

**Literary Representations of Home and Dislocation, Trauma, Healing
and African Spirituality in Niq Mhlongo's *Way Back Home* (2013) and
Mongane Wally Serote's *Rumours* (2013).**

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Abstract

This dissertation analyses the literary representations of collective disillusionment and emotional dislocation in contemporary South Africa as illustrated in Niq Mhlongo's *Way Back Home* (2013) and Mongane Wally Serote's *Rumours* (2013). In particular, I am interested in how the protagonists' repressed memories of apartheid-induced trauma manifest themselves in the present, and how individuals attempt to process traumatic 'hauntedness' through practicing various forms of African spirituality as anchored in traditional indigenous knowledge.

Through an engagement with relevant critical theories and concepts – home, trauma and African spirituality – this dissertation explores the novelistic representations of the ex-political exiles' emotional dislocation upon returning to South Africa in the early 1990s. I also examine the impact of past traumatic memories on the protagonists' narrative present and further explore aspects of traditional indigenous knowledge and spirituality that may assist in one's search for cultural identity, belonging and emotional healing from traumatic memories of past historical trauma.

Both novels present protagonists who have spent many years as political exiles serving under the armed wing of the ANC, uMkhonto we Sizwe, and who – upon returning to their homeland – struggle to integrate themselves into a rapidly changing society. Not only do they feel 'unhomed' and alienated, but they are also disenchanted with present-day post-transitional social circumstances. Their emotional dislocation is heightened by the repressed traumatic memories that infringe on their present, and threaten their future. To overcome their traumatic 'hauntedness,' both protagonists seek emotional healing through an engagement with traditional healers and indigenous healing methods. However, of the two protagonists, only Serote's successfully uplifts himself from traumatic 'hauntedness' and finds belonging in the present.

My main interest in this dissertation is to explore how Serote and Mhlongo suggest ways in which the protagonists hope to process their traumatic 'hauntedness' through recourse to African spirituality and traditional indigenous knowledge. Although only Serote's protagonist actually manages to still the demons of his past trauma, through an in-depth analysis, I suggest that both writers – Serote and Mhlongo – strongly advocate the need for one's reconnection with indigenous culture, healing practices and spirituality.

Declaration

I, Ntando Mazibuko, do declare that

- (i) The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.
- (ii) This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

Signed:



Date: 26 March 2024.

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1. Chapter One: Introduction, Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature

1.1 Introduction

My study aims to analyse the literary representations of collective disillusionment and emotional dislocation in contemporary South Africa, as illustrated in Niq Mhlongo's *Way Back Home* (2013) and Mongane Wally Serote's *Rumours* (2013). More specifically, to investigate how the repressed memories of apartheid-induced trauma manifest themselves in the present, and how individuals can process and go beyond their trauma through practicing various forms of African spirituality and traditional indigenous knowledge. These two authors draw on concerns derived from the aftermath of the apartheid era and are also centred on profound feelings of identity dislocation, fragmentation and belonging in the fast-changing new democratic dispensation. With this interest in mind, I will explore the literary representations of the impact of emotional dislocation on political exiles returning to South Africa in the early 1990s, by focusing on the consequences of trauma as a trigger for one's journey toward emotional stability and rootedness.

Niq Mhlongo's *Way Back Home* (2013) and Mongane Wally Serote's *Rumours* (2013) are supportive of my exploration of the literary representations of South Africa's so-called 'post-transitional' period. Coined by Ronit Frenkel and Craig Mackenzie (2010), post-transitional South African literature "emerged in the post-2000 period" and incorporates "works of extraordinary range and diversity" (1). Whereas the work produced under apartheid centred on the past Struggle for a democratic society, post-transitional literature "signals a broadening of concerns and styles that reach both backwards and forward" (7). However, although literary works produced after the year 2000 have moved away from the racial and political issues that overdetermined the apartheid era, they commonly explore the impact of the past on the present and the future while examining the collective psyche. Frenkel and Mackenzie (2010) further state that in post-transitional narratives, history is interrogated in the form of retrieving buried histories "from the variety of perspectives to add to the growing body of new South African stories" (2).

Using an overall postcolonial theoretical framework, I aim to analyse the literary representations of post-transitional times in South Africa, as illustrated in my chosen novels. More specifically, I will investigate how the repressed memories of apartheid atrocities manifest themselves in the present and how the protagonists can hope to process and escape their trauma through African spirituality and traditional indigenous knowledge. Through my analysis, I hope to gain insight into the complex nature of home, trauma, African spirituality, and traditional indigenous knowledge in contemporary South Africa.

In this chapter of my dissertation, I will provide an analysis of the relevant theoretical framework and conduct a literature review while also engaging with the critical scholarship regarding my chosen novels and their respective authors. In section 1.2, I will explore the theoretical framework to be utilised:

postcolonial literary studies, as well as the numerous concepts that fall under it, specifically home, dislocation, trauma, and African spirituality.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

1.2.1 Recent Tendencies in Postcolonial Literary Studies

In the 1950s and 1960s, postcolonial studies mainly focused on national issues, such as the economic and socio-political situations of a country after liberation. According to Elleke Boehmer (2005), migrant and postcolonial literatures produced after liberation “represent a geographical, cultural, and political retreat by writers from the new but ailing nations of the post-colonial world [as] they are marked by its disillusionment” (237). Since the beginning of the 1970s, previously colonised countries that had recently gained their independence were “plagued by neo-colonial ills” (237), such as economic instability and disorder, kleptocracy, poverty, and social unease. In fact, many of the same abuses of power and hierarchies of power that existed before colonisation were maintained.

More recently, the field has shifted its focus towards more global issues such as the cross-border experience, migration, and diasporic activity in the postcolonial world. Postcolonial studies have expanded their scope to discuss issues of immigration, globalisation, cosmopolitanism, disenchantment, and their traumatic impact on the migrant. Most notably, the social responsibility of postcolonial studies is to make sure that “theory and interpretation of postcolonial texts challenge the hegemony of the Western canon” (Katrak 1989 qtd in Punter 2000: 8). One focus of interest is therefore concerned with migrant and diasporic people and places: how they relate with one another, and with places (for example, the migrants’ sense of belonging among a community and whether they can refer to a place as ‘home’). Jopi Nyman (2009) argues that recent postcolonial literary studies focus on “the mobility of people, ideas and cultures, suggesting that culture is an ongoing and dynamic process rather than a static product” (13). As more individuals immigrate to other countries, the idea of migration has broadened to include various cultural and social border crossing, thus challenging the notion of identity and belonging as linked to a place of birth. As Johan Jacobs (2016) said, despite this kind of cross-border experience, it must be recognised that its consequences are a feeling of being “doubly relocated [and] doubly dislocated” (239) – of no longer existing in the past but also struggling to integrate themselves in the present-day. Many postcolonial authors draw attention to the experience of straddling worlds. Memories of the past also contribute to a double perspective as repressed, subverted, and traumatic memories always find a way of resurfacing in the present, against the wishes of the one it occupies. In moments of crisis, individuals are forced to acknowledge their false comfort and to address their ‘doubleness’ and traumatic memories. Globalisation has problematised our traditional understandings of home and belonging by leading individuals to experience emotional trauma and loss linked with migration. In many post-transitional South African novels, the returned ex-political exiles find themselves plagued by emotional dislocation, fractured identities, trauma, migration, home, belonging, and the need to find emotional and spiritual grounding in traditional indigenous knowledge.

The larger theoretical framework of my dissertation is anchored in postcolonial literary studies, focusing on three concepts relevant to my research: home, trauma, and African spirituality. More specifically, I will investigate how the repressed memories of apartheid manifest themselves in the present, and how individuals attempt to process their psychological traumas and find a sense of self and belonging through practices of African spirituality and traditional indigenous knowledge.

Thus, 'postcolonial' literature is primarily concerned with issues of emotional dislocation, liminality, the uncanny, hybrid identities, complex past traumas, and the search for belonging and home. The 'postcolonial condition' is concerned with emotionally dislocated individuals searching for their identity, belonging and a sense of 'home' in a rapidly changing society. Postcolonial literature focuses on how people relate to places: how individuals engage with and connect to their surroundings, including their ability to cultivate a feeling of belonging to places and the local community, as well as their concept of 'home.'

David Punter (2000) also states that postcolonial literature is also about "that which resists pinning down, that which will always squirm away and produce an 'other'" (6). These tensions can illuminate how displaced people may feel a sense of unbelonging and unrootedness in a place, or within themselves. Elleke Boehmer (1995) describes this feeling as a 'double perspective': the postcolonial individual as privileged, yet also existing in a painfully traumatic situation, taking advantage of "the resources of their own half-and-half status" (117).

In what follows, I will offer a few reflections on the postcolonial concepts of home, trauma, and African spirituality.

1.2.2 Definitions of Home

There are many definitions of home. For example, as Aviezer Tucker (1994) said, 'home' is viewed as the place where one feels an emotional connection, a sense of belonging and safety that enables one to feel "personal self-fulfilment" (181). 'Home' is where we can truly feel at ease and be ourselves, and it "allows us to be *homely*" (184). When we think of what it means to be homeless, we immediately think of shelter – the physical and material home "which affords protection to oneself, and which appears to others as at least a roof over one's head" (Somerville 1992: 532). According to Tucker (1994), homelessness does not mean only a loss of the physical home. It is far more complicated than that; it may be a "lack of self-fulfilment, control of one's physical environment, lack of emotional comfort, absence of intellectual stimuli, [and a] state of utter social loneliness" (184). Shelley Mallet (2004) seems to write in disagreement with this as she argues that the era of globalisation has made the concepts of home, homeland and belonging problematic; the critic states that discussions surrounding the idea of

'home' are generally "nostalgic or romantic" as they focus solely on positive descriptions, and rather naively so as they "do not reflect people's diverse experience[s] and understanding[s] of home" (69-70).

In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi K. Bhabha describes the idea of 'not being at home' as a feeling of unhomeliness. The feeling of 'unhomeliness' can be described as disorientation, a sense of "ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (1994:1). During such instances, we encounter an "estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world:" this is what Bhabha refers to as 'unhomeliness' (9). To be homeless is different from the feeling of unhomeliness: to be 'unhomed' (for Bhabha) means suddenly finding yourself "taking the measure of your dwelling" in a state of extreme distress and uneasiness (1). In these unhomely moments, the "recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions" (1). The 'unhomely' moment is known as dislocation, which is brought about when – as Bhabha (1992) said – "the border[s] between home and [the] world become[s] confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision [of the world] that is as divided as it is disorientating" (141). Jacobs (2016) states that the migrant individuals may feel emotionally dislocated – or "doubly dislocated" – as they are both inside and outside – of the society they live in (239). While the migrant individuals may be members of the community – living, raising a family, and contributing to it – they may continually experience times when they feel as if they have not fully integrated themselves into society.

Bhabha's argument here is that home can be an intrinsically unstable and potentially traumatic experience that has the potential to emotionally and psychologically dislocate an individual. According to Monique Every (2018), the belief that one can be emotionally and psychologically dislocated from their home due to trauma is well documented in postcolonial studies. Although the uncanny space is disorientating, Bhabha (1994) argues that it is also productive as it "provide[s] the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity" (2). Nyman (2009) argues that in postcolonial narratives, the notion of home is reshaped, "and its link with some mythical geographical homeland is severed," allowing the migrant individual to construct a sense of belonging and identity in other spaces (25). Contemporary South African novels portray the experience of exile as damaging, as it often dismantles one's sense of belonging and, simultaneously, their ability to integrate themselves within society. Individuals who are unhomed and in a state of unbelonging may, once again, restore their sense of self in new and different ways.

In literature, home is often described as a haven – a place where one can retreat. According to Shelley Mallet (2004), this notion of home is based on the understanding that there is an inside world and an outside world: the inside world, such as the physical home, typically represents a secure and comfortable environment (71). Mallet further states that as opposed to the inside world, "the outside [world] is

perceived as an imposing, if not threatening or dangerous space. It is more diffuse, less defined” (71). However, globalisation challenges the belief that home is a place of safety and emotional fulfilment, portraying individuals characterised by loss and emotional dislocation in their home country. Rosemary Marangoly George (1996) argues that in contemporary fiction, a prominent theme is the “search for the location in which the self is ‘at home’” (3). Jacobs (2016) builds on this by stating that home is “doubly coded”: it manifests itself as a place of both “inclusion [and] exclusion” (261). Home can be a place where one seeks to escape to and also escape from (261). In the context of contemporary South African novels, many writers depict displaced individuals who spent lengthy time away from home during apartheid and who – upon returning back after apartheid – experienced home as a place of unbelonging. Many novels convey stories of individuals seeking contact, a sense of community and home in alien territory.

Specifically, the African understanding of the word ‘home’ is uniquely different from how it is understood in English. For example, the isiXhosa word for ‘home’ is ‘ekhaya,’ which is not simply a word used to describe a place where people live; rather, it denotes the whole network of the family instead of a singular nuclear family. According to Athambile Masola (2020), ‘ekhaya’ is where people can connect their family to ancestors, and while ancestors may not exist materially, “they are spiritually present” (51). AmaXhosa people who are able to bury their family at their family homestead ensure that the “gravesite connects [e]khaya with the spiritual world of the ancestors,” which then gives meaning to the many rituals that are performed ekhaya – for example, like the ritual of bringing the spirit of the departed home (51). [E]khaya – home – is therefore intrinsically connected to land because it is where rituals take place. When a connection with the land is broken, certain rituals cannot be performed “because of the displacement and dislocation from land” (51).

According to Masola (2020), South Africa’s history of land displacement means more than a physical displacement; it meant an “existential dislocation” (51). Masola goes on to say that until the exiled individuals return to South Africa, home remains an idea they hear about from adults who lived there previously; home is like a dream – they can only imagine what South Africa is like (51). The returned exiles in my selected novels struggle to formulate a sense of home and belonging in a democratic South Africa amidst intense feelings of lostness, confusion and emotional uprootedness, which further aggravate a sense of traumatic ‘hauntedness.’

1.2.3 Perspectives on Trauma

According to Punter (2000), postcolonial writing on trauma focuses on “the constancy of hallucination[s] and dream[s in] response to the violations of slavery and indenture and conquest” (95). Postcolonial research into trauma often focuses on how contemporary works are influenced and moulded by the global legacies of colonialism and by apartheid in South Africa. Abigail Ward (2013), for

example, offers an in-depth understanding of those who have “experienced colonial traumas [...] and their descendants, but also those connected to more recent 20th- and 21st-century sites of trauma in the postcolonial [and post-transitional] world” (171).

In delving into trauma studies, theorist Cathy Caruth (1995) is particularly influential. According to Caruth, Sigmund Freud was instrumental in changing the understanding of ‘trauma’ to not only refer to bodily wounds, but also to include mental/severe distress with “symptoms which can be described only to [their] shock” value (7). Caruth states that ‘psychological wounds,’ or “psychic trauma”, not only necessitate deep “personal suffering, but it also involves the recognition of realities that most of us have not begun to face” (vii). Her understanding of ‘psychic trauma’ is based on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which she defines as:

[a] response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (1995: 4-5)

As implied by this definition, the traumatic event is of such significance that it continues to affect the individual in various ways long after the incident has taken place. PTSD gives us the underlying framework for understanding trauma and the insidious ways in which it presents itself. There are many similar definitions for PTSD, but according to Irene Visser (2011), the common thread is that it is a mental health condition that a person sustains after experiencing a traumatic event that displays itself in many different ways, such as nightmares, amnesia, agitation, restlessness, flashbacks, numbness, anxiety attacks, and the avoidance of situations that resemble the traumatic event (272). Sociologist Kai Erikson (1991) states that trauma “is an assault from outside that breaks into the space one occupies as a person and damages the interior [that demands] a continual reliving of the original experience” (455; 457). As claimed by Freud, the returning image or event is especially startling “because it cannot be understood in terms of any wish or unconscious meaning, but it is, purely and inexplicably, the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits” (Caruth 1995: 5). The individual becomes “possessed by an image or event” threatening to drain them of everything, leaving them barren (3). Trauma not only serves as proof of a belated event, but it is the uncontrollable return of an experience “not yet fully owned” (151). According to Caruth (1995), traumatic memories can be referred to as the unprocessed and unclaimed pieces “of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language” (176). However, for this to take place successfully, the individual suffering from trauma must actively retrieve the memory to process and complete it.

In the social climate of current movements to decolonise knowledge around trauma, it is also essential to investigate the larger social causes of trauma. According to Abigail Ward (2013), Cathy Caruth's explorations into trauma are based on the psychological legacies of the Holocaust (177). While Caruth's ideas about trauma provide a valuable and relevant vocabulary for the study of trauma in a larger sense, Ward warns against minimising the differences between Holocaust trauma and postcolonial trauma (176). Unlike Caruth's examinations of trauma, Ward's assessment of trauma moves beyond the individual to argue that "trauma is not necessarily confined to those that have experienced traumatic events" as its effects may impact those "beyond the immediate victims" (179). This means that trauma is transmissible beyond the immediate victims and may even affect those who did not directly witness the event. Regarding the transmissibility of traumatic memories, Ward (2015) examines a term coined by Marianne Hirsch known as "postmemory" (7). 'Postmemory,' also referred to as the "inherited recall of trauma," is the unconscious transmission of trauma filtering down to generations who may not have experienced the trauma directly (171). In the context of South Africa, 'postmemory' is the transmission of traumatic memories of the apartheid regime to generations born after 1994.

Stef Craps (2013) argues that although the traumas of non-Western groups have in recent years begun to be documented, Caruth's vision tends to fall short in its "promise of cross-cultural engagement" (2). According to Craps, Caruth's texts have limitations: her texts do not acknowledge the "traumatic experiences of non-Western" people, they typically think that Western definitions of trauma apply universally, and "they tend to favour or even prescribe a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia as uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma, and they generally disregard the connections between metropolitan and non-Western or minority traumas" (2). Thus, Eurocentric trauma theories are "culturally insensitive and exclusionary" (3). For instance, one major criticism against the dominant discourses of Eurocentric trauma studies is that it considers trauma to be a purely individual experience. The problem with this belief is that it neglects "collective societies [wherein] individualistic approaches may be at odds with the local culture" (28). Furthermore, by using a narrow approach that focuses on the individual psyche, one leaves out the conditions that brought about the traumatic abuses, "such as political oppression, racism, or economic domination" (28). Rebecca Fasselt (2014) writes in agreement with this by stating that "traumatic stress in South Africa is intricately connected to the historical conditions of colonisation and apartheid, which led to the collective traumatising of generations" (93). In particular, South Africa is an interesting case as both the oppressor and the oppressed suffer from trauma. Although most trauma studies have Eurocentric biases, this does not mean that they cannot be rearticulated and reshaped to include the traumatic experiences of non-Western people.

Another theorist who engages with trauma studies and argues for the decolonisation of knowledge around trauma is Beatriz P. Zapata (2021), who writes in agreement with Caruth's definition of trauma:

...in general terms, trauma has been characterised by belatedness, the impossibility of knowing what happened at the moment of the traumatic event, unconscious repetitions, anxiety, repression, fragmented memory, the splitting of the self and development of multiple personalities, dissociation, a fraught relationship with communities, and shame, all of which may deprive trauma victims of any sense of agency and/or capacity to cope with and adapt to the world they are confronting. (2)

Numerous 20th-century studies and narratives testified to the horrifying atrocities that had taken place during the Holocaust and in wars. However, according to Zapata, towards the end of the 20th-century and in the 21st-century, psychological approaches to postcolonial studies have broadened to include experiences that go beyond Eurocentric ideals to examine the collective and historical traumas of oppressed people (12). In fact, in many post-transitional South African novels, trauma is a recurring theme as it sheds light on forgotten pasts and illustrates “a broken society still coping with the aftermath of apartheid” (Ivad 2020: 6). According to Ivad (2020), South Africa is the only country where “a system of racial separation was implemented through official laws and rules by the government over decades,” where the minority maintained its legal control over the majority (25). Therefore, the collective trauma felt by South Africans, even today, is unique in the world.

One of the ways in which postcolonial trauma novels move beyond Eurocentric ideals is by utilising myth, traditional beliefs and rituals to understand the long-lasting effects of trauma in African countries. According to Visser (2011), postcolonial trauma theory calls for a “more comprehensive, conceptualisation of trauma [that] expand[s] trauma’s conceptual framework, in order to respond more adequately to postcolonial ways of understanding history, memory and trauma” (270). Abigail Ward (2015) states that postcolonial trauma studies psychologically examine “the effects of colonisation and decolonisation on the colonised, or formerly colonised, as well as the colonisers” and unearths the effects of “the traumatic legacies of colonisation and slavery, post-slavery trauma, apartheid, wars and twentieth-century genocides,” (3). Stef Craps and Gert Buelens (2008) seem to write in agreement with Ward’s understanding by stating that the key purpose of trauma theory is to understand colonial traumas, like “dispossession, forced migration, diaspora, slavery, segregation, racism, political violence, and genocide” (3). Zapata (2021) goes on to argue that for trauma to be an accessible category, it must be revised and remoulded to include “collectivity [...], racial inequality, abject poverty, and unemployment,” therefore highlighting that trauma cannot be separated from cultural, socio-economic and political environments (4-5). More importantly, Zapata states that the decolonisation of trauma studies means that a myriad of traumatic experiences are covered in postcolonial trauma novels, such as “the traumatic consequences of colonialism as well as the traumatic potential of societies that still rely on (neo)colonial systems and structures” (12-13).

According to Zapata, postcolonial novels encourage us to analyse not only the individual but also the historical and collective “wounds that diasporic characters show and move beyond considering the traumatic event on its own because socio-political variables can often trigger off traumatic experiences” (17). Michelle Balaev (2008) states that the concept of ‘trauma novel’ refers to fictional works “that convey profound loss or intense fear on individual or collective levels” (150). A key aspect of trauma novels “is the transformation of the self ignited by an external, often terrifying experience, which illuminates the process of coming to terms with dynamics of memory that informs the new perceptions of the self and world” (150). As Ivad (2020) also says, trauma literature also portrays the “disruption between the self and others by describing the place of trauma” (50). Examining the larger physical environment is integral to representations of trauma as it highlights “the individual experience within a larger cultural context and organises the memory and meaning of trauma” (50). The examination of trauma through storytelling is an “attempt to alleviate the burden of the ever-present history of colonialism and the insidiousness of historical and collective traumas that persist through multiple generations” (Zapata 2021: 25). Similarly to Abigail Ward (2015) who discusses ‘postmemory’, Zapata (2021) analyses the “transgenerational transmission of trauma” to individuals who may not have suffered directly but “nevertheless present symptoms of being traumatised themselves” (25). Numerous theories around transgenerational trauma argue that “a traumatic event which is experienced by one individual can be passed on, so that its effects are replayed in another individual one or more generations later,” sometimes without it ever being spoken about (Whitehead 2004: 14).

