to interpret the paradoxical correlations between these two layers of the narrative and find out how they operate in investing the text with meanings that exceed its apparent subject. Because stories are strategies that help humans make sense of their world, narratives form an important resource for structuring and comprehending experience. It can therefore be assumed that the study of narrative has a bearing on the study of the cultural and social framework by which lived experience is interpreted.

The conceptualisation of South Africa as a nation takes on a particularly complicated and paradoxical form, and it is easy to detect how difficult it still is for the nation to imagine itself as properly united. In spite of the fact that it could officially be considered a nation from the nineteenth century onwards, the divisions enforced by apartheid saw the subject of a truly united cross-national community only appear in South Africa after the end of apartheid in 1994. This makes for a continued complexity in discourses that imagine a South African national identity, both in the country’s literature and in popular media discourses.

An example is provided by the “start imagining” campaign devised by the First National Bank, as sponsors of the World Cup Soccer that will be hosted in South Africa in 2010. This

campaign gives a telling example of the complexity of imagining South Africa as a community that is not divided. Yet, it appears in a “black” version and a “white” version. One would think this alone defeats the purpose of imagining a joint nation, and clearly shows how “imagining” is taken as working differently for both populations. In one of the clips, the black population is presented with the glorious image of opportunity for success and hope in the future. A little boy is seen signing the soccer ball of a famous soccer player with his own name, handing it back to the soccer star with the promise that his name will be worth a great deal in the future. In the other version, a South African is queuing in an airport and complaining about inefficiency, speculating out loud that an efficient organisation of the World Cup by South Africans will prove impossible. An Australian reprimands him for his negativity and reassures him that, in spite of public misgivings, the Australians managed just fine in organising the Olympics and South Africa may even beat their country at cricket one day. The white segment is offered reassurance that things are not as bad as they fear, and that there may even still be opportunity for enjoying what used to be seen as the national sport (predominantly played by white people), cricket. The by-line of both versions of the advertisement show that the “community” that is imagined does refer to the nation of South Africa (it reads: “help South Africa shine”), but the execution of the clips reveal that South Africa is still not imagined as a joint community.

Nevertheless, I believe it is useful to take Benedict Anderson’s concept of a nation as a starting point, and perceive the nation of South Africa as a political community that is constructed by means of the invisible ties of the imagination and distinguished by the style in which it is imagined more than by its history or demographics. In this way, one can productively question to what extent an analysis of how the history of power struggles inherent in moments of contact shaped these imaginings in the first place, and how it continues to influence our perception of the South African community (Anderson, 6). Anderson fruitfully explores inconsistencies within the concept of nation by insisting on the impossibility of solid and factual descriptions of the nation, and by locating the fundamental condition of possibility for the nation, something he calls the “homogenous empty time” of the nation, within the disorder created by the continuous movements of mass migrations and other changes. Anderson is concerned with the framework of a new consciousness that literature makes possible, providing a paradigm that enables the imagining of a community, rather than with any particularly nationalistic content of specific novels.

A special issue of *Diacritics* published in the Winter of 1999 was dedicated to the implications of Anderson’s work.¹⁰ In this volume, Jonathan Culler, in an article entitled “Anderson and the Novel,” undertakes a challenge of Anderson’s ideas of what activities and imaginings have

¹⁰ I am referring to the *Diacritics* issue 29, volume 4 of the Winter of 1999, entitled “Grounds of Comparison: Around the Work of Benedict Anderson” by special editors Pheng Cheah and Jonathan Culler.

gone into the creation of nations in their present-day form. He focuses on three aspects of the novel which he identifies as important in Anderson's theory: the formal structure of narrative point of view, the national content of fictions and the construction of the reader (22).