Although some critics have argued that it is impossible to adequately talk about trauma, others believe one can talk about trauma. For example, critic Anne Whitehead (2004), in support of Caruth’s work, argues that trauma is “susceptible to narrative formulation” (6). For Caruth, literature that engages with past traumas is important as it gives both reader and writer a “powerful mode of access to history and memory” (13). This literature is known as ‘trauma fiction,’ and it “signals the recent journey of trauma from medical and scientific discourse to the field of literary studies” (4). Oftentimes, these narratives will depict individuals whose “present is overshadowed and haunted by the unsolved effects of the past” (15). The transmission of trauma across generations in postcolonial novels poses the question of whether there is an end to the process and gives contemporary writers an effective tool to examine and illustrate the long-lasting and ever-present effects of trauma on those who were born later (Zapata 2021: 26). For example, writers will often illustrate the ways in which the past significantly and negatively affects one’s ability to situate themselves in the present.

Postcolonial writers highlight “the ways in which contemporary cultural works are influenced and shaped by the complex legacies of colonialism” by producing fictional stories that reconstruct and “replace the public and collective narrative of history with an interior and private act of memory” (Whitehead 2004: 82). Postcolonial authors shed light on previously overlooked histories by bringing

forward hidden, denied, repressed or forgotten stories into public consciousness. For example, Laretta Ngcobo's novel *And They Didn't Die* (1990) depicts the remarkable courage and endurance shown by rural women against apartheid laws that threatened their livelihoods in 1980s South Africa. Ngcobo's book makes us rethink how history has been represented by telling the forgotten stories of unsung female heroes. This lets the stories of these heroines be heard and changes how we understand the past. Books like Ngcobo's not only dig up forgotten memories, but also give them a voice.

Trauma novels strategically utilise the literary strategy of repetition through plot, imagery and language to mirror the consequences of trauma which "suggest the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology" (Whitehead 2004: 86). The strategic device of repetition in literature mirrors the "unconscious repetitions" that traumatised people experience in real-time (Zapata 2021: 2).

In real life, trauma is marked by indistinguishable memories of past traumatic events. However, unlike reality, trauma fiction recreates these experiences with accuracy. According to Caruth (1995), this is because while the flashback or nightmare may be vivid, recovering the past is closely linked to trauma due to "the inability to have access to [memories]" (152).

Although trauma fiction exists, some critics have argued that trauma cannot be articulated as it is "unrepresentable" (Balaev 2008: 151). However – according to Adrian Iwad (2020) – trauma stories possess the power to reconstruct and relive events and encounters for individuals who might not have witnessed them first-hand. The significance of trauma fiction is its capacity to expel memories affecting individuals and entire communities. Therefore, it offers a way for traumatised people to recover and a means of preventing the same traumatic instances from ever occurring again in the future. Novels that engage with trauma will often portray protagonists, or other secondary characters, who suffer from nightmares, flashbacks, intrusive memories, anxiety and destructive behaviours. As Cornelius (2019) says, through such portrayals, the long-lasting influence of a traumatic past is highlighted. In order to overcome the trauma, it is necessary for these individuals to confront painful memories – "sometimes contemplating complicity, guilt, and betrayal" – to find acceptance and healing so as to move on and no longer be hurt by memories (3).

Whether it is acknowledged or not, trauma is the literal, unintentional and subconscious return of an event contrary to the wishes of its host, "for trauma is that which inverts linear history, that which forever inserts a wedge into history's doors, keeping them permanently open, preventing closure" (Punter 2000: 137). That is to say, the emotional wound will persist if it is not confronted. In postcolonial novels, repressed memories will often return in the form of ghosts and hauntings, resulting in some literary works being labelled 'postcolonial gothics.'

I aim to draw on the above-mentioned critical works to interpret the protagonists' traumatic experiences and thus contribute to the growing literary criticism on trauma-related issues in South African contemporary novels.

1.2.4 Perspectives on African Spirituality

The novels I have selected for textual analysis are written in the realist mode, but they also employ aspects of the 'postcolonial gothic' and of magical realism in their narrative: the presence of ghosts, hauntings, "aesthetic elements such as madness, enclosure, monstrosity, [...] discontinuous narrative [and] sexual predation" (Shear 2006: 70-71). When applied to postcolonial writing, the Gothic conveys the idea of a traditionally European genre as applied to a previously colonised society. Cheryl Stobie (2008) states that the Gothic engages with:

...the binaries of self and other, life and death, past and present, inner and outer, the homely and the uncanny, [...] existential hopes and fears, the corporal and the metaphysical, all co-exist simultaneously, and this dissolution of absolutes is profoundly unsettling to both characters and readers. (28)

According to Gerald Gaylard (2008), postcolonial literary works that feature the Gothic are defined by the 'return of the repressed' in the form of ghosts and hauntings, where unspeakable things come to light, and old painful memories find a way to be talked about (3-4). Additionally, postcolonial novels also explore feelings of disappointment with the failures of post-transitional South Africa. Gaylard further states that Sigmund Freud's concept of the 'uncanny' stirs sensations of fear and dread as it delves into key themes of death and the paranormal, seeking to illustrate what cannot be represented (15). According to Gaylard, the Gothic is much suited to southern African literature as it aptly conveys the "eldritch horror of imperialism and apartheid and their aftermath" (2).

Magical realism refers to "any mythic or legendary material from local written or oral cultural traditions in contemporary narrative" (Ashcroft 2007: 119). In contemporary novels, magical realism utilises magic and myth to radically re-imagine subverted histories, thus providing alternative narratives. Although magical realism is thought to have originated from South America, Tukumbeje Mposa (2017) argues that it is "quintessentially African, because of an ancient history of oral tradition in which linear time is fractured and cause and effect disrupted" (2). This literature "portrays magical or unreal elements as a natural part of otherwise realistic or mundane environment" (2). In this narrative mode, it is not uncommon for the dead and the living to interact freely. While 'the Gothic' and 'magical realism' are well-known critical concepts, my dissertation will focus on mythical elements of African spirituality, which involve traditional healers and indigenous healing methods.

A growing number of postcolonial novels employ elements of African mythology, folklore, legend, and spirituality in their narratives. These elements may aid in making sense of contemporary malaise in the light of past atrocities (e.g. colonialism, slavery, and apartheid). These narratives depict people as part of a larger spiritual world able to impart knowledge, impact the present and influence the future. Jones M. Jaja (2014) states that ‘the mythic’ is not solely a mere creation of the human imagination, but it is used to express aspects of reality and “portray the African way of thinking by acting as vehicles for preserving and transmitting valued” traditional indigenous knowledge while reminding us of “the past in its real existence” (9-10, 14). The Britannica Dictionary defines myths as stories constructed to “explain a practice, belief, [...] natural occurrence[s],” the history of a people and the origin of things which are passed down orally from one generation to the next (2022: n.p.). In African societies, myths are not “just a product of human imagination, but are a direct expression of reality,” therefore making them largely “susceptible to rational and logical interpretation” (Jaja 2014: 10). According to Jaja, “myths connect the past with the present” as they bridge the gap left by the absence of written literature for preserving history and knowledge through oral literature thus making them valuable sources of truth (12).

Nwamaka Ekamma Iyizoba (2018) states that ‘the mythic’ can be used in literature “to symbolise human experience and embody the spiritual values [and traditional heritage] of a culture,” constituting a “formidable way of contextualising African experience” (10, 16). According to Iyizoba, the mythic is indeed “a formidable way of contextualising African experience[s]” as it is linked to the “larger definition of oral tradition” (9). Iyizoba further states that myths often engage with elements found in folklore or legend, which depict people as an important part of a much larger universe. In literature, myths capture and sustain the attention of the reader, and push the bounds of belief where “realms merge and run together, space is shattered and time is pushed back” (11). In addition to engaging with folklore and the ‘shattering’ of time and space, African novels that incorporate myth into their narratives use it “as a framing device that contains and interrogates historical event[s], thereby functioning as a form of alternative history” (Halpè 2010: ii). Zeleza (2007) also argues that these narratives challenge history and transcend “the European model of literary imagination, production, criticism, legitimation, and canonisation” (11). More specifically, in contemporary postcolonial literature, myth investigates and interrogates key socio-political, cultural and historical moments in time. Aparna Halpè (2010) states that contemporary postcolonial literature often addressed “issues of modernity” such as nation building, disillusionment, and liberation after colonial rule (2). Most importantly, Wole Ogundele (2002) argues that by engaging with the mythic in their narratives, contemporary postcolonial writers took advantage of the English language to express, circulate and disseminate indigenous knowledge “as a way to reconnect with the past” and to respond to the present while “projecting back to the past or forward in the future” (130, 132).

It can be seen from the above that contemporary postcolonial literary studies identifies the presence of myth in “literary texts and addresses its relation to issues of modernity,” including aspects of neo-colonial rule, democracy, home, belonging and identity formation in a changing society (Halpè 2010: 22).

Concerning Mongane Wally Serote’s *Rumours* (2013) and Niq Mhlongo’s *Way Back Home* (2013), most critical attention has focused on how these writers fictionally engage with the representations of real-life and historical social trauma. Critics argue that contemporary postcolonial South African writers moved away from the Struggle narrative as soon as political freedom was attained in 1994, to focus on black concerns in the Rainbow Nation. For example, Beverley Cornelius (2019) argues that a lot of critical attention has focused on “Serote’s art in relation to politics” (3). Muxe Nkondo (2015) further argues that Serote’s novels depict individuals “of great sensitivity, courage, and great possibilities” who are weighted-down by the frustrations of living in post-apartheid South Africa (57). Concerning Mhlongo’s novel, critics have largely focused on the “rampant corruption” displayed by corrupt government officials and former Struggle fighters in the years after democracy (Rafapa 2018: 106-107). Additionally, Nadia Inarmal (2019) examines gender in the novel and argues that Mhlongo’s writing in the novel directly responds to “the crisis of black masculinity, and its association with corruption, excess and greed” (20).

When it comes to Serote’s and Mhlongo’s novels, critics have primarily focused on the fictional representations of political and social trauma and the kleptocracy displayed by many ex-political exiles. However, not enough critical work has focused on the novels’ representation of spirituality and how both writers incorporate traditional indigenous knowledge in their narratives. In their novels, Serote and Mhlongo fictionally fuse tradition and spirituality in an atmosphere in which the extraordinary and the ordinary are accepted as part of reality, thus blurring the lines between fantasy and reality.

One of the few critics who has focused on the spiritual elements in Serote’s novel, *Rumours*, is Cornelius (2019). In her PhD, she analyses the mythic through the characters’ nostalgic lens, which she refers to as “nostalgic yearnings” (2019: 182). Cornelius’s argument is that, in *Rumours*, the protagonists’ “nostalgic longing for a particular place is triggered by a general mood” of disillusionment and discontent with recent social contexts, including unprocessed trauma, and feelings of immense loneliness, all of which make the characters yearn for “a restorative imagining of a magical, idealised Africa” (194-195). Although Cornelius begins to explore the mythic, she does not explore in detail how rituals, traditional medicine and healing can help individuals overcome their trauma, homelessness, and feelings of unbelonging. Therefore, my examination of African spirituality aims to explore, at some length, Serote’s representations of rituals, traditional medicine and healing meant to help the protagonist overcome feelings of trauma and loneliness.

This is a position also espoused by Manfred Loimeier (2020) as applied to Mhlongo's novel, which he sees as not simply a highly charged historical novel, but also a psychological story "composed of magic and myth" (473). Nadia Inarmal (2019), in her turn, has also approached Mhlongo's *Way Back Home* (2013) with a focus on magical realism as the real world and the world of the supernatural enable the protagonist and other secondary characters to engage with the past and come to terms with it. Inarmal's main focus in her dissertation is on the novel's protagonist, Kimathi, and his grappling with notions of masculinity, his efforts to bury the wrongdoings he committed during exile, and the way Senami's presence serves as a metaphor for the resurfacing of long-buried and overlooked memories in Kimathi's life. Yolisa Kenqu (2019) also acknowledges the presence of the mythic in Mhlongo's novel by stating that it "bears the markers of a postcolonial gothic work of disillusionment and failure" (158). In her writing, Kenqu states that the folktale of 'Vera the Ghost' is reimagined by Mhlongo in the character of Senami, also known as Lady Comrade Mkabayi, "who is brutally raped and murdered by the comrades in exile and returns as the living dead to avenge her death" (158). Although Kenqu acknowledges the presence of ghosts and haunted houses, she does not focus her writing on it; rather, she focuses on the novel "as a critique of the kleptocracy" displayed by ruling politicians and their friends (158). In an article published in the *Mail and Guardian*, Percy Zvomuya writes that Mhlongo's novel critically "attempts to tackle the centrality of the mystical in our lives" by incorporating the myth of the ghost of Vera into contemporary narrative (2013: n.p.).

While aligning myself with the main findings of the above research projects and dissertations, it must be stated that my analysis of *Way Back Home* and *Rumours* will add extra perspectives – not investigated thus far – of specifically African perspectives on traditional healing, rituals and African spirituality. Mothibe and Mncengeli (2019) state, "African spirituality encompasses belief and worship of God, and reverence and acknowledgement of ancestors" (12). Additionally, it also includes African traditional healing methods and medicinal practices.

I intend to explore representations of African spirituality in Mhlongo's and Serote's narratives and illustrate the ways in which it "is holistic in its approach" to healing individuals and communities (Mokgobi 2014: 28). The novels illustrate how traditional healing does not only diagnose the physical sickness of a person, for it understands the appearance of an illness to be "the physical manifestation of [an] imbalance between the spiritual and psychological" (Okpapaenwe and Odigwe 2018: 16).

The novels also illustrate how important traditional medicine is in helping people communicate with their ancestors and find holistic healing. According to the World Health Organisation, African traditional medicine "refers to the knowledge, skills, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures, used in the maintenance of health and in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and

mental illness” (2021: n.p.). According to Mmamoshedi E. Mothibe and Mncengeli Sibanda (2019), African traditional medicine can be described “as a body of knowledge that has been developed and accumulated over tens of thousands of years, which is associated with the examination, diagnosis, therapy, treatment, prevention, or promotion and rehabilitation of the physical, mental, spiritual or social well-being of humans” (6). African traditional medicine is “one of the oldest and most diverse of all medicine systems” and it includes “herbal medicines, which may be herbs, herbal materials, herbal preparations and finished herbal products” (1-2).

According to Jo Thobeka Wreford (2005) – similar to other African countries – in South Africa, modern medicine exists alongside traditional healing practices, and it is commonly used by black people across all walks of life (2). African individuals also use longstanding traditions and rituals to alleviate trauma caused by social contexts: slavery, colonialism, apartheid, civil wars, genocides, poverty, and HIV/AIDS. Traditional medicines are used by traditional healers to provide holistic health care based on herbs, remedies and rituals. Maboe G. Mokgobi (2014) argues that traditional healers go beyond using traditional herbs to help with physical ailments: they “serve many roles which include but [are] not limited to custodians of the traditional African [...] customs, educators about culture, counsellors, social workers and psychologists” (24). Traditional healers are persons who have received a calling from their ancestors to provide healing to people as they “possess special powers such as divination” and use incense to act as mediums between people and their ancestors (Melato 2000: 66). They also acquire their knowledge through training and oral tradition from relatives, elders in the community and more experienced traditional healers.

In many African ethnic groups, there is the belief that “people and their ancestors are related to one another as if the dead were still alive” (Mulambuzi 1997: 6). This is because life is not believed to end at death – life continues on after death and departed family members become ancestors. Ancestors are the “compassionate spirits of the departed blood-relatives of an individual, and may involve a whole lineage spanning generations” (Mothibe and Mncengeli 2019: 12). The ancestors are revered and are regarded as being able to protect future generations as well as impart valuable knowledge to them. Therefore, they “occupy a position of dignity and respect within their descendants” (12). Not only do people believe that ancestors are spiritual and immaterial, but they also believe they “are a source of supernatural powers” (6). Africans believe that the departed can communicate with the living via traditional medicine and rituals. According to Sithabile Ndlovu (2016), a symbiotic relationship exists between the living and the non-living members of a family: “the living reveres and honours the ancestors with ceremonies and rituals and in turn receives guidance, luck and good health” (23).

According to Olaniyi Bojuwoye (2005), rituals are an intricate part of healing in African culture and “are culturally organised, symbolically meaningful activities that provide standardised therapeutic

experiences for reduction of anxiety and emotional distress” (69). Rituals have the ability to bring all living and non-living people together, and can mediate the relationships between people by influencing the way they interact. Oftentimes, during a ritual, an animal will be slaughtered, and parts of it will be kept aside and given to the ancestors in order to thank them or appease them. Bojuwoye states that, “as a health-promoting strategy”, the importance of rituals lies in its ability to provide “social contacts” (69). This is because African cultural beliefs argue that harmony within oneself is not achieved alone, but it “is gained through personal community with other people” (69). Therefore, rituals are important for one to achieve healing and personal empowerment, as they allow people to establish belonging by breaking away from their isolation and find their identity “through common observance and experience” as they dance, sing, eat, and celebrate as one (69).

Traditional healers use various techniques to help individuals seeking help regarding their ill-health. A traditional healer is an umbrella term for many types of healers. According to Okpapaenwe and Odigwe (2018), a traditional healer is a man or woman who is recognised in their community as someone who uses their “verse knowledge of the medicinal uses of plants and uses the knowledge to help others” (16). The primary concern of a traditional healer is helping people with emotional, spiritual and physical illnesses using herbs and plants, as well as their connection to the spiritual realm. With their extensive knowledge of the healing properties of plants and herbs, traditional healers will use the corresponding plant or a combination of plants to heal an illness. The plants can be taken in their natural form, or the healer will turn them into “concoctions, emulsions, ointments and powders” so that they can be administered orally or by inhaling them (Okpapaenwe and Odigwe 2018: 17). The administration of traditional medicines in this way ensures that the physical – as well as the emotional and psychological – illness is cured.

As Okpapaenwe and Odigwe (2018) have shown, the significant difference between the healing techniques used by traditional healers and modern European psychologists is that traditional healers recognise “that culture is highly relevant to people’s everyday behaviour” – their “values, shared histories, experiences, and languages affect how [they] see things, feel, and what matters” (16). An African-centred psychology takes into account the things that matter to African people and advocates for the holistic healing of people as it understands that “sickness [...] is the physical manifestation of [an] imbalance between the spiritual and psychological” (16). One of the most commonly used and important diagnostic methods used by traditional healers is ‘Detailed History Taking’ (18). This is a method whereby the traditional healer does a detailed psychological and physical examination of the individual. According to Okpapaenwe and Odigwe, they take note of certain signs – for example, what the person says, their physical appearance (e.g., their untidiness), “being withdrawn and looking frightened [or haunted by] nightmares” – in order to use the information gathered to form a diagnosis

and treatment (18). This method is therapeutic as it allows the client to vent their feelings. Clients are urged to be open to allow recovery to take place. Counselling is also accompanied by dancing and music.

Unlike other traditional healing practices (e.g., Chinese traditional medicine), African traditional medicine does not receive the credit that it deserves, even though it existed for many centuries before Africans were exposed to and influenced by Western forms of treatment and medicine. According to Atindanbila and Thompson (2011), despite Western cultural influences, many educated, as well as uneducated, Africans across the continent continue to hold on to their cultural values by using African traditional healers and traditional medicine to support their (mental) health (457). This does not imply that Western medicine and practices are rejected; it simply means that people will consult a traditional healer after hospitalisation. I argue that African healing practices should be incorporated into Western healing practices as they recognise people's culture, shared histories, language and overall experiences to work through trauma and any form of physical and psychological pain.

1.3 Review of Literature and Critical Reception of the Two Novels

Recent South African literature is informed by the political contexts of the anti-apartheid Struggle and centred on resistance against the apartheid state. The end of apartheid in 1994, “toward which so many South African writers had devoted their literary and political lives,” saw a few critics and authors express concern and unease regarding the direction of South African literature (Davis 2013: 797). Leon de Kock (2008), for example, expressed his apprehension that the disappearance of the anti-apartheid Struggle meant that South African literature had outlived its purpose. Quoting Andre Brink, Frenkel and MacKenzie (2010) stated that “a widespread gloom is settling [...] in the curious conviction that ‘there is nothing to write about any more’” (1). According to Jabulani Mkhize (2001), there was a “lack of experimentation on the part of these writers” post-apartheid, and their work was “closer to journalism than creative writing” (171). According to this critical perspective, the view had been that South Africa’s socio-political condition negatively affected what writers were producing, as well as the form of their writing. The question of whether the end of apartheid would liberate modern South African literature from the bondage of racial and political issues now arose.

The fear that the end of apartheid would mean the demise of South African literature was not confirmed, as “the post-apartheid period produced an array of texts on topics not previously part of South African literary discourse [...] it marked a new era in creative production” (Davis 2013: 797). Chapman and Lenta (2011) argue that while there may have been a brief pause in literary production following the fall of apartheid, soon afterwards, there was a “flowering of fiction” by old and first-time novelists (50). Critics noticed a change in South African fiction: writers shifted their attention away from the sphere of politics, protest and racial issues that plagued apartheid to look more inwardly and reflected on the psychological impact of the past. Ronit Frenkel (2013) mentions that the work that emerged in South Africa’s post-liberation phase looked at the new in relation to how the layers of the past are still reflected through it (25). Novelists did not completely disregard all that took place in the past; instead, they continued to engage with it “as a means of addressing its consequences in the present and shaping the future” (Poyner 2008: 103).

The selection of my primary texts – Niq Mhlongo’s *Way Back Home* (2013) and Mongane Wally Serote’s *Rumours* (2013) – was guided by my desire to explore contemporary South African novels that represent issues of home, emotional dislocation, trauma, and emotional hauntedness. Each novel presents a black, male freedom fighter who served outside the country and spent time in exile under uMkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC). Upon returning to their homeland – South Africa – in the early 1990s, these protagonists feel severe emotional dislocation and must deal with past traumas impacting their present and potentially crippling their future. The selected novels share significant similarities and, therefore, provide a good foundation for comparative analysis.

At a time in South Africa when the apartheid government sought to silence black voices, the major Black Consciousness (BC) writer Mongane Wally Serote and others were part of the driving force that mobilised ordinary people and audiences to strive for political change. Their BC poetry “affirmed and fostered black cultural values, aiding the establishment of a racial solidarity in the face of harsh oppression” (South African History Online 2022: n.p.). As a member of an ‘older generation’ of writers, Serote’s literary work was influenced by the socio-political environment of apartheid and the struggle against injustice, which contributed to the overturn of the apartheid regime.

As compared with Serote, Mhlongo’s “finger-on-the-pulse reports of South Africa’s post-apartheid social complexities and challenges have rightly established him as part of a younger generation of black writers” (Moreillon and Stiebel 2015: 256). The post-transitional novel *Way Back Home* (2013) explores contemporary South Africa and the lasting effects of the apartheid regime well after democracy. Mhlongo’s uncompromising narrative explores how the past impacts the present in democratic South Africa and marks him as “one of the most high-spirited and irreverent new voices of South Africa’s post-apartheid literary scene” (Donadio 2006: n.p.). Therefore, Mhlongo’s novel is an example of a post-transitional novel as it does not completely distance itself from the apartheid era, but instead, it provides fresh insights into the past and how it continues to influence the past and future of individuals.

What follows is an overview of each author’s profile and the literary criticism directed at their *oeuvre*, specifically the critical materials surrounding the novels I selected for textual analysis.

1.3.1 Mongane Wally Serote’s *Oeuvre* and the Critical Reception of *Rumours* (2013)

Mongane Wally Serote is a South African poet, author, playwright, and academic whose career spans five decades. Serote has lived through two distinct periods of South Africa – the apartheid era and the new democratic dispensation. Whereas his early writing mainly centres on the political Struggle during apartheid, his later writings (although still dealing with a traumatic and violent past) have optimistic undertones and engage with African spirituality.

Serote’s early literary work, mainly in the genre of poetry, reflects the socio-political climate of South Africa under apartheid, with critic Essop Patel (1990) describing Serote as “a revolutionary poet” (193). Patel remarks that Serote’s work reflects his profound “dedication to the culture of the oppressed and exploited, as well as being actively engaged in asserting the highest ideals of the revolution” (187). Serote’s BC poetry also made him a creative spokesperson for “disenfranchised South African citizens” in a time of immense oppression (Ngwenya 2015: 219). According to Rita Barnard and Ander van der Vlies (2019), his apartheid-era work, particularly his poetry, has been described as revolutionary: he used “both words and weapons” to contribute to the overturn of the regime (240). In an interview with Duncan Brown (1992), Serote states that, in his poetry, he tries to “translate political struggle – including

armed struggle – into [the] cultural sphere” to inspire those who may be cultural activists to search for how “democratic structures can emerge” (4). *Yakhal’inkomo* (1972) is Serote’s first collection of short poems. *Tsetlo* (1974) is Serote’s second collection of short lyric poems, with critic Mncedisi Mashigoane (2000) stating that including *Yakhal’inkomo*, this poem signals a “Black Consciousness phase” in Serote’s poetry (18). These two volumes of poetry in particular reflect the growth of Serote’s “revolutionary consciousness under the influence of Steve Biko and the BC Movement” (Barnard and Vlies 2019: 43).

According to Mashigoane (2000), Serote’s next publication, *No Baby Must Weep* (1975), possesses his “stylistic trademark” as its form is a long autobiographical poem (18). *Behold Mama, Flowers* (1978) and *A Tough Tale* (1987) are stylistically similar, and both convey the fighting spirit that the oppressed people of South Africa have. *Behold Mama, Flowers, A Tough Tale, No Baby Must Weep*, and *The Night Keeps Winking* (1982) were all written during Serote’s years of exile. The works of poetry mentioned so far portray “a period of extreme violence” in South Africa at the hands of the apartheid government, and they “relate time as end-stopped” and lacking any possibility (Attridge and Jolly 1998: 4). Published after South Africa’s first democratic elections, Serote’s poem *History is the Home Address* (2004) explores history’s effect on African consciousness in a dialogue between a lover and a beloved. However, although it tells a tragic story between two lovers, it remains optimistic. As Cornelius (2019) said, Serote’s *History is the Home Address* explores numerous issues, such as the long-lasting effects of “slavery, colonialism, and apartheid, the resulting racial tensions and poverty, and the devastating effects of the HIV/Aids pandemic” (146).

Apart from poetry, Serote has also written essays that are more optimistic than his poetry, thus signalling a political shift in the country. Published in 1992, *Third World Express* speaks of how, although African people have historically been diminished and destroyed by colonialism and apartheid, the rejuvenation and reinstatement of human integrity are not merely conceivable but are currently in progress. Apart from *Third World Express*, Serote’s essays *Come and Hope With Me* (1994), and *Freedom Lament and Song* (1997) are works that Mashigoane (2000) refers to as Serote’s “post-exile phase” (30). *On the Horizon* (1990), consists of a compilation of essays from various discussions and talks held during 1986-1989. These discussions took place while Serote was “the cultural attaché based in London,” where he gave talks “on behalf of [the] organisation, the ANC” (Serote 1990: 1). In his last collection of essays, titled *Hyenas* (2001), Serote “takes the reader on a journey through his experiences as a black person in South Africa,” his time spent in exile and military training, “and finally as a Member of Parliament who is attempting to change the culture of the ‘New South Africa’” (Pillay and Pillay 2018: 48).

Expanding his scope beyond poetry and essay writing, Serote has, to date, also published five novels. His novels exploit the traditional forms of “oral storytelling, the lyric, drama” in the form of a novel

(Nkondo 2015: 57). Serote's novels portray characters of "great sensitivity, courage, and great possibilities" who are trying to place themselves in a society that is still impacted by the apartheid past (57). Serote's earlier novels depict life under apartheid and mainly the complexities of the liberation Struggle. His later novels focus on the years after democracy, or more specifically, on life in post-transitional South Africa and the many failings of democracy. According to Cornelius (2019), Serote's novels primarily delve into history by portraying the real-life experiences of people living under oppression during apartheid, therefore "encompass[ing] living memory" (142). While his earlier novels portray characters living under apartheid conditions, his later novels wrestle with the difficulties and insecurities of adjusting and integrating into a changing society; however, a recurring theme throughout his novels is the constant search for meaning in a disillusioned society by looking back at earlier times. Serote's novels convey his faith in the potential for freedom and restoration in post-1994 South Africa, while also maintaining a realistic perspective that acknowledges that democracy alone does not guarantee the achievement of liberation objectives.

His debut novel, *To Every Birth Its Blood* (1981), is a thought-provoking novel that delves into the topics of being free and the inevitability of death. The novel offers insights into the violence in South Africa during the 1970s while also imagining a future in the 1980s. In this novel, Serote imaginatively exposes the internal tensions people experienced during a particularly violent time in South Africa. Critics Rita Barnard and Andrew van der Vlies (2019) state that Serote began writing his novel at a time when South African society was at its most violent – during the historically tragic 1976 Soweto Uprising – and that it "attests to a change in perception of temporality that Serote likely underwent at that time" (36).

In *Gods of Our Time* (1999), Serote contrasts the dirty and dangerous township of Alexandra with the buzzing city of Johannesburg; he contrasts two realities, the black person's world and the white person's world. According to Essop Patel (1991), this novel reinforces Serote's "double commitment, towards liberation and literature" (191). Sten Moslund (2003) argues that in this novel, the "dichotomies" of history are challenged as various versions of the apartheid past are provided, thus allowing varied views of the past and future South Africa (48). In this novel, Serote begins to clearly portray the image of a person trying to find their way in a society that has not been able to detach from a particularly painful period of South African history.

Serote's third novel, *Scatter the Ashes and Go* (2002) illustrates "the tortuous transition from [apartheid] Struggle to post-apartheid democracy" (Popescu 2014: 101). Soplelekae Maithufi (2015) builds on this idea by stating that *Scatter the Ashes and Go* depicts the exile's return to a country in which they feel emotionally dislocated and in which they struggle to integrate themselves into life in a changing society – a society "on the threshold of the post-apartheid era" (170). This novel begins to raise the subject of the returning exile using the metaphor of 'ashes,' which portrays the horrifying sense of hopelessness,

defeat, loss, and even death. It also depicts the strong friendships cultivated during the Struggle between comrades and the journey of overcoming horrifying apartheid traumas encountered again in his later novels, *Revelations* (2010) and *Rumours* (2013).

Serote's fourth novel, *Revelations* (2010), covers numerous topics, including the impact of apartheid, slavery, racism, poverty, and HIV/Aids. Although *Revelations* is primarily concerned with the experiences of black South Africans under the apartheid regime, it also presents characters from other parts of the world, allowing the reader to consider other forms of oppressors. *Revelations* investigates the ongoing journey towards reconciliation of life in a democratic society, the search for one's identity, and carving out one's way in the new South Africa. Most importantly, as Salim Washington (2015) stated, this novel begins to raise the question of how black people can further enrich their "political freedom with spiritual depth and meaning" (117). This is because Serote explores how his protagonists can continue to use their "ethnic heritages that have withstood the ravages of slavery and colonialism" to help them find their identity and sense of self, as well as "help navigate them through the travails of human existence" (118).

The novels *Revelations* and *Rumours* were published three years apart and share some similarities but are also considerably different. For instance, a similarity that they share is the theme of individual development and emotional growth. This theme is first introduced in *Revelations* and explored in-depth in *Rumours*. The protagonist in *Revelations* is experiencing emotional trauma during the apartheid era and begins to consider a spiritual journey in order to live a meaningful and purpose-filled life. In *Rumours*, the themes of a spiritual awakening are further explored, and it focuses on Keke reaching out to African mythology, tradition and culture to process emotional trauma in order to find his identity, make sense of the world he lives in, and imagine a future in which he can participate actively. Cornelius (2019) has compared and contrasted Serote's two novels, *Revelations* and *Rumours*. The critic has shown that, while in *Revelations*, Serote "imaginatively returns to the townships, and sites of the armed struggle in the 1970s and 80s" (141), in *Rumours*, the author only partly focuses "on the struggle years" and pays considerable attention to "an earlier time in Africa's history and to traditional African life" (141).

Serote's fifth novel, *Rumours* (2013), is the novel I have selected for comparative analysis in my dissertation. This novel continues Serote's exploration of the post-apartheid era and deals with the fate of political exiles returning home in the early 1990s. The novel's protagonist, Keke, a former MK soldier, must journey back into the past to find his identity and a sense of belonging so as to overcome severe emotional traumas experienced during apartheid and integrate into life post-apartheid. Cornelius (2019) observes that during apartheid, "the trajectory of Serote's work charts a movement from the (lost) individual 'I', to the (unified) collective 'we', while searching for a sense of identity and meaning" (4).

Cornelius further states that “in the post-apartheid era, Serote’s characters return to the concerns of the individual and that his more recent writing displays a deep sense of yearning for an earlier sense of identity and meaning” (4).

With reference to the novel’s spiritual leanings, Serote is specifically interested in African spirituality. He views it as the only solution to restoring Keke to holistic well-being, and at large, of giving black South Africans the tools necessary for them “to negotiate a balanced and integrative relationship with modernity” (Barris 2015: 45). The novel’s narrative takes the reader into the past by engaging with African traditions and indigenous knowledge, and even into the future by providing knowledge on how Africans can be healed from their traumatic past.

In this novel, Serote expresses nostalgia for “the heroes of the struggle” and for all those who fought hard for liberation, but he is also disappointed and disillusioned by the present “quagmire” that has become of South Africa (Serote 2013: 5, 7). Ken Barris (2015) asserts that although Serote shifts his attention towards African spirituality and traditional indigenous knowledge in *Rumours*, “the political advocacy” in his writing does not stop even in the post-transitional period (44). The novel, therefore, both “sustains and departs” from traditional Struggle narrative (45).

1.3.2 Niq Mhlongo’s *Oeuvre* and the Critical Reception of *Way Back Home* (2013)

Niq Mhlongo is a South African author, academic, travel journalist, and screenplay writer. Having grown up during apartheid, Mhlongo is part of a younger generation of writers, so his writing is significantly influenced by the BC philosophies of writers like Mongane Wally Serote, Njabulo Ndebele and many others during the 1950s. Mhlongo has been described as an eminent figure within the post-transitional landscape of South Africa’s post-transitional scene (Murray 2000: 77). Mhlongo is among many new writers who have published literary works of remarkable diversity and range, which are often free of the confines of apartheid, but may choose to engage with the past in new ways. Frenkel and MacKenzie (2010) argue that Mhlongo’s work is “acerbic [and] boldly satirical,” reflecting a wide range of contemporary concerns and styles (1). To date, he has published four novels and four edited collections of short stories. In addition to story-telling, Mhlongo edited and published a collection of essays called *Black Tax, Burden or Ubuntu* (2019).

Mhlongo’s debut novel *Dog Eat Dog* (2004) follows the story of Dings, who has just been rejected for a scholarship by the University of Wits, as he tries to obtain a middle-class life of comfort once he returns home to the township, among other things. In this novel, Mhlongo writes “with verve and candour about the anxieties of his demographic: children who are the first in their families to attend college,” and feel concerned about meeting their family’s hopes and expectations” (Donadio 2006: n.p.). As Minesh Dass (2018) stated, “rather than [being] a *Bildungsroman*” charting the upward development

of a character, *Dog Eat Dog* “is a novel of ordeal” depicting a series of problems faced by its protagonist and the issues of “institutional racism and academic exclusion” in the academic space of South African universities, which were to become central issues to “the student-led protests on South African campuses in 2015 and 2016” (121). Although Mhlongo clearly conveys his disappointment with post-apartheid society, the novel is more complex beneath its surface. Mhlongo purposefully constructs this narrative to reveal how past injustices transform into new forms in the newly established democratic South Africa, thereby offering a critique and a nuanced examination of the current challenges faced by the nation.

Mhlongo’s second novel, *After Tears* (2007), has been critically acclaimed and, like its predecessor, was received with similar enthusiasm. *After Tears* centres on Bafana, a recent university dropout who has failed his law exams but pretends to be a qualified advocate. Reading the title of Mhlongo’s novel makes one believe that the story will deal with the township celebration of sending condolences to a bereaved family. Rebecca Fasselt (2017) argues that the novel is not about “post-funeral parties” at all; instead, “the title extends beyond that to metaphorically capture the spirit of contemporary South Africa” (473). According to Yolisa Kenqu (2019), *After Tears* “grapples with the themes of corruption, deception, failure, and the precariousness of township life” in the recently established democratic South Africa (155). It is a novel of post-apartheid disenchantment that criticises the continued marginalisation of black people.

Kenqu (2019) states that *Dog Eat Dog* and *After Tears* are similar in that they are both concerned with young black, male protagonists who grapple with questions about their own masculinity and the dynamics of ‘hustling,’ marginalisation, and disillusionment in the post-apartheid era of South Africa (157). According to Fasselt (2017), *Dog Eat* and *After Tears* are “novels of deception,” as they engage with life in the township to tackle “pressing contemporary socio-economic issues” (470, 472). Thabo Tsehloane (2010) argues that in *After Tears*, Mhlongo continues to represent some of the themes examined in his first novel, such as “the protagonist’s ambition to escape township poverty, which had constrained his ability to enjoy the full benefits of patriarchy” (81). Both novels mirror the hopelessness and excruciating lives of the majority who still live in poverty in the ‘new’ South Africa. Christopher Warnes (2011) states that these novels act as a critique of post-apartheid South Africa, “in which social relations are deformed by ongoing exploitation and in which the post-apartheid project – so full of the promises of justice, fairness and equality – shows the signs of a grotesque betrayal” (546). Adamu Pangmeshi (2016) seems to agree with this sentiment by arguing that in these novels, Mhlongo carefully employs a “realistic writing technique to project the ‘nervous condition’” under which the youth of South Africa suffer today (56). The continuation of the theme of disillusionment is further explored in his third novel.

Way Back Home (2013) is Mhlongo's third novel, a novel which I have selected for comparative analysis. Kenqu (2019) argues that much like his previous novels – *Dog Eat Dog* and *After Tears* – this novel tackles “the themes of corruption, deception [and] failure,” by depicting a culture of “hustle that plays out on the grand scale of nationalist politics [by acting] as a critique of the kleptocracy championed by the ruling elite” (157-158). The novel features characters that have since “graduated” from being guerrilla fighters in exile, to “black economic empowerment fat cats and government bureaucrats” (Zvomuya 2013: n.p.).

In an interview with Olivier Moreillon and Lindy Stiebel (2015), Mhlongo himself describes *Way Back Home* as a story centred around the theme of ‘betrayal,’ specifically “how the ANC government has betrayed [its] people” with unfulfilled promises in post-apartheid South Africa, not because it could not materialise their promises, but because many politicians are corrupt and only seek to line their pockets (260). After democracy in 1994, the people of South Africa were assured that they would receive housing, land, better education, employment opportunities, and equality. However, the benefits of democracy have mainly affected the elite, while many have not seen these improvements. In the text, this can be found in a conversation between Kimathi and a colleague who claims that he did not join the revolution “to be a poor man when liberation came” (Mhlongo 2013: 39). In the same interview mentioned above, Moreillon and Stiebel (2015) state that this is the first betrayal of the apartheid Struggle that the novel talks about (260). The second kind of betrayal the two critics mention is the “betrayal of the Movement’s principles” that took place within the anti-apartheid movement during the revolution (260). Within the context of the novel, this is portrayed through the protagonist Kimathi’s rape and murder of a female comrade.

However, unlike Mhlongo’s previous novels that primarily engage with corruption and disillusionment, *Way Back Home* is also a postcolonial Gothic novel emphasising failure and disenchantment as it exhibits elements of a “haunted” nature (Punter 2000: 92). The novel tells the story of ‘tenderpreneur’ Kimathi, a man who is haunted by the actions of his past political exile, specifically by the ghost of a female MK soldier whom he murdered at the Amilcar Cabral detention camp in Angola (Frenkel 2019: 73). Mhlongo states that *Way Back Home* was “inspired by [the] urban legend of a haunting” as based on a traditional Sowetan urban legend called ‘Vera the Ghost’ (Mhlongo 2021: 9). Numerous versions of this story exist, but the essence of it is that the legend of ‘Vera the Ghost’ recounts the tragic murder of a girl in the 1950s who then returned to avenge her death by murdering men (Moreillon and Stiebel 2015: 263).

The tale of ‘Vera the Ghost’ highlights the significance of rituals performed after death at the place where it takes place so that the spirit of the departed does not linger between the after-life and this world:

rituals should have been performed where her death occurred. In *Way Back Home*, because Senami was not given a ritual burial, she returns to terrorise her killer, Kimathi.

In addition to exploring 'hauntedness' in his novel, critics argue that Mhlongo's novel also explores the concept of emotional trauma in post-transitional South Africa. Inarmal (2019) investigates the theme of emotional trauma by using "a Freudian psychoanalytical lens" to look at "how Kimathi repeatedly experiences trauma as memory repression" (11). The writer, Niq Mhlongo himself, would agree that the past powerfully impacts the present; in an interview with Moreillon and Stiebel (2015), he states that "South Africa's past permeates the present" (256). As well as discussing South Africa's past, Mhlongo argues for "the importance of 'home' and 'tradition'" in his novel, by stating that one facet of home "is linked to African tradition [...] home is where your ancestors are buried, therefore making it the final resting place of one's spirit" (256). In Chapter Three of the novel, Mhlongo also seems to be urging the people to save their conscience. The protagonist, Kimathi, and his unethical business associates slaughter a sheep to express gratitude to their ancestors after securing the tender to repair potholes in Bassonia. However, this ritual is not motivated by helping others but rather for questionable purposes. Therefore, Mhlongo portrays a scenario where African cultural traditions are "distorted for corrupt financial gain" (Rafapa 2018: 107).

As argued by Inarmal (2019), on the one hand, this novel repeatedly obscures "the boundaries of life and death, tradition and modernity, truth and fiction, past and present" (9); it also sums up some of the failures of the democratic government. Mhlongo's writing "traces the fluctuations" of his society and the disillusionment with unfulfilled promises continually being made by politicians (Loimeier 2018: 456). The novel also explores the difficulties of postcolonial black masculinity that aligns itself with Western capitalist values, which place success above everything. As Inarmal (2019) shows, Kimathi masks his insecurities and feelings of inadequacy with a "performance of masculinity": this is a reading of Kimathi as "a victim of hegemonic masculinity" (2019: 8, 11). In order to prove their masculinity, Kimathi and his fellow 'comrades' repeatedly use violence and intimidation, methods which they learned and used in their time as guerrilla soldiers in exile. According to Graeme Reid and Liz Walker (2005), this is because outright acts of violence and militancy were promoted and viewed "as a necessary response" to the many atrocious acts committed by the apartheid government (8). Additionally, Kimathi's masculinity is also linked to excess, corruption, and greed. In relation to the performance of black masculinity, Kimathi's masculinity is tied to his material wealth, even if it is questionably acquired.

Various critics have predominantly focused on the social and political issues explored in Mhlongo's novel (e.g., black masculinity, democratic disillusionment), and not enough credence has been given to spiritual perspectives (e.g., with how traditional indigenous knowledge can aid in the healing of

collective trauma in contemporary society). Therefore, my dissertation will dig deeper into the complexities of indigenous knowledge and African spirituality and their contribution towards overcoming the 'hauntedness' of past emotional trauma.

Mhlongo's most recent novel, *Paradise in Gaza* (2020), continues to explore spirituality and further builds on his previous novel, *Way Back Home*, by offering a "smorgasbord of beliefs that may, to the modern reader, seem fantastic" (Szczurek 2016: n.p.). The novel focuses on the Mpisani family beginning in 1970s apartheid South Africa (in Soweto and the fictional village of Gaza), with the death of one of the central character's son setting the story in motion. According to Edwin Smith (2021), Mhlongo engages with African spirituality by introducing bewitchment, traditional beliefs and indigenous knowledge, *inyangas* and African rituals. Although Mhlongo's novel educates the reader about traditional beliefs, it also examines the effects of apartheid on black people living in rural areas with a focus on spirituality, poverty, racial discrimination, land dispossession, Christianity, and patriarchal legacies. Smith describes *Paradise in Gaza* as "a multi-layered literary experience" (2021: n.p.). While the plot is set in apartheid South Africa, echoing the earlier past, the experiences taking place in the story echo contemporary times (2021: n.p.).

In addition to his novels, Mhlongo has also written collections of short stories. Published in 2016, *Affluenza* is Mhlongo's take on South Africa twenty years after democracy. *Soweto, Under the Apricot Tree* (2018) is Mhlongo's second collection of short stories. This collection captures the liveliness of the township of Soweto and its surroundings. *Black Tax – Burden or Ubuntu* (2019) and *Joburg Noir* (2020) are collections of essays edited by Mhlongo. *Hauntings* (2021) is also a collection of essays edited by Mhlongo. The stories told in *Hauntings* highlight the ways in which people can be haunted by a variety of things (for example, "greed, cultural beliefs, personal choices, and even natural disasters") (Mhlongo 2021: 10). Mhlongo's latest publication of short stories, *For You, I'd Steal A Goat* (2022), is set in Gauteng and is largely based around the theme of betrayal and meanders "from apartheid-era forced removals to the coronavirus lockdown of recent years" (Solomon 2022: n.p.).

1.4 Structure of the Dissertation

The aim of my dissertation is to analyse the literary representations of collective disillusionment and emotional dislocation in contemporary South Africa as illustrated in Niq Mhlongo's *Way Back Home* (2013) and Mongane Wally Serote's *Rumours* (2013). More specifically, I aim to investigate the connection between current social/personal disenchantment and the protagonists' – ex-political exiles – repressed memories of apartheid-induced trauma, as well as to explore their ways of processing emotional 'hauntedness' through practising various forms of African spirituality and traditional indigenous knowledge.

Chapter One offers an introduction to my study, including its theoretical framework and literature review. My 'theoretical framework' focuses on an examination of recent trends in postcolonial literary studies and also on the concepts of home, trauma and African spirituality. In my 'review of literature,' I will discuss Mhlongo's and Serote's *oeuvre* and the critical reception of their novels. I will conclude this chapter by briefly discussing the reasons for why I have selected these novels for my study.