The exterior narrative point of view, which supplies the idea of the synchronicity of events, was, for Anderson, the most important analogy between the novel and the nation in terms of their similar creation of a world of simultaneous events in the understanding of the reader. Culler notes, however, that this contradicts Anderson's discussion of particular novels. These do not really represent analogues of the nation, but fuse the world of the novel with that of the reader in a representation of its social space (23). Critiques of Anderson's theory that rest on content seem misguided. The accusation that his vision of the novel as belonging to an anti-imperial national culture ignores the fact that novels have the power to disenfranchise alternative voices within a multi-voiced national narrative.¹¹ Novels that embody the idea of nationness in content include those of star-crossed lovers that represent particular facets of the nation's population that seek to join within the terms of a national community, representing the desire for a nation in which they could possibly come together. These novels, Culler states, "share the project of national reconciliation," the desire to "cast the previously unreconciled parties, races, classes or regions as lovers who are 'naturally' attracted and right for each other" (25). This aspect of imagining the nation I will be looking at in closer detail in the third chapter of this study.

According to both Anderson and Culler, the novel does not hide internal differences within a nation but turns it into a story. Culler believes that Anderson's theory on the way in which time is organised in novels is too general to stand up to scrutiny (25). Homi Bhabha, whose contribution to the debate is also published in *Diacritics*, sees nationness as a form both of "social and textual affiliation": a narrative strategy as well as a tool for power (292). The nation shows itself as narrative at the moment when one becomes aware of the "double-time" that it inhabits: the time of historicity, which lends it authority, and that of modernity, which gives it its contemporary character. An image of "progress" thus fights with that of "timelessness". Bhabha also questions whether a certain sameness is required in order to embody the unity in diversity that the concept of nationhood seems to require and, if so, what the effect is of the effacement of specificity that it requires (296). This also calls up the idea of an authority that enables identification or membership of the nation. As with any ideology, experience and knowledge are generalised. People are contained within a national discourse. From the margins of a society indications of disruption are most clearly seen (302). Within these groups, the struggle inherent in the inevitable double-identity of nationals makes the narrativising or even mythologizing of the nation necessary in order to make

¹¹ For a discussion of this notion, see David Lloyd's article "Nationalisms against the State"(1997).

nationness coherent.¹² The notion of a nation being performed in terms of myth is explored in the last chapter of this work, in which I discuss the impact that such a performance of a national myth has on the relegation of certain populations to its margins.

Bhabha also takes Anderson's idea of homogenous empty time to task for ignoring the presence of what he calls an "all at once" time of the sign, which in its arbitrariness signifies disruption and breaks through Anderson's "meanwhile" as lived by numerous anonymous lives. The "all at once" is performative and embodies a will to nationhood. This will to nationness is what Bhabha sees as unifying historical memory by joint consent, as exemplified in Anderson's acts of "national forgetting". Anderson's theory on the necessity of forgetting is elaborated on in his second edition of *Imagined Communities*, in a chapter entitled "Memory and Forgetting". Anderson recognises that some "national" tragedies, such as Saint Bartholomew's for the French, need to be forgotten in order for a sense of community to exist. Bhabha, in *Nation and Narration*, comments on Anderson's supposition that this act of forgetting constitutes a performance of communal amnesia by stating that "[t]o be obliged to forget – in the construction of the national present – is not a question of historical memory; it is the construction of a discourse on society that performs the problematic totalization of the national will" (311). Both in chapter four, which analyses Brink's *Devil's Valley*, and chapter five of this study, which deals with *The Rights of Desire*, such attempts at (voluntary or enforced) forgetting take centre stage. The problematic inherent in national identification that result from forgetting, is something that I will unpack further in all the chapters that follow. With the help of such an analysis, and an examination of the use and understanding of the role of language in transforming a sense of South African identity, the chapters combined will strive towards a conception of post-apartheid identity as imagined in Brink's fiction.

Please note that the use of racial categories such as "white", "black" and "coloured" in this discussion, while they appear to reflect those instituted by the South African government under apartheid, do not imply approval of such classifications. Rather, they reflect the continued use of such classifications both as a matter of expedience, and as a strategy for addressing the imbalances of the past by refusing to subsume them within inadequate generic misnomers that ignore the fact of their past imposition.

¹² In his "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation" published in *Nation and Narration* (1990), Homi Bhabha discusses the social structures and hierarchies that operate within the modern nation-states and are produced in narrativising the nation from the standpoint of those on the periphery (291). Like Anderson, Bhabha focuses on the way in which the nation is imagined in order to oppose the presumption of objectivity in historiographical accounts of the nation.