Chapter Two is dedicated to Niq Mhlongo's *Way Back Home* (2013), where I begin with an examination of the setting of Johannesburg in the social context of South Africa: the city of Johannesburg acts as a metaphor for memory's repressed nature. In my next section, I explore the 'refractions of trauma,' by examining the protagonist's 'unhomed' condition in present-day South Africa as standing for the many traumatised ex-political exiles' experiences, and how trauma is fictionally represented in the novel. In the final section of this chapter, I examine the various ways the protagonist is 'haunted' by the traumatic memories of his past. Additionally, I will explain how various traditional rituals succeed in 'bringing' inner peace for some characters, yet fail in helping the protagonist find healing from repressed memories.

In *Chapter Three*, I offer an in-depth analysis of Mongane Wally Serote's *Rumours* (2013). This chapter begins with an analysis of the contemporary cityscapes of Johannesburg and Durban as metaphorically representing the unearthed memories of South Africa's colonial and apartheid past, as well as Serote's disillusionment with the state of post-transitional society. Similar to *Chapter Two*, I am interested in what I refer to as 'refractions of trauma' and how the protagonist's current 'unhomed' condition and traumatised state reflect the condition many ex-political returnees to South Africa have experienced. I conclude this section by discussing the fictional representations of past traumas and their present conditions. In this chapter, I also examine various aspects of the African holistic healing approach, the different types of traditional healers and how various traditional medicines and rituals support the protagonist's journey to healing. I conclude this chapter by exploring why African spirituality and traditional healing methods are supportive for some protagonists, and why – in contrast – others cannot uplift themselves from their traumatised state.

In *Chapter Four*, I offer an overview of my main findings, and conclude by briefly comparing Mhlongo's and Serote's novels. This section summarises my insights into the protagonists' experience of unbelonging, traumatised psyches and the fictional representations of past trauma. I am particularly interested in the different trajectories of the main characters, and why an engagement with African spirituality and traditional healing methods helps the one character (Serote's) find healing, but not the other (Mhlongo's).

2. Chapter Two: Niq Mhlongo's *Way Back Home* (2013)

Set in contemporary post-transitional South Africa, Niq Mhlongo's *Way Back Home* (2013) is a novel that focuses on themes related to the challenges of post-1994-South Africa: corruption, disillusionment, home, trauma and African spirituality. The narrative focuses on Kimathi, who struggles to find a sense of home and belonging after returning to South Africa in the early 1990s. In this chapter, I shall start with a brief summary of the novel's central plot and a few character descriptions that focus on the protagonist and relevant secondary characters. Additionally, I will provide a brief overview of the novel's themes, such as the difficulties returning ex-political exiles face in a rapidly changing society, the return of repressed memories, and how African spirituality can provide solutions for people facing emotional issues and traumatic memories. In this chapter, I will also provide an examination of the metropolis of Johannesburg depicted as a space of hauntings. I will also investigate the origins of Kimathi's 'unhomed' condition and the cause for why exiled political returnees struggle with emotional dislocation, which hinders their ability to integrate into post-apartheid South Africa.

2.1 Plot Summary

Way Back Home (2013) is Niq Mhlongo's third novel. Similarly to his previous novels, it builds on the theme of corruption by depicting the culture of hustling on the much larger "scale of nationalist politics" (Kenqu 2019: 157). However, unlike his previous texts, *Way Back Home* is written in a third-person narrative. The novel takes place in two different settings: in Angola during exile in the 1980s, and in present-day South Africa of 2007: alternating between both settings until they dovetail at the novel's end. The novel's primary focus is on Kimathi Fezile Tito – also known as Comrade Pilate – born in exile, a member of The Movement¹, a political organisation fighting against apartheid oppression, violence and racial discrimination.

Mhlongo's novel rapidly oscillates between the past, from his childhood and his time spent in exile in Angola, to present-day contemporary South African. Not only are these sudden shifts traumatising for Kimathi, but they are also difficult for the reader to follow as we are forced to quickly grasp where the narrative is taking place.

The novel opens with a scene from Amilcar Cabral camp in Kwanza Norte province, Angola. In the scene, a man (Mongezi, also known as Comrade Bambata) is cross-examined by Kimathi, and he falsely

¹ The Movement was a resistance organisation which fought against the injustices perpetuated by the apartheid system. The Movement fell under the leadership of the African National Congress (ANC).

confesses that a woman (Senami) betrayed The Movement by giving away their location to the Boers² and UNITA³, a decision that led to the detainment, torture and murder of Senami.

Through the descriptions of Senami and other characters' detainment and murder at the Amilcar Cabral camp in Angola by members of the Movement, Mhlongo sheds light on the innumerable human rights violations and atrocities that took place in exile. Mhlongo's intention is to reveal the complete picture of The Movement's exile struggle. By revealing such murders, Mhlongo highlights how even those activists who swore to maintain "the integrity and solidarity of the people's army" sometimes failed to do so (Mhlongo 2013: Prologue). Instead, some leaders of The Movement "were also responsible for gross human rights abuses" (Kaden 2012: 102). Therefore, the novel is "also about betrayal within the anti-apartheid movement at the height of the apartheid regime" (Moreillon and Stiebel 2015: 260).

Senami's detainment, torture, rape and murder by Kimathi takes place during exile at a detention centre for political exiles who are suspected of betraying The Movement. The events that take place at the detention camp not only highlight the numerous human rights violations that took place, but – for the novel's protagonist, Kimathi – they also serve as a point of no-return, being, at the same time, the cause of his later trauma. Senami's return as a ghost later in the novel (Chapter 9) causes Kimathi's long-forgotten and repressed memories of his time in exile to resurface.

In his novel, Mhlongo shifts from depictions of the past during exile, to present-day South Africa, where Kimathi now lives as a corrupt businessman trying to secure tenders from the government. After returning to South Africa in 1992, a comrade and friend of Kimathi's father helps Kimathi obtain documents granting him South African citizenship. He also helps reunite Kimathi with his paternal family in Dimbaza. A sumptuous feast is prepared in honour of Kimathi's return home: a goat is slaughtered to introduce Kimathi to his departed grandparents, and another goat is "slaughtered to welcome Kimathi home" (Mhlongo 2013: 30).

Initially, Kimathi is excited about reconnecting with his father's family; however, despite all the traditional rituals done to welcome him, Kimathi does not feel a sense of connection with his family, and he continues to be estranged from them. Mhlongo's novel also engages with the significance of ancestral land in African culture. When Kimathi's paternal family were forcibly removed from their land during apartheid, the connection to the ancestral land where their ancestors were buried was severed. In an interview with Moreillon and Stiebel (2015), Mhlongo stated "that many South Africans

² Boer refers to a South African of Dutch, German, or of Huguenot descent who originally settled in southern Africa in the late 17th-century. At present, descendants of the Boers are referred to as Afrikaners. In this context, the word refers to the apartheid state.

³ UNITA is the acronym for The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola. It was difficult for South African members of The Movement to fight against them as they had the advantage of air power.

don't have a sense of belonging" and feel displaced because they do not have a connection to their "ancestral place" due to past land dispossession (258).

In addition to being estranged from his paternal family, Kimathi's wife has been separated from him for two years. He is also an uninvolved father in his daughter, Zanu's, life and even forgets her birthday. Instead, using his political connections from exile, Kimathi focuses his attention on prostitutes, alcohol and acquiring money thus becoming a corrupt "millionaire business man" (Kenqu 2019: 157). However, despite all his expensive possessions and luxurious lifestyle, it is glaringly obvious that Kimathi is lonely: he is alienated from his family and has no real friends. It is also evident that he is "deeply troubled" by his past and the many apparitions of Senami's ghost and the memories of his past that persistently encroach on his present (159). With *Way Back Home*, Mhlongo explores the themes of home and belonging by depicting how "many South Africans don't have a sense of belonging," just as Kimathi struggles to feel a sense of home despite being surrounded by his family (Moreillon and Stiebel 2015: 258).

After months of haunting encounters, inexplicable strange behaviour and hospitalisation, Kimathi finally realises that he has to "confront [his] past" (Mhlongo 2019: 144). With the help of the traditional healer Makhanda, Kimathi returns to the place in Angola where Senami was murdered and buried, to bring her spirit back home. While Makhanda and Senami's parents excavate Senami's body and execute the ritualistic proceedings to bring her spirit back home, Kimathi wanders off in the direction of a dilapidated building, and shockingly – in the same building where Kimathi had murdered her – he sees her ghost for the last time. Ghost Senami tells Kimathi that he will never be able to escape her and that he must essentially pay for his crimes with his life. Kimathi then hangs himself in the same building where he had killed Senami. Outside the building, Mongezi tells Senami's parents and Makhanda that Kimathi is responsible for the deaths of many of his comrades and friends, including Senami. He tells them that Kimathi was in love with Senami and that after she had rejected him repeatedly, he retaliated by calling her a spy and putting her in prison, where he tortured, raped and murdered her. The Tladis are shocked by Kimathi's deception but continue with the ritual of bringing their "daughter's spirit home with" them (Mhlongo 2013: 208).

The rituals that Makhanda performs for Kimathi to help him overcome his trauma do not help Kimathi because he only goes forward with them for selfish reasons. He goes through with the rituals just to pacify Senami's ghost and get back to his normal life as soon as possible. Additionally, he is only able to finally admit his depraved actions, and ask for forgiveness, when he realises that he will never be able to escape Senami's revenge.

2.1.1 The Setting of Johannesburg in the Social Context of South Africa

Niq Mhlongo's *Way Back Home* is primarily set in the city of Johannesburg and is part of a selection of post-transitional contemporary South African works that attempt to fictionally articulate a post-apartheid metropolis. Contemporary South African authors write the metropolis of Johannesburg "as an interstitial realm that exists in between the strata of surface [...] and underground" (Buys and Farber 2011: 1). According to Sarah Nutall (2004), "the city of Johannesburg has emerged as the primary site for the creation of the social imaginary in much of the newest writing" (740). In fictional writing, a city such as Johannesburg is "a vivid and explicit" setting for a large "array of social [issues], fears and possibilities" (740). The 'underground' consists of "blood and scandal, death and betrayal and much, much more in this fast-paced tale set in Johannesburg" (Zvomuya 2013: n.p.). Johannesburg, as imagined by Mhlongo, is not a city of lights, "gold and diamonds" as one would expect (Mhlongo 2013: 20). Instead, the city resembles "a dog-eat-dog frontier city": it is a tar wasteland filled with "outlaws and misfits, thugs and [corrupt] cops attempt[ing] to outdo each other" (Zvomuya 2013: n.p.). The 'underground' is "a catacomb where the dead, corrupt and the ailed are hidden"; it functions "as a metaphor for that which is repressed, or lies beneath the surface of consciousness," thus providing the perfect "disquieting strangeness of the uncanny" (Buys and Farber 2011: 3). The recurring reference to hidden and unarticulated memories remains an important theme that Mhlongo alludes to in his novel *Way Back Home* (2013).

As stated in my Introduction, Freud (2003) writes about the unconscious return of an image or event that "appears before us in reality" (15). According to Freud, the 'uncanny' or *unheimlich* "is that class of the terrifying that leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (1). 'Uncanny' is a term referring to all familiar things that ought to have stayed hidden but have suddenly become visible, often against one's will. This environment thus creates a sense of helplessness and fear. For example, according to Freud, in novels, the uncanny can refer "to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts" (14). Therefore, encountering the uncanny entails confronting all that lurks beneath the surface of one's consciousness. In contemporary South African literary works, this usually means unearthing all that lies beneath the visible landscape – underneath the metropolis's surface – and finally it means dealing with and processing "the spectre of apartheid which cannot be ignored or repressed" (Buys and Farber 2011: 7).

What is fascinating about the setting of Johannesburg in Mhlongo's novel is its "colonial roots as a tent city built on dreams and wealth rather than near water" like most settlement patterns (Frenkel 2013: 37). As a city, Johannesburg's history is shrouded in violence and the exploitation of black people, all in pursuit of the riches – gold and diamonds – buried deep within the earth. During apartheid "white South African and European mining magnates benefitted financially from the subterranean toil of predominantly African" labour all while their labourers worked and lived under terrible conditions

(Buys and Farber 2011: 2). They lived in barracks that were overcrowded, poorly ventilated and unsanitary. Black men worked in these mines and lived in terrible conditions because the land that had belonged to them for generations had been stolen from them and given to the Boers, and they were forced to relocate because of the Land Act of 1913. According to South African History Online, although they made up the majority of the population, the Land Act of 1913 only allocated “7.5% of the land in South Africa for black people,” thus dispossessing them of their land, which had given them a steady livelihood and dignity (2019: n.p.). This Act caused many problems for black people: they lost their land and had to decide whether to work for the white farm owners, or to move to overcrowded urban areas designated for black people. The land that black people were left with soon became overworked and could not provide for them and the little cattle they had left. During the same period, the government needed cheap labour to work in the mines. According to critics such as Masola (2020), when black men moved from rural areas to urban centres, where they performed “dehumanising labour in the mines and other forms of labours while [enduring] living in squalor,” highlights the socio-economic challenges that oppressed people experienced during apartheid (106-107). Compared to the land that black people once occupied, they were now relegated to “the peripheries of the cities with little to no space” (108).

As previously mentioned, in many post-transitional contemporary South African novels, Johannesburg serves as an image of the post-apartheid milieu. In Mhlongo’s novel, Johannesburg is not only “a city characterised by material and psychic violence” but it also serves as a metaphor for the repressed nature of memory (Masola 2020: 112). This is represented in a very particular scene of the novel, where Kimathi is conversing with his father. Years ago, while Kimathi was a young boy, one of his peers referred to him as “wakimbiza wa Africa kusini,” which is derogatory and it means “a refugee from South Africa” in Swahili (Mhlongo 2013: 20). In response to this, Lunga Tito, Kimathi’s father tells him that he must say to his peers that he is “a revolutionary” and not a refugee (20). Most importantly, he is to tell them that he is “from a country where the cities are built on top of gold and diamonds” (20). Lunga paints a hyper-romanticised picture of South Africa for Kimathi. Having grown up away from South Africa, Kimathi knew very little about his father’s homeland South Africa. From that moment, Kimathi imagines the city of Johannesburg as a place filled with modern-day riches and gleaming from gold. This scene in which Kimathi recalls a conversation he had with his father years ago highlights the significance of Johannesburg in the context of South African literature. Therefore, in the novel, Johannesburg can be read as a metaphor for the repression of traumatic memories. Often, in novels depicting trauma, an author will convey an array of emotional states. I argue that in *Way Back Home*, Mhlongo highlights the deep-rooted trauma of South Africa’s past by focusing on the cityscape of Johannesburg.

In another scene of the novel, where Kimathi is driving through the streets of Johannesburg in his luxury BMW seeking out prostitutes, he drives past Gold Reef City and recalls how he lost twenty-five

thousand Rands while gambling at the casino (Mhlongo 2013: 21). In this scene, Mhlongo again points out how Johannesburg is the perfect metaphor for the repression of traumatic histories. The truth about Gold Reef City is not as picturesque as the modern reconstruction of the old mining village might suggest; it is now filled with a casino, amusement park rides, food stalls and replicas of buildings that mimic the same period. In the park there is the original headgear from the city's oldest and most profitable Crown Mines. Additionally, underneath the surface of the theme park, visitors can travel two hundred and twenty metres down a mine shaft and see where gold was mined during the gold rush that started in 1887. According to Inarmal (2019), the current success of the amusement park and casino stands in stark contrast to the distressing historical mistreatment of black workers in the gold mines and their living conditions in the barracks (78). In this scene, Mhlongo skilfully parallels the past and the present by pointing out the stark differences between the modern casino and amusement park and its horrible history. Furthermore, how we currently view Gold Reef City in contrast to its horrific past brings up important questions regarding collective and public recollections. In an article that addresses public memorialisation in post-apartheid South Africa, Sabine Marschall (2017) argues that the danger in markers that are "meant to preserve the memory of colonial and apartheid era repression [by serving] as a basis for building the new democratic nation" is that people tend to forget the true horrors behind the monument's erection and expect the "marker to do the memory work for us" (362). This leads me to ask – in agreement with Marschall – whether we as a society truthfully acknowledge and come to terms with our traumatic past, or whether we move on so as to achieve national reconciliation by putting the past behind us?

Through Kimathi and the other corrupt male characters in the novel, Mhlongo captures the mood of disillusionment and increasing dissatisfaction with the government in South Africa. Through various characters in the novel, Mhlongo fictionally represents the "post-apartheid nation-state as a place of excess" (Kenqu 2019: 155). Frenkel (2019) argues that Mhlongo's novel can also be read from an ethical standpoint, according to which Mhlongo condemns the ruling elite for abusing their political power for their gains (75). *Way Back Home* reveals the true failings of the euphoric 'Rainbow Nation' discourse and the feeling of being betrayed experienced by numerous individuals in South Africa after the transition period.

Over and over again, we see the misappropriation of governmental authority and finances as Kimathi and his business associates siphon off state resources. Additionally, we continually see the importance of having political connections in the relationship Kimathi has with Ludwe: he uses the government position held by Ludwe to further enrich himself. In Mhlongo's (2013) imagined post-transitional South Africa, having "strong political connections" guarantees that you will be a successful businessman in South Africa (38). In one particular scene of the novel, Kimathi, Sechaba, George and Ludwe – the director-general of the Department of Public Works – are discussing the details of a tender deal in the

bar of the Park Hyatt hotel in Rosebank and describe the state resources as a “fat cow [that] has finally fallen” ready for their “skinning” (37). This metaphor of the nation-state and its resources as a “fat cow” indicates the ruling elite’s greedy nature (37). In response to their business offer, Ganyani – a former “member of The Movement’s military wing” – states:

No ways, comrades! Why are you guys asking me to bring just a knife if you’re bringing machetes for the so-called fallen cow? I didn’t join the [S]truggle and go into exile to be a poor man when liberation came. I cannot betray the spirit of our noble revolution by taking such a small percentage while you guys walk away with the lion’s share. (38-39)

So, not only is Ganyani prepared to take state funds that do not belong to him, he is not willing to take a smaller percentage than the other businessmen. His statement reveals the sense of entitlement felt by many elites in positions of power: they hold the belief that their participation in the Struggle and exile experience entitles them to greater recognition than those who stayed in South Africa. Kimathi’s greed completely contradicts the oath he made when he first joined The Movement where he pledged to “place [himself] in the service of the people” (Mhlongo 2013: Prologue). Instead, Kimathi feels he is deserving and entitled to “the lion’s share” because he holds the necessary Struggle credentials (39).

In her article, Kenqu (2019) describes the matter of material possessions, greed, and over-eating. She states that another indicator of the elite’s blatant greed and “exploitative relationship with the state” is how the novel describes their physical appearance (162). Kenqu mentions that the character’s greedy behaviour is reflected in their physical appearance. For example, Ganyani is described as having a “round face and [...] big stomach,” which highlights the excess of people in positions of power (Mhlongo 2013: 37).

Later in the novel, Ganyani states that he feels no loyalty to The Movement and joined it “to make money” (107). Even after Kimathi tries to sway him by stating that they are all conducting business for the betterment of black people’s lives, Ganyani responds by saying that:

They are a useless bunch of lazy monkeys who still vote for us when we embezzle their tax monies, even when we employ our friends and relatives, even when we use their taxes to buy expensive houses and cars and sleep with their wives [...] Come election day, the masses will still vote for us. (107-108)

While one could interpret this as the ignorance of the masses, it instead reflects a betrayal of the Struggle. When the masses voted in the first democratic elections in 1994, they thought that they would finally get housing, land, education, jobs and equality. The imagined utopian society that many fought hard for

during the Struggle has instead been replaced with rampant corruption, crime and failed promises. According to Moreillon and Stiebel (2015), the main people that benefit from democracy are members of the ruling party itself (260).

In addition to political leaders abusing state resources and funds, the novel also shows how other people in positions of authority abuse their power. While Kimathi tries his best to secure tender deals during the day, at night, he seeks “the kind of passion that comes without the exchange of tender words” from prostitutes along Oxford Road in Rosebank (Mhlongo 2013: 21). He meets a prostitute by the name of Lakeisha, and together they agree on a rate for the night. However, Kimathi is caught red-handed by the police and is escorted into the back of a police van. When he arrives at the police station in Hillbrow, the police act extremely unprofessionally and threaten to sell the recorded video of Kimathi and the prostitute to “the cinemas” (32). The two police officers show that they can be easily bribed when Kimathi asks them, “How much will [his] freedom cost [him]?” (33). The police officers drive Kimathi to a deserted area, and in exchange for his freedom, Kimathi gives them over a thousand rand in cash, some cigars and leaves them with Lakeisha. Kimathi shows his inherent instinct for self-preservation in this scene: “he didn’t care if they took [Lakeisha] away. She was a liability to him” (33). Kimathi feels no pity for her even after she begs that he take her with him, and she is left to fend for herself against the two male police officers. Here, not only do we see how police officers are unprofessional and easily susceptible to bribes, but we also get to see how easily Kimathi’s instinct for self-preservation is initiated – even if it may come at the cost of others.

Kimathi’s actions above must not be read in isolation from his business actions as he repeatedly exhibits the same attitude in his business dealings. As mentioned above, Kimathi and his business partners try to cheat Ganyani out of a large portion of a share of a sizeable tender deal. In response, Ganyani displays his greed by insisting he is entitled to more than what they offer him. The misappropriation of state funds illustrates the moral failures of post-transitional South Africa.

As evident in the above analysis, it is clear – according to Loimeier (2020) – that over a quarter of a century after South Africa’s inaugural democratic election, writers who surfaced during the post-transition era have created works that mirror the growing dissatisfaction with the governing party, the ANC, “as a result of persistently emerging corruption scandals, cases of self-enrichment, intrigues and personal abuses or the downright undemocratic clinging to offices and sinecures” (457). Mhlongo is no exception; in *Way Back Home* (2013), he too reveals his disillusioned evaluation of post-transitional South Africa.

2.2 Refractions of Trauma

2.2.1 Kimathi's Current 'Unhomed' Condition

Way Back Home (2013) follows the themes of corruption and 'hustling' that Mhlongo's previous texts explore; however, in addition to these themes, the novel also discusses emotional dislocation, alienation and belonging. For instance, the novel presents a millionaire protagonist, Kimathi, who is constantly hustling and pursuing money, while he is also a deeply 'unhomed' individual. As Kenqu (2019) has said – Kimathi in his attempt to allay his uprootedness – fills his life with expensive possessions, gambling, prostitutes and alcoholism. So while it may at first appear as if Kimathi is successful – with his "luxurious mansion, top-of-the-range cars, expensive bottles of whiskey, and imported swag" – he is emotionally empty (157).

Kimathi's emotional dislocation and state of unbelonging in the narrative present can be traced back to the apartheid era, when his father's family were forcefully removed from their ancestral home in Middleburg. The history of South Africa's legislated land dispossession is addressed in the novel, and how much of the land was stolen because of the Land Act of 1913 (and then, later, the Group Areas Act of 1950). Mhlongo addresses the issue of stolen ancestral land and how it still has not been returned to the rightful owners. It also discusses how land and African spirituality are connected. Assisted by Ludwe, his father's comrade during their time in exile, Kimathi locates his paternal family in Dimbaza in 1992. Kimathi's aunt tells him the story of how they came to live in Dimbaza, although they were originally from Middleburg. She tells him that, in 1967, the authorities came and simply told her father that they had one day to pack their belongings and be ready to move to a new home. Kimathi's aunt states that within a day, their entire family lost their ancestral home and farm, and were forced to move to an unfamiliar place:

[Kimathi's grandfather] had big land where we planted maize, beans and potatoes. He also had many goats, pigs, and sheep. When he was taken to jail, we were brought here to Dimbaza, to this house, which was initially a wooden shack with a zinc roof. My father only joined us here six months later, but when he came, he decided to go and check his farm in Middleburg. There he found out that it was now owned by some Boer called Viljoen, who had also inherited our livestock. (Mhlongo 2013: 29)

The land that had belonged to the Tito family for generations was given to a Boer, and there was nothing they could do about it. Kimathi's aunt tells him that in response to this injustice, Kimathi's grandfather went back to the farm and killed Viljoen, and after evading the police for a long time, he was caught and hanged. However, his body was never returned to them, so they could not give him a traditional burial. As Kimathi's grandfather's body was never reunited with his family, Mhlongo suggests that the connection between him and his ancestral home will forever be severed. His aunt also tells him that they

“cannot go and perform [some] traditional rituals” on their land because the land no longer belongs to them (2013: 30). This statement made by his aunt points to the fact that in African culture, land is more than just land – it represents a connection to the ancestors and the past.

Notions of home, identity and what it means to belong in a place are significant themes that are explored in the novel. The day after meeting his paternal family in Dimbaza, a great feast is prepared for Kimathi and “a goat is slaughtered to welcome him home” (30). At the beginning of the chapter, Kimathi thinks about how meeting his family would be “the happiest day in [his] life” (27). However, these feelings are later contrasted by new experiences.

For all of his efforts to reconnect with his cousin, and stepbrother – as well as going to the cemetery where his grandmother is buried – and being welcomed back into the family, his attempts to create a sense of filiation and belonging fail: “despite everything, Kimathi felt no connection with his father’s home” (30). This failed attempt at negotiating a sense of home clashes with what home should feel like, and it is what makes Kimathi ‘unhomed’. When Kimathi first moves to South Africa, he is filled with the hope that he will make a connection with his father’s family. His hope soon turns into disappointment when he finds that he feels “no [emotional] connection with his father’s home” (30). Kimathi’s lack of emotional connection with his paternal family is what contributes to his ‘homelessness,’ and it also contributes to his disorientation and traumatised state in the present. After taking in his surroundings and trying to deepen his emotional and cultural connections – as Jacobs (2016) said – he feels “profound unease” with what should have felt like home because he is emotionally estranged from all that should feel familiar (265).

The link between home and African tradition is crucial in this novel. In an interview with Moreillon and Stiebel (2015), Niq Mhlongo states that home is an essential aspect of African tradition, as it is where one buries one’s ancestors, making home a place “where a spirit rests forever” (258). Mhlongo goes on to say that, in the context of African culture and tradition, “home is where land is. Home is where the ancestors come from. We don’t point up when we talk about our ancestors” (258). When black people were forcibly removed from their lands during apartheid due to unjust land distribution laws, many lost their ancestral homes. In his book titled *Native Life in South Africa* (2021), Sol Plaatje writes about how the Land Act of 1913 legally “legislated the dispossession of black people in South Africa” and how black people suddenly woke on June 20, 1913, to discover they had been reduced to “pariah in the land of [their] birth” (21). The Land Act of 1913 was a legal document “which was designed to enrich white power and property rights in the countryside – as well as to solve the ‘native problem’ of African peasant farmers working for themselves and denying labour power to white employers” (5). In addition to describing the Act’s unfairness, Plaatje describes the liminal condition – an ‘in-between’ space – of being born and living in a country without the protections of being a citizen. Athambile Masola (2020)

states that in his book, Plaatje indicates how “the Land Act of 1913 became legislated dispossession, a denial of human rights, a denial of citizenship and loss of sense of being in the world for Black people” (92). The loss of land did not only mean loss of property, but it meant a severing of the spiritual link to land as spiritually meaningful to Africans. Therefore, the novel also addresses why many black South Africans still feel dislocated. Black South Africans “have lost their ancestral home,” which is why they feel lost (Moreillon and Stiebel 2015: 258).

Sol Plaatje’s (2021) descriptions of the loss of homeland examine how apartheid’s grand politics in South Africa drastically impacted the everyday lives of black people, and how it changed their relationship with ‘home’ forever. Remarkable works of South African literature produced after 1994 continually build on these ideals of home, thus pointing out the fact of land loss and its dramatic psychological impact on Africans. In these contemporary South African novels, some characters manage to redefine their home in the new democratic dispensation and can therefore cultivate a sense of belonging. However, many other characters are shown as unsuccessful in trying to find a sense of belonging, thus remaining unhomed in an ever-changing society. The tension between an imagined homeland after apartheid and the disenchanting reality of everyday life in South Africa contributes to ex-political exile’s feeling alienated and emotionally disconnected from their homes.

Concerning Mhlongo’s literary work, Sally-Ann Murray (2000) argues that his “fictions of the ‘here at home’ are, very clearly closely linked to his attempts to define a place of belonging” (78). In *Way Back Home*, rather than looking back at a home that is in the past and realising that it is unattainable, returnees will often look back longingly at the years of Struggle, when the dreams they fought hard for during apartheid remain increasingly unobtainable. Ex-political exiles disillusioned with South Africa yearn for the Struggle years and the dreams that they had conceived and fought hard for. Similarly, Kimathi looks back longingly at the past whenever he experiences anxiety or when his present condition becomes too painful emotionally. For instance, Kimathi spends a lot of time alone in his big house and, on numerous occasions, he will retrieve an old item of clothing his ex-wife wore, spray it with some of her old perfume and hug the item of clothing while reminiscing about their failed relationship (Mhlongo 2013: 18). In this scene, Kimathi is yearning for a sense of home and family that no longer exists.

Throughout the novel, the reader encounters numerous instances where Kimathi yearns for a sense of belonging and ‘homeliness.’ As mentioned before, during his childhood in Tanzania, he struggles to belong and feels out-of-place compared to his peers. It also does not help that Kimathi loses his father at a young age. Things do not get any better when he arrives in South Africa: when he meets his paternal family for the first time and has been welcomed into the fold with traditional rituals, he is disappointed to find that he feels “no connection with his father’s home” (Mhlongo 2013: 30). Furthermore, there is no evidence of him having any relationship with his mother or her family. In fact, very little is known

about his mother beyond her nationality being Tanzanian, and that Lunga had probably raped her which resulted in the conception of Kimathi. There is no evidence suggesting that she and Kimathi may have had any emotional relationship beyond their biological bond. Additionally, she passed away shortly after the death of Kimathi's father. When Kimathi met and married Anele, it looks as if he may have finally found the family and sense of belonging he has always been yearning for. Upon the birth of his daughter, Zanu, it appears as if Kimathi had finally found 'home.' Unfortunately, due to his own actions, this feeling does not last long and he soon becomes 'unhomed.' Kimathi cheats on his wife Anele and loses the family he had established and the feeling of home he had been yearning for so long.

2.2.2 Kimathi's Past Trauma: The Transnational Journey of Political Exiles to South Africa

While Kimathi may be a fictional character, his inability to feel at home points to the larger and very real dynamic nature of home for returning exiles in the early 1990s in South Africa. Most of the traditional definitions of home claim that when an individual finds their way back home, they would immediately feel a sense of emotional fulfilment and immediate belonging. Instead, home can feel uncanny and inhospitable for the migrant individual, and indeed for the ex-political exile.

Migrants make the journey home to renew and solidify their familial bonds, only to find that they cannot formulate these bonds. In her dissertation, Lavasha Naidoo (2021) states that for many returning migrants, the return home is "a liminal experience marked by conditions of alienation, dislocation and nostalgia" (1). Their experiences, therefore, subvert "conventional definitions of home as a place of emotional stability and belonging" (1). Additionally, the migrant individual's journey home becomes traumatic when they are unable to integrate themselves into the changing society. Political exiles who journeyed home at the dawn of democracy often regarded their once known surroundings in South Africa as disturbingly unfamiliar. Marschall (2017) states that "a prolonged time away from home renders previously familiar roles and identity positions more complex and requires their renegotiation" (217). Failure to renegotiate their identity in the new environment means they will perpetually live in-between worlds: existing "at the intersection of history" and the present (Jacobs 2016: 27).

As mentioned before, after returning to South Africa in 1991, Kimathi failed to establish a new sense of belonging. Additionally – I would argue – he fails to negotiate a new identity. Kimathi's identity is rooted in a romanticised memory of exile; born in Tanzania during exile, Kimathi repeatedly identifies himself as "a real son of exile" and "a true son of the revolution" throughout the novel (Mhlongo 2013: 19, 113). In a conversation with his business partners and Ganyani, Kimathi mistakenly refers to Shangaan people as "Shanganese" (38). While this may seem like a simple slip of the tongue, I argue that it reflects Kimathi's uprootedness and split identity. Kimathi's mistake highlights how he is unfamiliar with the language spoken around him and that he is essentially a stranger in his own home country. Ganyani calls Kimathi "pathetic" for making the mistake and asks him how he has not learned

anything about his homeland. Kimathi responds defensively to Ganyani's jest and says: "You can't blame me for being born in exile [...] it was not my choice, but the revolution's" (38). Kimathi then further attempts to divert attention away from his mistake by stating that only one language is vital in this world, and that is the language of "Money!" (39). As mentioned in this chapter, Kimathi hides his loneliness behind expensive material possessions. In this scene, he disguises his sense of dislocation and loss by mentioning money to steer the conversation back to the only thing he is comfortable with. It is clear that while Kimathi may physically be at home, he is a stranger in his own home. As critic Nadia Krige (2009) argues – for many migrants and exiles – the constructed boundaries between home and the world are blurred, thus "mak[ing] home a strange place" (7). Kimathi becomes harshly aware of his painful double dislocation; he did not feel at home in Tanzania as his peers called him "a refugee from South Africa," and he cannot go back to his time spent in exile either (Mhlongo 2013: 20). He is also unable to forge a sense of belonging in the South African present thus exhibiting what Kenqu (2019) calls "revenant belonging," a state which further contributes to his unhomely and traumatised state of mind (159). Kimathi has a 'revenant belonging' because he is "unable to establish a sense of belonging in the full sense of the word" with his father's family, and because of his past that refuses to remain in the past (159).

Another signifier of a migrant individual's lack of belonging is their inability to cultivate meaningful relationships. As Every (2018) argues, contemporary "understandings of home are less rooted in a physical space and foreground relationships instead" (67). However, Kimathi fails at this too. While Kimathi may be politically connected, the narrative makes it clear that he is an extremely alienated character: not only is he estranged from his family, but it becomes abundantly clear that Kimathi has no real friends. He frequently confuses business for friendship even though it is clear that "in politics and business there are no eternal friends" (Mhlongo 2013: 108). While it may seem that Sechaba is Kimathi's friend, I argue that, in several instances, the true nature of Sechaba's feelings towards Kimathi become clear and that their friendship is superficial. For example, in a particular scene where Kimathi has a "hysterical" outburst at Ludwe's funeral and is hospitalised for five days, Sechaba is not concerned with his 'friend's' health (93). He simply says to Kimathi: "I'm glad you're back from the dead, comrade [...] It's going to be our D-Day in four days. That's when we are doing our tender presentation to the department" (102). Sechaba immediately moves away from Kimathi's health and is only concerned with the tender bid, which will bring them money. Proof of this lies in what he says next: "Money is coming our way again, comrade. I can smell it! Currency!" (102). For Sechaba, their relationship is purely transactional – he uses Struggle rhetoric and refers to Kimathi as 'comrade,' and he only wants him to get better so that they have a chance at acquiring money from the tender bid. I argue that the use of the phrase 'comrade' provides Kimathi with a false sense of closeness he lacks in the present.

Another example of Kimathi's unbelonging is his inability to cultivate a meaningful relationship with his daughter Zanu. When we meet Kimathi, he does not live with his ex-wife Anele or his daughter, Zanu. He forgets Zanu's birthday, and in an attempt to make up for this, he promises "to make a huge birthday" party for her and hire a jumping castle so that she and her friends can enjoy it (Mhlongo 2013: 15). Almost as soon as he makes that promise, he backtracks and instead pulls out a two-hundred Rand note and tells her to go and buy herself a big birthday cake. Not only did Kimathi betray his marriage with Anele by cheating on her with their housekeeper, he now also betrays his daughter by being an absent parent. In this scene, we can see how alienated he is from his daughter and how he makes false promises. It is only in the end chapters of the novel that Kimathi begins to feel some remorse for destroying his family and thinks of "Zanu and [...] Anele's love that he had betrayed and lost forever" (171). It becomes abundantly clear just how alienated Kimathi is from Anele and Zanu when he sees that they both seem to be moving away from him by forming a new family unit that does not include him. When Anele and Zanu visit Kimathi in hospital after his manic episode at Ludwe's funeral, he notices that Anele is "visibly pregnant" and instantly knows she has moved on with another man (101). In another scene of the novel Mhlongo seems to suggest that another man may have even replaced Kimathi's role as a father figure. The day before Kimathi is set to make the trip to Angola – in order to try and heal his past by helping the Tladis find the remains of Senami and bring her spirit back home – he spends an afternoon with Zanu. Kimathi picks up Zanu after school and together they share a meal and then he drops her off at home. As Zanu is exiting the car, she points towards the two people waiting for her outside a block of flats and says that it is Uncle Thami and Tumelo – or as Mhlongo seems to suggest – Anele's partner and his son (175).

The scenes mentioned above illustrate Kimathi's alienation and 'unhomeliness.' As he sits in his car and sees his daughter walking towards another man, he takes on the role of a visitor gazing longingly from the outside. Although Kimathi has been back in South Africa from exile for many years now, he has never been able to find a sense of belonging and home. This also highlights the complexities of returning home and how this experience is oftentimes very difficult, sometimes even resulting in personal failure.

In this section, I have illustrated how Kimathi is represented as an 'unhomely' figure who is also emotionally dislocated. Additionally, I have also addressed how returnees may feel like strangers at 'home.' One other thing that makes it difficult for Kimathi to assimilate into the present is the persistent and graphic nightmares he has that depict traumatic memories from his time spent in exile. In what follows, I will discuss Kimathi's traumatised state, his repressed memories and the various ways he is haunted by them in the present.

2.2.3 The Fictional Representations of Past Trauma and Present Consequences

While there are many definitions for trauma, what they all seem to agree on – as Caruth (1995) has said – is that trauma manifests as a delayed response to a profoundly distressing incident or incidents, revealing itself through recurring nightmares, intrusive hallucinations, terrifying thoughts or involuntary and even sometimes violent behaviours which all originate from the event (4). In addition to these symptoms, the sufferer may numb themselves “during or after the experience, and possibly also [have] increased arousal (and avoidance) stimuli recalling the event” (4). In *Way Back Home*, trauma is fictionally depicted in various ways. This section will discuss how trauma is illustrated – drawing on the novel’s unusual structure and its multiple characters/perspectives.

Critics like Anne Whitehead (2004) have pointed out that one of the most impactful ways trauma is represented fictionally is in the novels’ fractured structure. This literary device sharply captures that which cannot be put into words. Trauma has the unique ability to impact an individual long after the actual event has occurred. Anne Whitehead (2004) further says that this unique characteristic of trauma “renders [trauma novels] resistant to narrative structures and linear temporalities” (5). This means that when trauma is fictionally represented, it usually “departs from conventional linear structure,” meaning that time is often interrupted with things such as flashbacks, nightmares and recollections of memories long forgotten (6). Whitehead (2004) goes on to say that those trauma fiction novels with fractured timelines:

[o]ffer a version of history as revenant, in which the effects of [apartheid] are far from over. In contemporary fiction, then, the lost story is reconfigured to explore the nature of trauma as psychological possession. The ghosts embody or incarnate the trauma of recent history and represent a form of collective or cultural haunting. The novels raise the important question of whether the ghosts of the past can be exorcised. (7)

Since the traumatic event is not properly experienced and processed completely when it occurs, but only much later “in its insistent and intrusive return,” it is bound to return in unusual ways (12). Many post-transitional works of fiction will often employ spirit possessions or hauntings in their narratives which suggest trauma, haunted histories and “suffering of the past in the present” (6). At first glance, the victim will walk away from the event completely unharmed; however, much later, it becomes clear that the event mentally harms them as it will possess subjects “with its insistent repetitions and returns” (12). Therefore, if history is belated and cannot be referred to straightforwardly, it makes sense for the narrative structure to appear broken and fragmented. I believe that post-transitional novels that engage with trauma are essential reminders of hidden history and long-forgotten or repressed memories. Critics Frenkel and MacKenzie (2010) argue that those writers who emerged in the ‘new’ South Africa “produced works of extraordinary range and diversity” having written about previously overlooked

histories – such as the role of women in the anti-apartheid struggle or the true living conditions of the detention camps in exile (3). Most importantly, writers use the literary strategy of a fragmented narrative in an attempt “to embody the psychological ‘action’ of traumatic memory dissociation” (Balaev 2008: 159). In addition to examining previously overlooked stories, a decolonised approach into trauma has enabled writers to engage with transgenerational, societal and collective trauma.

In Mhlongo’s novel, trauma is presented through the narrative’s fractured timeline – “the narrative is non-chronological and fragmented, consisting of seemingly unrelated episodes, memories and dreams” that continually intrude into the present narrative without warning (Gohrisch 2006: 236). In post-transitional novels, evidence of unresolved pasts will often return in the form of the “ghosts of those who died too suddenly and violently” seeking out revenge from those responsible for their deaths (Whitehead 2004: 6). This is very true in *Way Back Home* as Senami’s spirit returns in the form of a ghost seeking revenge from Kimathi for his crimes committed during apartheid in exile.

As mentioned above, the plot of *Way Back Home* is non-linear, with the narrative shifting between Kimathi’s years in exile in Angola to the present in democratic South Africa. At first, this continual shift is confusing as it is difficult to understand how the past pieces together with the present-day narrative. However, soon it becomes clear that Kimathi’s “strange and incomprehensible dreams at night” and flashbacks are memories of his past that he had repressed (Mhlongo 2013: 136). While the novel’s continual interruptions create a feeling of disorientation for the reader, one can only imagine the confusion Kimathi must be experiencing in the present. In this section, I will illustrate how Mhlongo uses his writing to investigate the enduring impacts of violence.

The confusion and trauma experienced by Kimathi in the present can be traced back to specific moments of his past and even possibly beyond them. The first indication of Kimathi’s far-reaching trauma roots can be traced back to his paternal family’s genealogy. Both Kimathi’s father and grandfather died in violent ways. As mentioned before, Kimathi’s paternal family were forcefully removed from their ancestral land due to land dispossession during apartheid in 1967. In retaliation, Kimathi’s grandfather returned to the farm and killed the man who dispossessed them. In 1972 he was “caught and hanged” by the apartheid authorities (Mhlongo 2013: 29).

The cycle of trauma continues with Kimathi’s father, Lunga, who died in exile in 1985. Lunga was suspended as camp commissar after allegations came forward that Lunga was luring “new female recruits into his bed by providing them with supplies [stolen] from the logistics section” (19). The night he killed himself, he “shot six of his colleagues in their sleep before turning the gun on himself” (19).

Eight months after Lunga's death, Kimathi's mother passes on. Although Lunga considered himself a Struggle hero, his actions are detestable and cowardly: he abused his position of power. Even after his death, his peers still consider Lunga a Struggle hero: when Kimathi's aunt asks about Lunga's death, Ludwe does not tell her the truth; instead, he says that he died from "gunshot wounds" while in Tanzania (27). Kimathi's aunt asks if the Boers shot him, and Ludwe lies and says they did. Additionally, his peers believe that Lunga "was not given the respect other struggle heroes were afforded" (19). Although his actions in exile are anything but heroic, Ludwe protects Lunga's reputation instead of telling the truth, and Ludwe's peers believe that Lunga was not given the respect he deserved after death. Because both his father and grandfather have never been buried on their ancestral land, Mhlongo implies that their spirits will forever remain uprooted.

Another possible cause of Kimathi's trauma in the present could be that he is a "result of an unromantic lust" between his South African father and Tanzanian mother during exile (Kenqu 2019: 19). Lunga met Kimathi's mother, Akila, a Tanzanian woman, while he was in exile in Tanzania. The implication is that Kimathi was conceived through the violent act of rape. Kenqu (2019) argues that Lunga and Akila's "inauspicious coupling" is the root cause of Kimathi's "permanent sense of out-of-placeness [...]" which culminates in his deep desire for rootedness" (159). Kenqu's point is true as Kimathi exhibits an 'out-of-placeness,' as mentioned before. Kimathi's 'out-of-placeness' first becomes apparent when he is with his childhood school peers. Upon his return to South Africa once the traditional rituals have concluded, he struggles to feel a sense of belonging with his paternal family, and again later on with his business partners.

Throughout the novel, Kimathi repeatedly and boldly proclaims that he is "a real son of exile" or "a true son of the revolution" and truly believes that the contributions he made during his time spent in exile are significant and meaningful to the struggle (Mhlongo 2013: 19, 113). When Kimathi first joined The Movement, he pledged to "serve with discipline and dedication at all times, maintaining the integrity and solidarity of the people's army" (Prologue). However, his actions at the Amilcar Cabral detention camp prove otherwise. *Way Back Home* sharply criticises (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission⁴) TRC narrative that the only perpetrators of inhumane crimes committed during the Struggle were by the 'white' apartheid state. The novel condemns the TRC for concealing the testimonies of those abused and tortured by their fellow ANC comrades during the struggle, particularly in the detention camps. Some critics accuse the TRC, for example Kaden (2012), of "presenting a highly reductive version of the past" by fostering a 'collective memory' of the past which strictly depicts the 'white' apartheid regime as evil and characterises the 'black' anti-apartheid movement as virtuous and commendable

⁴ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a court-like platform in the new democratic South Africa by the Government of National Unity so that people could deal with the crimes perpetuated under the apartheid regime, particularly those committed between the years 1960 and 1994.

(102). These critics argue that the silencing of individual memories eliminates the many complexities of the past.

During exile, some leaders of the anti-apartheid struggle failed to maintain the integrity of The Movement and were, in fact, responsible for many human rights cases of abuse. In an article titled ““We Still Want the Truth”: The ANC’s Angolan Detention Camps, and Post-apartheid Memory” (2005), Todd Cleveland “reconstruct[s] prison life from the perspectives of those who experienced it,” the most infamous of them being Quatro in Angola (64). This Angolan detention camp imprisoned individuals within the ANC ranks “who violated regulations or were suspected of collaborating with the apartheid state” (Kaden 2012: 102). Similarly, Mhlongo, through the fictional detention camp named Amilcar Cabral, depicts the violence and lamentable conditions that prisoners had to endure.

Cleveland’s (2005) article contradicts the claim that black people only suffered maltreatment at the hands of the apartheid authorities by relating the “harrowing experiences [of black anti-apartheid soldiers] while in the African National Congress (ANC) prison camp[s]” (63). Robert Kaden (2012) writes in agreement with Cleveland (2005) by stating that “the myriad of human rights abuses and atrocities that occurred during apartheid were by no means committed by the apartheid state alone” (102). The former inmates of Quatro provided testimonies that revealed that they “were often treated as subhumans” by MK members who violated the organisation’s regulations (Cleveland 2005: 66). Prisoners at the detention camp were also often subjected to random beatings for any reason or none at all. In addition to the physical and mental abuse the prisoners experienced, testimonies also revealed that food deprivation was also used as a method of punishment. Other accounts of the conditions in Quatro also “reveal that blankets could be washed only once every six months and that detainees were then allowed to bathe only in the water that remained” (66). On the rare occasion that a prisoner was permitted to go into the infirmary to treat ailments as serious as malaria, their trips would “typically [be] accompanied by severe beatings” (66). These testimonies proved that “at least in Quatro, there was a systematic approach employed to break the will of the prisoner,” which contradicted the statement made by the ANC and other anti-apartheid groups that these occurrences were “aberrations and exceptions” (66). Although all physical evidence of the atrocities committed were destroyed when the buildings were demolished, the traumatic memories remain embedded with former inmates (67). In the novel, when Kimathi, Makhanda and the Tladis arrive in Angola to retrieve Senami’s remains and spirit, the old detention buildings are dilapidated and overgrown with plants (Mhlongo 2013: 204).

As illustrated in *Way Back Home*, the traumatic and ambiguous memories of the detention camps contradict the master narrative of the Struggle. In the novel, any comrade “suspected of betraying The Movement, the so-called mutineers,” are immediately sent to the Amilcar Cabral camp in Angola (94). It is there that they are subjected to overcrowding, poor ventilation, food deprivation and violence that

“usually had nothing whatsoever to do with any disciplinary transgression” (Cleveland 2005: 69). In the novel there are numerous examples of prisoners being treated as subhumans; in one particular scene Kimathi and Comrade Idi call the prisoners under their charge “dung-eating baboons” (Mhlongo 2013: 89). As Kimathi and his fellow prison officers walk the halls they are met with the “stench” of air “fouled by unwashed bodies and suppurating infections” so horrible and thick that they have to hold their noses closed (95). The prison cells are “damp and dark [and] there are no blankets or mattresses, only the concrete floor” (95). Even though some prisoners exhibit signs of mental health disorders and cerebral malaria, they do not receive the help they need. Instead, the narrative shows how normal it was for prisoners not to receive medical attention by stating that “it was not unusual for them to bury one or two prisoners [...] every weekend because of the [cerebral] malaria” (98, 99).

During his time in exile, Kimathi served alongside many people who did not return to South Africa at the dawn of democracy. Many exiles did not return home because they had died in battle. In the novel, Kimathi is directly responsible for the deaths of several comrades who did not return. Kimathi brutally murdered one comrade by the name of Makana for the suspicion of betraying The Movement and disclosing the location of their camp to the Boers. After the attack of the South African Air Forces on the Angolan camp, the group suffered great losses (2013: 35). After the invasion, Kimathi and Ludwe suspect that there may be “spies among [them]” and vow to deal “deal with whoever betrayed [them]” (66-67). One of the people they suspect of betraying them to the Boers is Comrade Makana, even though “most comrades knew that his only sin had been to question the leadership at his former camp” (164). Comrade Makana’s only sin had been to ask why the leaders were allowed to “live a life of luxury” and consume plenty of food while he and his comrades continued to “starve” (164). The Leadership did not take kindly to Comrade Makana questioning them, and “he was sent to the prison camp” soon afterwards (164).

Even though Comrade Makana’s only transgression was to question The Movement’s leadership, Kimathi and Ludwe brutally interrogate him for betraying them to the Boers. In an especially gruesome scene, Mhlongo vividly describes how Comrade Makana was murdered. In this scene, Makana is crawling naked towards a Mopani tree while being swarmed by “industrious ants [...] all over his body, which had been smeared with warthog fat” (163). Kimathi berates Makana by calling him a “sellout monkey” and then repeatedly kicks him in the ribs (163). After numerous kicks to his ribs, Comrade Makana coughs violently, vomits blood and eventually dies. Rather than show remorse for their actions the next day, Kimathi and Ludwe swiftly move on to their next victim, Senami.

The primary cause of Kimathi’s traumatised state in the present can be traced back to the repressed memory of the night Senami was murdered. On the night of her murder, Kimathi and Ludwe entered her cell claiming that they have entered her into “a pilot training course,” and all that she has to do to

get into the programme is to show her appreciation to them, and she will be free to go (176). Of course, Kimathi is lying because there is no pilot programme; he wants her to agree to have sex with him. Not only does this scene illustrate Kimathi's blatant dishonesty, but it also highlights the similarities between Kimathi and his father: similarly to his father, who took advantage of new female recruits by luring them into his bed by providing them with necessary provisions, Kimathi claims that he will send Senami on a training course if she shows her appreciation by sleeping with him. Even though Kimathi and Ludwe are in charge of Senami's fate, she refuses their 'offer' again. Although malnourished and severely ill with malaria at this point in the novel, Senami still refuses. Just as she had before, she refuses their sexual advances till the very end because she knows that the only thing she is "guilty of [is] not wanting [them]" (106). Later that evening, under cover of a storm, Kimathi and Ludwe return to her cell, where they rape her. When she fights back Kimathi "hits her across her face," and Ludwe "stabs her in the stomach" with a knife (177). Senami succumbs to her wounds, collapses and Kimathi and Ludwe hurriedly exit her cell. The next day, during a routine check at the camp, Senami is found dead in her cell, her face is a mess, and she has a big wound running across her left cheek. "Without any show of remorse," Kimathi and Ludwe give instructions for "a shallow pit" to be dug, and that is where Senami is buried (177).

Although Kimathi may not remember past events, he shows signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Kimathi exhibits the symptoms of PTSD as memories of his past repeatedly return in the form of nightmares, daydreams, flashbacks, and hallucinations. The symptoms of PTSD "may appear chronically or intermittently; immediately or many years after the event" (Visser 2011: 272). This is true for Kimathi as – while he is in exile – it does not appear as if he is traumatised; however, years after returning to South Africa, he exhibits signs of it.

The first encounter with the novel's primary character, Kimathi, in the current storyline occurs through a recurring nightmare in which he awakens from disoriented and "screaming" as he does not understand what he has seen in his nightmare, or why he sees the same image repeatedly (Mhlongo 2013: 12). As the novel goes on, it becomes clear that the nightmares that Kimathi has are in fact flashbacks from a past he had long since repressed in an effort to forget. Prior to him falling asleep the night before, Kimathi was afraid to go to sleep because he knew that if he did, he would again be plagued by the same nightmare he had been having for the past two nights (Mhlongo 2013: 12). As Ivad (2020) said, although Kimathi does not know it, he is suffering from trauma, and at this point, it is presenting itself in the form of nightmares. In addition to experiencing nightmares, an individual may respond to situations with "fear and anger" (38). Although Kimathi has already been prescribed medication to help him balance

his bipolar disorder, his unaddressed trauma presents itself in the form of “uncontrolled repetitive appearance[s]” (Caruth 2016: 17).

In various instances, we see how Kimathi’s daughter retreats when she witnesses outbursts of his short temper. One such instance is where after hearing that the circumstances of his tender bid have changed, Kimathi uses profanity all while forgetting that his daughter is right next to him holding his hand: “Zanu’s little hand withdraw[s] from his”, and this captures his attention, and he calms down (Mhlongo 2013: 102). In another scene, Kimathi and Anele engage in a heated exchange about Zanu’s school fees: Kimathi is implying that the money he pays for his daughter’s education is instead being spent on Anele’s many “boyfriends” (14). Zanu, in response to her father’s angry tone, “stare[s] at him with eyes that [are] damp” (15). Throughout the process, Kimathi indulges in reckless behaviour in an effort to quell his anxiety: he drinks excessively – sometimes to the point of blacking out – he buys expensive clothing and accessories, gambles, and has meaningless sex with prostitutes.

As already mentioned, Kimathi’s nightmares “full of horrible images” make no sense to him, and their placement as the novel’s opening scenes initially confuses the reader (as Chapter Two does not seem to follow Chapter One). However, the novel comes full circle, as in the final scene we learn that the scenes from the first chapter are the repressed memories of Kimathi. Over time, his traumatised condition deteriorates: his repressed memories resurface, and he begins to experience “uncontrolled repetitive [...] hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (Caruth 2016: 17). What starts as “nightmare[s]” and “dark, bloody dreams” eventually progresses and becomes hallucinations and the “ghost[s]” that he ‘sees’ during the day (Mhlongo 2013: 12, 74, 136). Suddenly, the ghost of Senami begins to intrude into Kimathi’s life. The first time Kimathi ‘sees’ Senami in her ghostly form, he does not know who she is. He tries to impress the ghost by boasting about his political connections and Struggle credentials in the hopes that she will agree to go on a date with him. Eventually, she agrees to a date and he says he will pick her up tomorrow. Later on in the novel when he sees Senami’s ghost again, he still does not know who she is, even though she is “dressed in a camouflage army uniform” and rubs her fingers across the scar on her left cheek (92). In a particular scene, the ghost of Senami even points out that Kimathi has chosen to repress his bad memories in exile: “Your past deeds are so shameful that only by forgetting have you been able to live with them” (97).

From the early chapters of the novel, we learn that Kimathi is getting “treatment for his bipolar disorder” after experiencing many “manic episodes” which caused him to spend “huge amounts on his credit cards on gambling and prostitutes” (Mhlongo 2013: 45). Although Kimathi has been taking his prescribed medication, the symptoms of his illness do not get better; instead he only seems to get worse. His mental health declines to the point where Kimathi suffers from an emotional breakdown and is hospitalised. Kimathi’s repressed memories have persistently continued “invading his thoughts” to such an extent

that we begin to see a deterioration in his physical health (136). The first time Kimathi is hospitalised, he sees the ghost of Senami next to his hospital room, and she affirms that she is “not going to leave [him] alone” (100). In this scene, Kimathi acknowledges that the apparition he is seeing is indeed a ghost by saying, “Dead people don’t come back to life,” but he still does not remember who she is (100). Here we see the full extent of Kimathi’s repression: he cannot interpret or make sense of what he sees and instead wishes to ignore it. After his discharge from the hospital, Kimathi tries to continue his everyday life as best as he can. However, as critic Ivad (2020) said, despite his best efforts, he is unsuccessful, and so Kimathi suffers the long-term consequence of trauma and confusion (38). One night, after a business meeting, Kimathi gets in his car and drives home. During his drive, he begins to have a dream in which he sees his mother’s face. When he eventually wakes up, he finds “himself glaring at a torch flickering besides his Mercedes” – at some point, Kimathi had dozed off while driving, and woke up on the side of the highway (Mhlongo 2013: 121). Kimathi is in such a brain fog that he has to run his hands over his face to convince himself he is not dreaming anymore and needs to ask a man for directions.

Kimathi’s confusion and blackouts worsen as time goes by. It is taken to extremes when he completely blocks out the knowledge of the murders of his business rival, Ganyani, and of his close friend and business partner, Ludwe. Kimathi kills Ganyani “to avenge the stress that [he] had caused him:” Kimathi feels justified in killing Ganyani as he feels the latter has been a significant source of emotional distress; more precisely, Ganyani refused to join Kimathi’s business company when bidding for the tender at the Department of Public Works because he felt he deserved a more considerable portion of the ‘lion’s share’ (Mhlongo 2013: 198). After a scuffle between them, Ganyani filed “a protection order, informing Kimathi that he was not allowed to contact him and that Kimathi must stay at least five hundred metres from him at all times” (198). As for Kimathi’s murder of Ludwe, one can say that Ludwe’s killing might also be interpreted as Kimathi seeking revenge: Kimathi is displeased with Ludwe assisting his niece in suing him after she is removed from their business partnership (192). One interpretation of these murders may be read as Kimathi getting revenge against those he believes have wronged him; Ludwe and Ganyani’s deaths may thus be understood as ‘retributive deaths’ as they contradict the TRC’s policy of reconciliation, healing and forgiveness.

There are other points of view regarding how people process their trauma. For example, Zapata (2021) states that some people act out their trauma in order to alleviate their pain (31). I argue that Zapata’s comment applies to Kimathi: during his time as a prison officer, Kimathi held unlimited power and control that he used to abuse the detainees at the detention camp; however, in the novel’s present he does not wield the same power and authority he once did. Therefore, Kimathi is attempting to recapture these past experiences of wielding power. Critics like Caruth (1995) argue that (above all) trauma involves the “continual reliving of some wounding experience [...] in a compulsive seeking out of

similar circumstances” (184). This display of trauma fits the description of Kimathi’s actions as he tries to recreate the familiar past in the present, which makes him feel powerful and in control. At this point in the novel, Kimathi has lost all control and Senami’s ghost intrudes into his life constantly, leading to his being hospitalised. Having lost his tender bid to the Department of Public Works, he feels entitled to murder Ludwe and Ganyani to gain some semblance of control.

Things come to a head when “the borders between home and the world become confused; and the private and public become part of each other” (Bhabha 1994: 8). After a disappointing meeting with his business partners and Ganyani, Kimathi returns home to find “a young woman sitting on the veranda of his house” (Mhlongo 2013: 122). The young woman introduces herself as Dee and says that she is Moliehi’s sister. Moliehi was Kimathi’s domestic worker, and also the woman with whom Kimathi was cheating on his wife, Anele. After a brief and uncomfortable conversation with Dee, Kimathi eventually agrees to let her sleep in the domestic quarters for the night, and then retires to his house. Sometime after midnight, Kimathi decides to pour himself a drink and sees the automatic floodlight turn on outside. He watches as she undresses herself and jumps into the pool. Almost immediately she begins to “scream for help from the swimming pool” as she drowns (125). By the time Kimathi manages to drag her body out of her pool, her face is chalk-white and she also has “a fresh gash on her left cheek” (125). In this scene, Dee appears to be the physical, real-life manifestation of Senami’s spirit: Dee has the same wound on her face that Senami sustained on the night of her murder. Whereas Kimathi is responsible for Senami’s murder in the detention camp, he acts differently when he sees Dee drowning in his pool: he tries to “resuscitate her, but she [is] already dead” (125). At this point in the novel Kimathi has recently seen ghost Senami in the hospital and is continually experiencing more and more vivid nightmares. Therefore, I read his actions of trying to save Dee as an attempt to fix his past wrongdoings. Dee’s death signals that no matter how hard he tries, Kimathi will never be able to undo his actions. It may also signal that the only way for Kimathi to pay for his crimes is through death. The next day Kimathi is visibly shaken by the events of the previous night and finally says that it is time he see “a traditional healer for answers” (137).

Not only does the novel focus on Kimathi’s trauma, but it also touches on how other characters are traumatised. Through the Tladis, we learn that Senami had left for exile via Botswana in 1987 and never returned back home. Years later, in post-transitional South Africa, her parents are still grieving her disappearance. The parents even believe they often hear Senami’s voice: “she would talk and laugh the whole night,” and sometimes they would find her “room in a complete mess, with clothes scattered on the floor” (Mhlongo 2013: 61). They are so disturbed by her spirit that they seek out the help of a traditional healer. Traditional healer, Makhanda, informs them that their daughter’s spirit is restless because “she died in a foreign place” (159). To calm her spirit, he performs a “symbolic burial” and some rituals “in [her] room to try and stop Senami’s ghost from haunting the family” (61). The Tladis

tried to find her through the TRC, so that they could give her a proper burial, but they were told that there was no information regarding Senami's whereabouts (58). They then wrote to Ludwe Khakhaza who, at the time, worked at "the ANC head office in Shell House in Johannesburg" as he dealt with matters related to missing exiles (58). In response, Ludwe wrote back a "dismissive" letter stating that "in every struggle there are bound to be casualties" (58). The closing lines of the letter read as follows: "The Movement deeply regrets that there are those comrades whose fate we may not know, but their death is not in vain," (59). *Way Back Home* criticises the TRC and the ANC government for not prosecuting wrongdoers, as it left many families with unanswered questions and unresolved trauma. I believe that the purpose of Senami's story in the novel is to illustrate the various truths that have still not been unearthed, such as the grief of many families whose loved ones never made it back after the end of apartheid.

In this section, I have illustrated the root causes of Kimathi's traumatised condition and the various ways he expresses his trauma in the present. I have also pointed out the ways in which many South Africans are also still traumatised by the apartheid past. In the section that follows I aim to discuss the role of traditional indigenous knowledge in healing traumatised individuals, and explore whether Kimathi is able or not to find healing and peace.

2.3 Fictional Representations of African Spirituality in *Way Back Home*

It is not unusual to encounter numerous postcolonial novels that employ marvellous, fantastical and haunted elements in their narrative. According to Wole Ogundele (2002), these novels have strong impact because they also incorporate African oral-mythic (125); more exactly, elements of traditional indigenous knowledge and African spirituality in their narratives. These novels are influential because the spiritual is blended with “narrative realism” and “the mental wounds that open up from the effects of colonial and post-colonial political” violence inflicted on generations of African people (Zezeza 2007: 14). Often, postcolonial writing that employs African spirituality can be read as textual reinforcements of historians’ explorations of previously colonised countries. In this section, I will examine how the return of ghost Senami is a metaphor for Kimathi’s repressed traumatic past. I will also discuss why African spirituality can be used to find healing and process trauma, but why it fails for Kimathi.

One novel that employs aspects of African spirituality is Yvonne Vera’s *Nehanda* (2007); it is based on oral history and myth as passed down from generation to generation. Vera’s novel also has a cyclic narrative style, with the story beginning in reverse. In its own way, the novel disrupts colonial images of power by reconstructing Zimbabwean histories that “sought to freeze the history of the indigenous people in a ‘primitivist’ enclosure and the nationalist historians with their androcentric narratives of heroic anticolonial struggles” (Zezeza 2007: 15). Above all, Vera’s novel emphasises the “unbroken ontological chain” between the living and the dead (17). Similarly, Mhlongo’s novel also points out that death is not the end, as ghost Senami’s apparitions embody the African belief and understanding of death: death it is not the end, but rather “a transition from one state of being to another” (17). Additionally, Kimathi’s journey into the past in search of healing and belonging utilises African spirituality and traditional indigenous knowledge. Although Kimathi has access to the tools of African spirituality, he is unable to move beyond his own traumatic ‘hauntedness’ and therefore fails in his quest to find healing. Therefore, my aim in this section is, on the one hand, to examine the extent to which ancestral guidance can support the protagonist’s quest for self-definition and healing. On the other hand, I will also show Kimathi’s failure of finding healing and a sense of belonging.

2.3.1 Senami’s Hauntings

In many works of fiction – including Mhlongo’s novel – the presence of ghosts and other representations of ‘hauntings’ generally point to the presence of unprocessed past traumas in the present. Therefore, in this section I argue that haunting are not simply a story, but also a metaphor for the repressed memories that stay hidden from consciousness.

Before I begin my examination of Kimathi and Senami’s respective spiritual journey’s, it is essential that I first analyse the role of oral tradition and the mythic elements in *Way Back Home* (2013). In novels that engage with trauma the presence of ghostly hauntings represents the presence of trauma. For

instance, in Mhlongo's novel, ghost Senami is a symbol of Kimathi's repressed and unprocessed past. Therefore, in this section, I argue that Mhlongo's purpose in including hauntings is not simply to tell a story; but also to act as a metaphor for the repressed. In an interview with Moreillon and Stiebel (2015), Mhlongo states that he uses the myth or traditional urban legend of 'Vera the Ghost':

'Vera the Ghost' is the story about a beautiful girl who was killed in the 1950's. There are different views on how she died. Some say that she was killed in a car accident. Others say she was raped and killed. The important thing is that she came back as a ghost to terrorise the Soweto community and avenge her death. Rumour has it that she used to target and seduce male hunks at parties. The next thing those males would be found naked and dead at the Avalon Cemetery [...] Vera came back to terrorise the township because her death was not complete. Some rituals should have been performed where her death took place. (263)

Percy Zvomuya says that 'Vera the Ghost' is a well-known Sowetan urban myth that was first reported by Can Themba in *Drum magazine* (2013: n.p.). Zvomuya explains that the legend of "Vera the Ghost" narrated the account of a young woman who suffered rape and murder, yet she could not fully move on to the afterlife (2013: n.p.). Consequently, because of the circumstances surrounding her death, her ghost remained trapped both in the physical world and in the afterlife, where she repeatedly took her revenge on men who lusted after her.

According to Mhlongo, Vera's story is not only meant to entertain; it is also supposed to educate (Moreillon and Stiebel 2015: 263). In African tradition, the intention of a mythical story handed down from generation to generation is not for it only to entertain but also to carry educational information about the ways of the past. Kenqu (2019) also writes that she believes the "urban legend of 'Vera the Ghost' [is] a cautionary oral tale" meant to warn men against the dangers of lusting after women (157-158). The myths in African tradition passed through oral tradition are a fundamental key used by storytellers, like traditional healers. Oral tradition is important as it combines the real and the fantastic: modern society is steeped in urban myths. Together the social and the mythic – cohesively deliver a larger message, usually through a metaphor. In Mhlongo's novel, "Vera is reimagined in the character of Senami, who [was] brutally raped and murdered by her comrades [during] exile and returns as the living dead to avenge her death" (158). It becomes apparent in the novel that Senami remains perpetually stuck between the afterlife and the real world because "she did not make a smooth transition into her next life" (Mhlongo 2013: 153).

Not only does Senami's story carry a message, but it also "reveal[s] the intimate relationship between reality and fantasy" (Mposa 2017: 1). Senami's return as a spectre (in the present) challenges the argument that there is a clear distinction between the living and the dead. When Kimathi 'meets' Senami

for the first time, he refuses to acknowledge the signs that hint at her being a spectral presence. However, the reader recognises the ominous nature of their encounter. When Senami makes her first ghostly appearance in Kimathi's life, and owl⁵ appears twice. The first time Kimathi sees an owl hooting "from the top of a nearby tree" and is instantly terrified because "since childhood, [he] had hated owl, as they were regarded as an omen of witchcraft in his culture" (Mhlongo 2013: 44). When he drives off, he sees what looks "like an owl flying in front of him" and swears that it looks as if "the owl's eyes looked straight through him" (46). Shortly after this, Kimathi is driving on the highway in the middle of a thunderstorm and heavy rain when he hears "a thump on the bonnet of [his] car" (46). He slows down thinking that he may have run over something, but is "surprised and terrified to see a dead owl on the bonnet" (46). The next time an owl is mentioned is when Kimathi wakes up in the hospital after his psychotic episode at Ludwe's funeral. During his speech at the funeral, Kimathi's eyes lock with those of a woman "dressed in camouflage uniform" and a scar running across her left cheek (92). After a "hysterical torrent of words," he collapses, bangs his head against a video projector and falls into a "black and boundless abyss" (93). When he eventually comes to his senses, Kimathi feels as if the woman he saw at Ludwe's funeral is someone "familiar [...]. He was sure he had seen her somewhere, but could not recall where" (96). The situation worsens, and he becomes terrified when he opens his eyes and 'sees' the same woman seated next to his hospital bed. When Kimathi asks her why she is 'following' him, she responds, "there is no hiding spot when you have hurt someone, comrade" (96). In other words, Senami is haunting him to make him remember. Kimathi responds to this comment by trying to attack her, but instead he collapses into his bed again and fearfully clutches onto "a pillow with an owl feather print on it" (96). Once again, an owl reappears in the novel.

On the night of Kimathi's encounter with Dee, his former maid's sister, he sees "an owl sitting on the wall next to the swimming pool" (125). A black cat also appears out of nowhere and stands on the wall between his yard and his neighbours. (In folklore, black cats are also of bad omen as they represent the presence of evil and bad luck). The last time an owl is mentioned in the novel is the day Kimathi dies. This sighting is different from the ones already discussed because, while the previous ones took place at night, this one takes place during the day. This is unusual because "owls only fly at night," but on this day, an owl flies, lands on the branch of a tree and when Kimathi glances up, it is "flying directly above him [...] in the direction of one of the old camp buildings" (203).

In addition to the owl's symbolism, there are other clues in the novel that go ignored by Kimathi, and which indicate that Senami is a ghost. In the same scene where Kimathi pulls over because he thinks he may have hit an owl, a figure with a "white cloth that covered its head and part of its face" approaches

⁵ In African spirituality, certain animals carry specific meanings. Mhlongo uses the owl symbolism as, in African culture it is believed that they are "harbinger[s] of death" and bad luck (Barnard and Vlies 2019: 69).

the car, opens the door and sits down next to Kimathi in the passenger seat, causing him to faint from the “fear engulf[ing] him” (47). When Kimathi regains consciousness, he opens his eyes to see the figure of a beautiful woman seated next to him wearing dry clothing. Kimathi also notices “two owl feathers: plaited into the figure's hair, and this frightens him further as he has been frightened of owls since he was a boy (47). When Kimathi asks her how it is possible that she is not wet when standing in the rain, she does not answer his question (48). Instead, she introduces herself as Senami and says that she is “on [her] way back home” (47). Kimathi offers to drive her home, and they begin to talk. As they converse back and forth, Kimathi focuses on her beauty and tries to persuade her to go on a date with him, but he ignores her hints. For instance, she says that she “live[s] in another world,” that while it “might seem [like they] live under the same sky, they do not “share the same horizon,” and she also asks him to question what he sees in front of him and ask whether it “is just an illusion” (51). These comments are intended to be interpreted literally, not metaphorically, as Kimathi does. Through several scenes pointing to spiritual intimations, Mhlongo highlights the crossing over of the spiritual realm into the material world. While Senami mainly haunts Kimathi – as she is a symptom of his trauma, now manifesting as bipolar disorder – she also haunts her own parents.

On the day of their date, Kimathi parks his car outside the house of Senami’s parents’ house, and he sees her “beckoning to him” from the door of her house (56). Kimathi is welcomed into the home by an elderly man, and when he enters the house, he sees “a framed picture of Senami on the wall,” and an elderly woman sitting on a couch wearing mourning clothes (56). After Kimathi greets them, they introduce themselves as Lola and Napo Tladi, Senami’s parents, and they ask him if he knows whom he is there to fetch. Their faces are in “disbelief” when they hear this, so they tell Kimathi to identify Senami in a photo album to confirm their suspicions. After he identifies her, Napo informs Kimathi that “Senami is presumed to have died in exile in 1991” and that she never “return[ed] home when everyone else was coming back to the country” at the end of apartheid (57). Kimathi insists that after he picked her (ghost) up on the side of the road the night before, she agreed to go on a date with him the next day; he showed up hoping to take her out today. The Tladis think that this is “very strange” because yesterday, their sangoma had “completed the rituals” for Senami’s symbolic burial, which had taken place in the previous year (59). They had been advised by their traditional healer to hold a symbolic burial for their daughter after Lola had complained that she saw Senami every day. Sometimes Lola would hear Senami’s voice – “she would talk and laugh the whole night, especially when it was raining or there was a thunderstorm” (61); she and her husband would wake up and discover Senami’s “room in a complete mess, with clothes scattered on the floor” (61). In another scene, Napo and Lola state that they were not able to sleep the night before because throughout the night, they could hear “crying noises” in Senami’s room and when they entered her room, “everything was upside down [...] The wardrobe has been pushed over, and the mirror has been broken” (158). It is important to note that not only does Senami haunt her parents, but they also hear her voice on nights when it rains and storms. On the night of her murder,

back in Angola, the rumblings of a storm could also be heard as Kimathi and Ludwe entered her cell (176).

After hearing the news of Senami's death, Kimathi has a panic attack: it sinks in that Senami, whom he had encountered recently, was a spectral presence. Kimathi passed out and finally regains consciousness at "about nine in the evening", and when he looks up, he sees "a gecko staring at him from the doorframe" (68). This is not the first time a gecko is mentioned in the novel; on the night that Senami was murdered, "her eyes followed a small gecko that was crawling across the floor" of her cell (105). Additionally, more inferences are made about the spiritual nature certain animals hold. Mhlongo uses animals as a fictional device meant to induce fear, as the contexts they are described in suggest psychological distress and guilt. On the day that Sechaba drives Kimathi to where the traditional healer is, he meets a female novice by the name of Gogo Mpiyakhe, who points out that the albino python that slithered into the indumba (sacred healing space) "is a sign that someone is bewitching one of [them]," (147). Once again, Mhlongo suggests that certain animals hold significant spiritual significance. In the novel, they are there to guide Kimathi to the 'truth:' that his "career as a freedom fighter was motivated by [his] dark and hidden desires [and Senami] was imprisoned in Amilcar Cabral for two years for nothing" (205). As I have already mentioned, the first time Kimathi sees the owl is the night he meets Senami's ghost on the side of the road, and the last time he sees an owl, is the moment when it flies in the direction of the building where Kimathi murdered her all those years ago during exile and where he subsequently kills himself.

When Kimathi enters the fateful building, Senami makes him face the truth about what he did to her; in their conversation, Kimathi finally admits to the truth of his actions. Even though he admits to his past, it is too late, and Senami finally gets her revenge when Kimathi kills himself. In the novel's Prologue, Kimathi swore always to serve The Movement with integrity and that should he fail to do so, he should be punished, even if the punishment was death. Kimathi's assertive statement in the Prologue indicates that he initially held faith in The Movement's principles of dedication, justice, integrity and justice for the people of South Africa. When Kimathi acts in violent and selfish ways, he breaks the pledge he had made and, therefore, must pay for his actions with his life, just as he had promised in the oath: "A tooth for a tooth; and eye for an eye; a life for a life" (Mhlongo 2013: Prologue). Kimathi therefore takes his own life because "dying is more attractive than living and suffering" because he knows that Senami will never stop haunting him (149).

In this sub-section, I have argued that Senami's ghostly hauntings are a metaphor for Kimathi's repressed traumatic memories. More specifically, I have pointed out the continuous presence of various symbolic animals of Dee and even Senami's apparition – how they all signify Kimathi's distress, his repressed trauma and guilt. In the end, it is revealed that he is unable to overcome being haunted by past

traumatic memories, as he is not prepared to take responsibility for his past crimes. He pays for his lack of repentance with his life.

2.3.2 African Spirituality and Healing in African Communities

Although *Way Back Home* firmly belongs in the category of a post-transitional novel, the narrative also engages with aspects of African spirituality and its relevance in contemporary society. When white settlers colonised Africa, they disregarded African beliefs and its various healing practices and favoured the Western medicines and procedures. As Seleme Melato (2000) shows, over time, Western medicine and healing methods became mainstream, while African healing practices fell by the wayside. While it cannot be said that Western healing methods are ineffective, they do not “encapsulate the whole world of the patient,” and it does not consider “his/her cultural background” (61). Western methods of healing do not always work because the African belief system argues that a person does not exist in isolation. This perspective is grounded in the belief that a tangible and consistent connection exists between historical events and the contemporary world, as well as between people that are no longer living and those that are currently living. Mhlongo (2013) supports this view in the novel when his protagonist Senami says, “a person does not simply disappear when they die [...] they go to another world” (204). According to Melato (2000), this holistic approach to healing “encapsulates [the] termination of suffering, controlling symptoms and restoring physical and psychological functioning and social relationships” (61). This approach fundamentally differs from Western medicine, as it relies on an integrated viewpoint, in contrast to the compartmentalised perspective of Western medical practices “where the patient is, to a large degree, the only one who is dealt with during his/her treatment” (61). In this section, I will examine the role of African traditional medicine, rituals and healing practices in relation to Kimathi and Senami.

In his novel, Mhlongo does not suggest that the dominant Western practices of healing must altogether be disregarded; instead, he seems to suggest that “a medically pluralist society” is possible, “where traditional healers co-exist alongside biomedicine” (Wreford 2005: 2). According to Mmamoshedi Mothibe and Sibanda Mncengeli (2019), South Africa – much like many African countries – “has a pluralistic system of healthcare, in which modern medicine practice coexists with non-conventional health systems” (6). These non-conventional health systems “include a variety of indigenous systems based on traditional practices and beliefs” (6). At various points in the novel, Mhlongo illustrates the importance of traditional indigenous knowledge, healers and medicine in South Africa and how it can exist alongside Western medicine practices and Christianity.

In the first few pages of Mhlongo’s (2013) novel, it is revealed that Kimathi is on medication for “bipolar disorder,” which is presenting itself in the form of dark nightmares and terrifyingly ‘realistic’ delusions that involuntarily invade his present (45). However, because Kimathi is unable to recall certain past

events and also refuses to acknowledge his violent actions in exile, his symptoms worsen, and his health continues to decline. During Kimathi's first hospital stay, his doctor tells him that his symptoms reflect that he is "suffering from the aftereffects of some kind of past trauma" and that he must confront whatever is causing him to be ill (101). When he is hospitalised again, soon after his first stay in the hospital, his doctor becomes worried that he is "on the verge of a breakdown" and recommends "that he see a psychologist" (135). After his second breakdown, Kimathi accepts that he is suffering from the effects of a past traumatic incident, and he knows that it is time for him to "confront [his] past" (137, 144). Additionally, he knows that he needs to seek out help from a traditional healer to help him get rid of the uninvited "dead people [...] following [him] everywhere" (135).

Even though Kimathi has been taking Western medicine for a long time, his condition does not improve; he now knows he needs to consult a traditional healer to improve. The narrative offers the help of a clinical psychologist for issues such as PTSD⁶. Furthermore, I believe that Mhlongo illustrates how traditional African healers – in various practices – can provide specialised help for African patients because they understand that when an individual exhibits signs of illness, it often means that the 'whole' person needs healing. Therefore, although Kimathi does receive a conventional diagnosis from doctors in the hospital, I now believe the narrative favours African indigenous "methods and remedies for dealing with psychological, psychiatric and spiritual conditions" (Mokgobi 2014: 28). Kimathi's doctor gives him medication for his bipolar disorder, and then later advises him that he is suffering from the effects of trauma and that he must consult a psychologist. Kimathi is then hospitalised, and on the day he is to be discharged, Sechaba visits him in the hospital and recommends that he see a traditional healer called Makhanda. When Kimathi arrives at Makhanda's, one of his female novices, Gogo Mpiyakhe, diagnoses him from a more holistic perspective that includes a cure for his "body and soul" because he is suffering from "something that cannot be explained in rational, empirical or linear terms" (146). After this brief, yet accurate diagnosis, Kimathi is instructed to enter the indumba (sacred healing space), where healer Makhanda is waiting for him. Upon meeting him, the traditional healer also ascertains that Kimathi is unwell: he says that he can tell that Kimathi is "seeing things and hearing things" that he is not supposed to, because "someone is following [him]" (148): Makhanda immediately knows that "someone is bewitching" Kimathi (147). He claims he knows who the "hostile spirit attacking [him]" belongs to, as he had recently conducted a ritual at her home: he knows the hostile spirit belongs to Senami because he had been helping her parents deal with her 'ghost' haunting them (151). This first consultation with Makhanda begins Kimathi's journey with African spirituality; unfortunately, his journey is unsuccessful, and I will examine why it is so.

⁶ PTSD is the acronym used for the psychiatric disorder known as post-traumatic stress disorder, which is characterised by reliving the experience through flashbacks, having distressing nightmares, experiencing intense anxiety, along with persistent and intrusive thoughts about the event.

As mentioned above, Makhanda believes that Kimathi is being attacked by a hostile spirit that he believes he can identify. Makhanda's proclamation seems to support Sithabile Ndlovu's (2016) statement that illnesses can "be caused by magical or animistic aetiology, it is believed to have been intentionally inflicted by others including the living-dead" (24). This applies to Mhlongo's narrative in the novel: Senami's ghostly return, Kimathi's mental health and overall illnesses. Kimathi's illnesses befall him because of the crimes he committed in the detention camps, and because he is not genuinely interested in accounting for his actions – past and present. He merely accepts Makhanda's suggestions for escaping his nightmares and ghostly hauntings in the hopes that he will soon be able to continue with his corrupt business dealings without any interruptions. Since he shows no genuine interest in admitting his wrongdoings, he must atone for them with his life.

As mentioned before, the novel also shows how Christianity and traditional beliefs co-exist (through Senami's parents). While the Tladis came to embrace Makhanda's spiritual advice and methods, they were initially very hesitant about it as they were Christians, and their religious belief meant that they did not think African traditional beliefs and customs were necessary and relevant. However, they become desperate when they start believing they are being haunted by Senami's restless spirit, and eventually they seek out the help of a traditional healer when Lola (Senami's mother) claims to have "frequent disturbing dreams" and goes into "trances" (Mhlongo 2013: 59). I believe that the Tladis' change in attitude regarding African traditions and rituals is part of Mhlongo's larger message: that although many Africans have chosen to be Christians, it does not mean that African traditional religion and its customs must be neglected as they are valid and relevant even in contemporary South African society. Even though the Tladis had not seen their daughter Senami since before she left for exile many years ago, they still held on to the hope that she "would find her way back home alive" (64). However, when Kimathi arrives into their lives, this is a confirmation of her actual death which they were not prepared for. Healer Makhanda takes on the role of a counsellor and therapist when he soothes her parents and says, "Kuzolunga. It will be fine" (64). He helps them grieve their daughter, offers comfort, and advice on their journey, so all the rituals to bring back their daughter's spirit are appropriately conducted. Makhanda remains by their side at all times, accompanying them on their journey to Angola to retrieve Senami's spirit, and informs them what final ritual must be done so that their daughter's spirit can finally rest in peace.

The term 'traditional healer' is all-encompassing, as there are different types of healers with diverse expertise and specific training. According to Mokgobi (2014), there are three types of traditional healers, and they include: diviners, traditional surgeons and traditional birth attendants (29). Traditional birth attendants are usually older women who have "perfected the skill of midwifery over the years through experiencing, witnessing and assisting in many births throughout their adult lives" (30). Their midwifery skills are transferred from one generation to the next. A traditional surgeon is qualified and has been

entrusted by village chiefs and the villagers to perform procedures such as circumcisions on boys. Their skills are further enhanced by their knowledge of traditional medicines also used by diviners. Traditional healers are essential because they “serve as counsellors, social workers and [as] skilled psychotherapists as well as custodians of indigenous knowledge systems” (31). Mothibe and Mncengeli (2019) state that African traditional medicine “is said to be one of the oldest and most diverse of all medicine systems, even though the medicine systems are poorly recorded” (2). The role of traditional healers in contemporary society is especially important because they act as custodians of traditional healing practices, passing on their vast knowledge of “herbal materials, herbal preparations and finished herbal products” (2).

In the novel, Makhanda plays the role of diviner and herbalist, and he uses “bones and spirits of the ancestors to diagnose and prescribe medication for different physiological, psychiatric and spiritual conditions,” and he uses his vast knowledge of plants to make different medicines (Mokgobi 2014: 29). Moreover, he uses his spiritual connection to the spiritual realm and knowledge of indigenous medicines to help the Tladis find their daughter’s remains and bring her back home to South Africa, which finally allows her spirit to find rest. Although Kimathi does not find help using African healing methods, there are instances in the novel where African practices and medicines assist him. For instance, on the day that Kimathi faints at the Tladi home upon hearing that the same Senami that he had seen the night before, and persuaded to go on a date with him, was last seen alive by her parents in 1987 (Mhlongo 2013: 60). When Makhanda arrives at the Tladis he instructs Senami’s mother, Lola, to boil milk with iqwaningi roots and feed the cooled mixture to Kimathi. Once this is done, he uses a small razor to make “small cuts on Kimathi’s ankles and wrists” and mix some black medicine with Vaseline into the incisions while reciting “healing incantations in isiZulu” (64). After being unconscious for many hours, methods used by Makhanda eventually stir Kimathi up from unconsciousness. Not only do the medicines work successfully, but they also help retrieve a repressed memory buried deep in Kimathi’s consciousness.

As a diviner, Makhanda’s connection with the spiritual world is highlighted throughout the text, particularly in scenes that involve Kimathi. After suffering from a nervous breakdown (which results in his hospitalisation) where he has a hallucination of Senami in the form of a young woman named Dee, Kimathi finally decides to consult with Makhanda to help him with what a doctor in the hospital stated was “the aftereffects of some kind of trauma” (Mhlongo 2013: 143). Before Kimathi divulges any information on why he has sought out help from a traditional healer, Makhanda identifies that Kimathi has a huge problem: “You’re seeing things and hearing things that you’re not supposed to [...] somebody is following you” (148). According to Nonkululeko Sandlana and David Mtetwa (2008), in the African cultural worldview there exists the belief that traditional healers receive their abilities through “favour with their ancestors” (119). In the scene mentioned above, Makhanda uses his connection with his

ancestors to identify more of Kimathi's issues: "My ancestors are telling me that you are having visions and hearing voices" (Mhlongo 2013: 148). As previously stated, Makhanda operates as a traditional healer who is both gifted in spiritual divination and traditional medicine to assist patients like Kimathi who are experiencing hallucinations of emotional distress.

Way Back Home consistently highlights the significance of ancestral home. The notion is initially presented in connection with Kimathi's paternal family: as I mentioned before, he is shocked that he cannot feel at home with his paternal family, who had their land expropriated, and therefore, his father and grandfather could not be buried at home, on their ancestral land. Later on, this theme is once again highlighted because Senami was murdered and buried far from home, in an Angolan detention camp. Due to the circumstances of her burial, she was not given a proper funeral as custom dictates, and therefore her spirit does not find rest. For Senami's spirit to stop being "restless," she needs to be separated from the living, "so that she can make a smooth transition to the next life" (Mhlongo 2013: 159). The only way to do this is to "bring her home from wherever she is" and give her a proper burial (159). In this conversation involving Makhanda, Kimathi and the Tladis, it becomes clear that a "way back home" is indeed possible for Senami (47). The rituals to bring Senami's spirit back home will only be complete when the Tladis "brew traditional beer and slaughter an ox" (162). In African custom, slaughtering an animal, whether a chicken, goat, cow or sheep, is an important part of rituals as it appeases the ancestors. Slaughtering is also important because the blood spilt "signifies the connection between the ancestors and their descendants" (Mothibe and Mncengeli 2019: 13). Additionally, establishing a connection between the living and the deceased can also be achieved through the ceremonial sacrifice of an animal. For instance, the living may slaughter an animal to communicate gratitude for their ancestor's continued protection and guidance, or to ask for assistance to acquire something important. Traditional beer, also known as *umqombothi*, is also brewed, and part of it is poured onto the ground so that the ancestors can drink and be merry. The rituals can only be followed correctly according to the specific instructions of a traditional healer, who informs the family where and how procedures should take place. At the end of the novel, Makhanda continues with the rituals to bring Senami home after they have found her remains.

After Senami's remains are found at the makeshift grave site of the detention camp, Makhanda performs a traditional burial and implores her to return home with them, so that she can finally find peace:

We have come here from far away back home in South Africa, in Soweto [...] You have been lost for many years [and we] want you to come back home. Please, allow us to take you back home with us. (Mhlongo 2013: 207-208)

After this speech, a strong wind begins to blow, and dust collects from Senami's "gravesite and coiled upwards like a snake" (208). This is important because, when Kimathi first arrives at Makhanda's place, Gogo Mpiyakhe tells Kimathi not to fear the many snakes he will see as "they are the spirits of our ancestors" (146). At the gravesite, Senami's spirit rises and forms the shape of a snake and – although they had expressed their hesitation in traditional medicines and belief – her parents admit that they "have [finally] found closure and [will] be able to carry [their] daughter's spirit home with [them]" (208). Hence, it is safe to infer that Mhlongo may have implied that Senami's spirit will ultimately find its proper resting place, as tradition demands. In the novel, Mhlongo stresses that African traditions should not be neglected, for they can provide very relevant, meaningful and practical ways to process trauma for communities still impacted by the legacy of apartheid. It also allows people to mourn the loss of their loved ones through various rituals and forms of counselling provided by traditional healers.

While Makhanda's guidance and rituals help Senami's spirit find its way back home, they fail to assist Kimathi in dealing with his own trauma and feelings of unbelonging. However, the problem does not lie with Makhanda and his utilisation of African medicine (*muti*) and rituals. In the following section, I will discuss the various rituals and methods, applied by Makhanda, to help Kimathi's mental condition. I will then end by exploring why he cannot escape his past, and thus cannot heal his brokenness.

During Kimathi's first consultation with Makhanda, incense (also called *impepho*) is burnt and placed in front of Kimathi (148). In this scene, Kimathi is instructed: "to inhale the impepho for good luck" (Mhlongo 2013: 148). According to Melato (2000), incense is burned by the traditional healer as part of the consultation process (66). There are a few other reasons traditional healers use incense: for example, as a vehicle for conversing with a patient's ancestors. The burning of incense "forms the basis of any consultation and intervention used by a traditional healer [and] the incense is regarded as a diagnostic tool in the traditional healing practice" (50). The smoke that comes from burning incense "is believed to have [the] power to connect the healer with both his/her ancestors and those of the clients. It is in this context that the traditional healer is believed to be able to talk with the patient's ancestral spirits and put forth his/her problem" (66).

In addition to incense, Makhanda also uses traditional medicine to help those around him by carrying out specific rituals. According to Samuel Atindanbila and Chalmer Thompson (2011), "African traditional medicine dates back as far as 4,000 years" and is still the main form of help African clients seek, whether it be physical or psychological illness (463). Traditional medicine remains valid and relevant in contemporary society due to its holistic approach, meaning that "healers look not only at the causes but also the consequences of the illness on the individual and the community as a whole" (463).

A traditional healer, therefore, cannot treat an individual's illness without adequately dealing with the spiritual influences negatively impacting a person; they look beyond the physical to deal with the spiritual cause of suffering first. The traditional medicine used by Makhanda consists of herbs. At various times, Makhanda creates his own treatments: "Makhanda had brought crushed umzilanyoni berries [...] boil[ed] in milk. When the milk was boiling, he added bark from the underground umgudo tree into it" (Mhlongo 2013: 63). Makhanda uses a razor blade to make "small cuts on Kimathi's ankles and wrists," that he puts the concoction in which then "seemed to transport [an unconscious] Kimathi to another world" (64-65). In this scene, it appears as if the concoction helps him remember Mafukuzela camp, Angola, where he vowed to find the individuals responsible for the recent carnage they had suffered during a raid by the Boers. After Makhanda made the concoction, "he lit each of the five candles in [Senami's] room and muttered something in what sounded like a foreign language while clapping his hands" (64). When traditional healers burn incense they enter a trance state in which they seem to communicate in "a special language which the spirits can hear and understand" (Melato 2000: 50).

In addition to traditional medicine and healing techniques, African spirituality also involves other rituals. According to Elizabeth Okpalaenwe and Gladys Odigwe (2018), in the African setting, "rituals play a significant role in the healing process" as they have been used "in dealing with life issues" (15). In an urge to chase Senami's ghost away from her room, Makhanda conducted a kind of cleansing ceremony where he "painted the room red and smeared the inside of the windows with ash," while also filling five Coke bottles "with water from the ocean" (Mhlongo 2013: 61). Ocean water is often used in cleansing ceremonies to "cast away evil spirits" and negative energy (Sandlana and Mtetwa 2008: 124). Another way traditional healers "chase [...] evil spirit[s] away" is by conducting "ceremonial purification" rituals (154-155). Makhanda tells Kimathi, that for the ritual to be successful, he must "return the following morning with two live chickens and a goat," so they can be slaughtered (Mhlongo 2013: 155). Olaniyi Bojuwoye (2005) states that many rituals "involve slaughtering animals" during the ceremony, with certain parts of the animal being used for specific purposes: "some parts of the animal are separated as the ancestors' share, some parts are smeared on the sick person, and everybody present partakes in the eating of cooked remaining parts" (69).

In the novel, rituals are an important part of the Tladis healing process, as it allows them to finally come to terms with their daughter's death starting with a symbolic burial in Avalon Cemetery, and ending with the real burial after her remains have been excavated in Angola. In an interview with Moreillon and Stiebel (2015), Mhlongo states that "if someone passes away, the process of healing and mourning doesn't end with burying the person because there are certain rituals that have to be performed" (268). This process includes many different things, but in the context of the novel, Senami's parents bring their daughter's spirit home and then conclude with "slaughtering an ox to appease the ancestors [...] once they returned from Angola" (Mhlongo 2013: 162).

While traditional indigenous medicines, healing techniques and rituals succeed in giving Senami's parents closure, they do not succeed in helping Kimathi find his identity by healing from his trauma and a sense of non-belonging. I argue that Kimathi cannot be helped because he does not take any real responsibility for his actions until the very end – which is too late for healing – when he has a confrontation with ghost Senami (Mhlongo 2013: 206).

Throughout the novel, we see Kimathi's struggles to find his identity and place of belonging. To feel a sense of rootedness in the present, Kimathi repeatedly proclaims that he is "a real son of exile" because he was born to a Tanzanian mother and a South African father serving as a soldier for The Movement in exile (19). However, although Kimathi feels such a strong connection to the past, he is essentially unhomed in a broader sense because he is also dislocated from the present – it all begins in his childhood when his peers treat him as an outsider. We see it again later, when he fails to feel a sense of belonging after being reunited with his paternal family; he also fails as a husband and father. Kimathi does not have a good relationship with women: he never knew his mother, lusted after Senami, and when she rejected him, he took revenge by killing her; he cheats on his wife with their maid, and regularly pays for the company of prostitutes. However, one relationship somewhat differs from all those above-mentioned; it is one he has with his daughter. Although Kimathi has not been much involved in his daughter's life, the person whom Kimathi shows genuine affection to is his daughter, Zanu. He reassures her of his feelings by saying: "Daddy loves you every day," and he affectionately refers to her as "sweetheart" and "my little princess" (15, 175).

Furthermore, Kimathi is concerned for his daughter's safety after Makhanda tells him that "the spirits sometimes extend their revenge to members of your family, who may have to pay for your past behaviour" (153). Kimathi realises that the spirit haunting him will not only affect him, but "those [he] love[s] will not be safe" until he confronts his past (157). Kimathi's ability to be kind is demonstrated through his final acts towards his daughter when he tells Anele that he is selling his house and will "create an account for [Zanu] and deposit the money from the proceeds of the sale" and will pay her "outstanding school fees for the rest of the year" (171, 172). On the surface, this may not seem like a lot, but this effort reflects Kimathi's deep-seated capacity to be selfless and emotionally mature.

Despite these kind and sometimes tender moments, Kimathi does not commit to a profound soul-search and self-improvement. Throughout the novel, we read of Kimathi being greedy, engaging in corruption, acting selfishly, and doing whatever it takes to preserve his image, even if it means betraying people; his actions towards the end of the novel are no different. In a conversation with Sechaba, Kimathi

flippantly refers to what is supposed to be a spiritual journey as “this Angola thing”; suggesting a superficial interest in the spiritual aspect of the journey. What he is really interested in is to get rid of inner turmoil, so that he can be more efficient in his business dealings, he behaves violently when he feels he has been wronged (167). Therefore, he brutally murders Ludwe when the latter discloses his involvement in assisting Kimathi’s niece in suing him after her removal from the company. He also blames Ganyani for the failure of his tender bid, and murders him in cold blood. Kimathi also kills the two police officers who accept his bribe in exchange for his freedom (57, 180).

Kimathi’s trip to Angola in search of spiritual redemption is completely insincere as he is more excited at the prospect of heavy drinking and visiting “several exotic strip clubs in Luanda” (165, 187). Even at the very end, Kimathi shows minimal signs of taking responsibility for his actions: he offers ghost Senami various insincere apologies for his violent acts during exile and remains reluctant to acknowledge his crime; instead, he tries to shift the blame and says: “I was merely following the orders of The Movement” (204). Senami immediately dismisses this statement by saying that this “is a beautiful, generous lie,” and she is not interested in reconciling (204-205). Senami’s ghost is only interested in getting revenge and holding him accountable for the promises he made in his own oath before he joined The Movement: “Should I violate any of these [promises], I accept that I should be punished by all means, not excluding death” (Prologue). In his final moments, ghost Senami rejects his apology and points out that Kimathi should not only pay for crimes committed during exile, but also for the ones he committed after the end of apartheid as he continued with doing wrong even though he knows “the difference between right and wrong” (205). Senami also says something during their encounter that may indicate that she is also speaking on account of many others who were murdered by Kimathi. She quotes Luke 6 verse 31 from the Bible: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (205). Perhaps, in addition to enacting her revenge for her murder, she is also avenging the deaths of all those who died because of Kimathi.

Kimathi is not able to find healing from his past traumas because he does not embark on his spiritual journey with genuine intentions. He does not act in good faith; instead, he begins his journey with the hope of appeasing Senami and returning to South Africa to continue his ‘hustle.’ Additionally, he does not seem to learn that there are consequences for his actions because he continues with the same violent acts responsible for his initial trauma.

In this section, I have analysed Kimathi’s attempts at finding peace and healing, and have also explored the possible reasons for why he has failed: he was not genuine in his intentions of taking full responsibility for his actions. Therefore, Mhlongo suggests to the reader that if one’s attempts at finding healing are not guided by good intentions, failure is inevitable. Additionally, through Mhlongo’s character, the author also seems to caution the reader against trying to find healing for selfish reasons:

Kimathi hoped to end his private torment only so that he could continue with his dubious life-style unhindered; he was not actually willing to give up his corrupt, deceptive and violent ways.

The next chapter explores another approach to healing, via the protagonist of Serote's novel, *Rumours*, who – unlike Mhlongo's protagonist, Kimathi – is successful in re-establishing and integrating his sense of self through spiritual endeavours.

3. Chapter Three: Mongane Wally Serote's *Rumours* (2013)

Mongane Wally Serote's *Rumours* (2013) is a post-transitional novel set in contemporary South Africa and it addresses disillusionment, belonging, identity, trauma and African spirituality. The story mainly focuses on the character of Keke, a former MK soldier and ex-political exile, and his struggle to find belonging in an ever-changing contemporary society. As the plot progresses, Keke must journey into the past to find his true sense of belonging and overcome severe emotional traumas experienced during apartheid. I will begin this chapter with a synopsis of the novel's plot, and some character descriptions, followed by a brief overview of the novel's themes. I will also discuss why the metropolises of Johannesburg and Durban are portrayed as sites of traumatic memory and why ex-political exiles struggle to feel at home in the present. This will then be followed with an examination of Keke's past traumatised state and how Serote fictionally represents past traumas and their present consequences in the novel. Lastly, I will examine the fictional representations of African spirituality and traditional knowledge by discussing the various traditional healers and the different methods of healing depicted in the novel.

3.1 Plot Summary

Similar to *Revelations* (2010), Mongane Wally Serote's fifth novel, *Rumours* (2013), also deals with the themes of identity and individual explorations. In *Rumours*, Serote moves beyond the Struggle years by paying considerable attention to early African history and traditional ways of living. In particular, the novel focuses on the main character of Keke and how he resorts to traditional indigenous knowledge and African spirituality to make sense of his present trauma and non-belonging.

Rumours is made of three parts. In each section, Serote introduces a new setting, new characters, with the theme mainly centring on the protagonist, Keke, and his trajectory throughout the novel. Part One takes us through Keke's physical and emotional decline in the 2000s. The story opens with a nightmare scene involving Keke as he seems to be trying to run ahead of an "evil" foreign "force" making its way to the township of Alexandra in Johannesburg (Serote 2013: 1). In his dream as a commander and veteran in the armed wing force, UMKhonto we Sizwe (MK), it is Keke's responsibility "to get to Alexandra before the force" and warn the community of its evil intentions and destructive capabilities (2). Keke arrives in Alexandra in time to warn the people, but when he turns back, he sees the force changing its course to Pretoria, the administrative capital of the country. As hard as he tried, the 'force' was now ahead of him, and he realised that he recognised it – the force was a combination of black and white pilots that looked like Barack Obama, Bush, Reagan, Thatcher, and Hillary Clinton. As his dream goes on, he becomes more disorientated: he does not know where he is running to, experiences numerous emotions, no longer remembers his mission, and struggles for breath. When Keke wakes up, he realises he was having a nightmare and is still alone in the house. As a member of the ruling party, he is also concerned with the future of the ANC: that despite it being "powerful," it is "disempowered" (4). As we

can see from the dream, Serote's novel, therefore, represents the theme of trauma caused by neo-colonial rule, particularly in times of Struggle – in the case of South Africa, it is the trauma emanating from the anti-apartheid struggle, and disillusionment with the current state of the ruling party. It also discusses why individuals suffering from trauma often experience alienation and emotional dislocation.

In the novel's opening chapters, we also learn that Keke's relationship with his wife, Mmabatho, has fallen apart, and that she has taken their children, Thalitha and Thebe, away. For the first time in his life, "if he were asked the whereabouts of his wife [...] he wouldn't be able to answer" (16). Without any reason, Keke's entire life suddenly seems to be falling to pieces: he loses his family and the home they shared, his car, his job and all his possessions until all that he is left with are a handful of clothes. During his downward spiral, he begins to frequent a shebeen called the Twist Street Tavern. The Twist Street Tavern is where individuals suffering from trauma and experiencing collective loneliness seem to gather. It is where he meets Nomsa, a prostitute and fellow patron of the tavern, and Ami, a spiritual healer from Mali. Keke suddenly stops visiting the tavern and completely isolates himself from everybody; nobody knows his whereabouts for several months. During his self-inflicted isolation, Keke had begun to rent a room at the back of someone's house, but he soon ran out of money and began to sell his clothes until he was left with only the ones on his back. Keke soon becomes literally homeless and lives among squatters and other homeless people in an old derelict "non-European hospital" (Serote 2013: 81). To earn some money, Keke begins to sell fruit to school children. However, he is told by one of his neighbours that to continue selling fruit, he needs to pay rent for the space he occupies. When he refuses, he is attacked by bullies, is struck in the head and ends up in the hospital. After Nomsa and Ami visit Keke in hospital, he realises that he needs answers for "where he had arrived at in his life" (84). During this introspection, he begins to think that he met Ami for a reason and to find the answers to his questions, and he needs to talk to her again.

Although Keke's narrative occupies centre stage in *Rumours*, Mandla's story is also significant. Mandla and Keke are old friends from The Movement and maintain a relatively close relationship at present. In the novel's opening chapter, we see a stark contrast between Mandla and Keke: whereas Keke seems to be experiencing many difficulties with his family and emotionally, but Mandla has a good relationship with his wife and daughters and is also doing well at work. However, fractures begin to show when Mandla and Thuli, his wife, are called into the principal's office at their daughters' school where they learn their daughters were part of a group of students who committed deplorable acts. Additionally, Mandla is extremely disappointed with the state of present-day South Africa and can often be seen yearning for the past. This is evident in the words he uses when he nostalgically refers to his close friends as "comrades" (7), he wonders about the visions of the anti-apartheid revolution and The Movement, what it has eventually and unfortunately amounted to due to its bad leadership. He is also frustrated with how the media do not accurately report on the complexity of current events and the way it slanders The

Movement. However, instead of dealing with his feelings, Mandla continually wallows in the past, and he does not find an effective way of dealing with his emotions.

Part Two of the novel focuses solely on Keke's spiritual journey in Mali. Keke travels to Mali searching for spiritual healing. He goes through several African rituals and ceremonies to deal with his trauma and identity issues. During his stay with Ami's family and community, he willingly participates in all that is required of him and in the process, his mental health improves: he finds his identity and comes to terms with all that took place during apartheid that was causing him trauma. The novel's Part Three is a continuation of Part Two, where Ami teaches and guides Keke on continuing with certain rituals to remain emotionally rooted.

After Keke returns from Mali, he continually consults with Ami, and she guides him on his spiritual path. During one of their consultations, Ami expresses her concern regarding Mandla and Thuli's two children. Unlike Keke, who has managed to find belonging in present-day South Africa, reconcile with his family, and is even reinstated in his high level job, Mandla's family begins to experience difficulties. Mandla's unresolved trauma continues to persist in the present and begins to affect his family, particularly his daughter, Wanjuri. Wanjuri's trajectory represents the negative impact of transgenerational trauma in South Africa. Although Wanjuri did not experience apartheid first-hand, she exhibits signs of trauma in her behaviour. Whereas Keke's narrative ends on a brighter note, Mandla's ends with his daughter, Wanjuri's, suicide. Keke's narrative strand is optimistic because he finds solutions in African spirituality, customs, beliefs and rituals that enable him to shed the past and optimistically look to the future. The three sections of the novel chart different parts of Keke's upward trajectory: beginning at the bottom with his physical and emotional decline in Part One, his road to healing in Part Two, and ending with a much improved Keke who now has the necessary tools to help him combat any difficulties he may face in the future.

While in his third and fourth novels – *Scatter the Ashes and Go* (2002) and *Revelations* (2010) – Serote focused his narrative on the Struggle years and the returnee's tumultuous journey back to South Africa in *Rumours*, Serote moves away from the anti-apartheid years by only partly focusing his narrative on the Struggle years. In this novel, he builds on the theme of belonging by fictionally representing individuals who had spent many years in exile and are now struggling to find home in contemporary South Africa. Furthermore, Serote pays considerable attention to early African history and traditional life and how such connectedness can solve trauma, identity issues and emotional healing. Additionally, in *Rumours*, he moves beyond writing about individual destiny to embrace the collective search for a sense of identity and meaning via tapping into African spirituality and ancestral guidance.

3.1.1 The Contemporary Cityscapes: Johannesburg and Durban

The first setting of Serote's *Rumours* (2013) is Johannesburg. The story then shifts to Durban before finally moving beyond the borders of South Africa, to Mali. The cities of Durban and Johannesburg represent the underlying scars that still exist from the colonial and neo-colonial rule and the challenges that come with the establishment of a new democracy. In this section, I will discuss how Serote illustrates the disappointment, disillusionment and, at times, corruption present in post-transitional South Africa. In my discussion, I will focus on Durban and Johannesburg.

Serote opens the discussion by referring to the moment Jan Van Riebeeck, the first white settler, arrived in South Africa in 1652 when black people had to fight for their freedom until it was achieved in 1994. In particular, Serote (2013) discusses Durban as a city with a history of violence and how its history continues to haunt it in the present by saying:

It was a shady city, where ghosts still walked and talked with a people who hadn't heeded Shaka's warning to beware of those whose ears let the sunlight through. Long ago the first foreign ships had docked. They said they'd come to trade, but they stayed. On the horizon men still sailed boats to and fro; ships and tankers moved across the endless surface of the water, unaware of the shipwrecks that echoed from the seabed with the screams of human cargo trapped for centuries on the sandy bottom. There could never have been so many wars here without people drowning in the sea. Durban knew all this, but kept quiet. (28)

In these lines, it becomes clear that Durban's underground history is filled with repressed traumas tracing back to the time when the first white settlers arrived on the continent. Serote (2013) also writes that although Durban is a "pretty city [...] its history [is] bloody, created by human greed" (28). Furthermore, Keke has a personal relationship with Durban that evokes traumatic memories. While in Durban he is thinking about the first time he arrived in the city: "He had come once in shackles" (20). During his time in The Movement, someone Keke trusted to be a comrade had betrayed him by disclosing his location to the authorities. For Keke, the memory is still fresh in his mind as he recalls the day the apartheid police captured him: he heard "yelling in the early hours of the morning, the banging on the door, [...] flashing lights and boots and rifle butts on his chest" (20). He finally remembers the moment when he heard the "voice and gait" of the individual who "had sold him" (20).

The narrative primarily unfolds in Johannesburg, and similarly to Durban, its traumatic past traces back to the country's apartheid past. Johannesburg's rapid development can be credited to the discovery in the late 1800s of a reef of subterranean gold close to the earth's surface. Buys and Farber (2011) further elaborate on the economic and political conditions of the time by stating that:

Johannesburg's underground and surface are linked causally and economically, but this connection is also manifest politically and metaphorically. The mining industry, with its traversal of the subterranean and the economy that play out on the surface, saw the inception of the politics of racial inequality. At the most obvious level, white South African and European mining magnates benefitted financially from the subterranean toil of predominantly African, but also Chinese, Indian, Malay and mixed-race labourers. (2)

In addition to being poorly paid – as Buys and Farber stated (2011) – miners “were also forced to live in peripheral, invisible, temporary or threatening spatial environments, such as miners’ barracks, hostels, informal ‘squatter camps,’ and, sometimes, within the mines themselves” (3). This means that non-white labourers living in Johannesburg were forced to live along the edges and peripheral spaces of the city in overcrowded and poorly maintained areas. Even today, some of the poorest people in Johannesburg live along the city’s outskirts, where poverty is rife. In this sense, “the subjects who inhabit the edges are vital to the economic life of the city despite their [...] geographic and aesthetic exclusion from mainstream city life” (6). Not far from the city of Johannesburg, Keke also remembers being “imprisoned in Pretoria Central” for months during apartheid (Serote 2013: 52). Keke recalls being imprisoned there for many months during his trial and how “life had been a constant search for courage” (52). Keke could only hold on to his courage during his imprisonment because many believed that it was death row. According to Kevin Ritchie, the prison was “a place built to kill prisoners, the warders were obsessed with keeping the condemneds healthy – so they could be executed” (2011: n.p.). Pretoria Central is where political exiles would be sentenced to be hung for their crimes against the apartheid state. Although *Rumours* is a post-transitional novel, rather than illustrating the positive improvements and changes that have taken place in South Africa, it focuses on disillusionment and disappointment with the present state of the country beyond the enthusiasm of the early 1990s.

In his novel *Rumours*, Serote reveals his disillusionment at the post-transitional society in the post-1994 democratic dispensation. In some parts of the novel, his writing critiques the political and socio-economic conditions of the Rainbow Nation by looking at the unfulfilled promises made by the new democratic government, the ANC. In one scene involving Mandla and Keke, Mandla recalls when he went to a house in Thembisa to issue its owners their home ownership titles. When he arrived at the house, Mandla was shocked at what he saw and felt as if one “could touch the poverty in that house” (Serote 2013: 32). The elderly woman to whom Mandla handed the ownership was living in a “dilapidated” house and Mandla asked himself if he were in her living situation “would [he] still bother to vote? What for?” (32). Mandla cannot understand how he, and many other comrades, spent years in exile fighting for equality and freedom only to return to a country “devastated” by poverty (226). In

this scene, Mandla is telling Keke that he is dissatisfied with the state of post-transitional South Africa and how he can see “the abject poverty in this country devour[ing] bodies and spirits,” in spite of the fact that they had fought hard for freedom to build the nation so that no one would have to live in poverty (32).

Not only does this scene express the nation’s disappointment with the new democratic government, but I argue that it also reflects Serote’s own disappointment. Serote’s extensive oeuvre charts his journey as a writer over the years, beginning with apartheid and the violent 1970s. His narrative then shifts and becomes more optimistic as it imagines a better future in the early years after democracy. Later, in 2002, with his third novel, Serote began to write about the difficulties which the returning exiles had to face when they returned to a country they had not lived in, or perhaps even seen, since leaving for exile. Although these novels depict the Struggle years, they look confidently to the future despite unimaginable current oppression and violence. Finally, Serote’s later books – *Scatter the Ashes and Go* (2002), *Revelations* (2010), and *Rumours* (2013) – are set in the years after democracy has been achieved, but they also depict a country still dealing with political, social and economic imbalances. In particular, Serote’s *Rumours* expresses the author’s dissatisfaction with the present through various characters as they reflect on their disappointment. In addition, Serote uses powerful imagery to paint a picture of post-transitional South Africa as a country ridden with faded hopes, corruption and persistent inequalities. He achieves this by focusing on particular settings that convey the nation’s widespread hopelessness and disappointment.

Similar to his fictional characters Keke and Mandla, who are part of the generation that resisted the apartheid regime and emerged victorious, ex-political exiles are now disillusioned and disappointed with what has become of the country they fought hard for. Poverty is not only present at the edges of metropolises but also within. On numerous occasions, Serote represents poverty through homeless people in Durban and Johannesburg. During a brief stay in Durban, Keke wanders around the city’s streets and along the promenade, and when he sees a homeless couple arguing over a dustbin and its contents (23). The issue of homelessness seems to be ever present in the novel because, during the protagonist’s downward spiral, Keke eventually finds himself living among the homeless and the squatters at an old abandoned non-European hospital where in Johannesburg “the poor had dug secret entrances” (76). The novel states that “over a thousand people had taken refuge from the elements here and made it their home (76). According to Masola (2020), continually hearing about and seeing how poor people live in South Africa “make[s] the rainbow nation fade after the euphoria of 1994” because the disappointing reality of unfulfilled dreams reveals itself behind the cracks (84). According to Loimeier (2020), society’s dissatisfaction with the ruling government is often “reflected in the works of writers who trace the fluctuations in the atmosphere in their societies” (475). This is indeed true of Serote’s writing in

Rumours, as he illustrates the level of dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the country's present socio-economic conditions through various characters.

In addition to the abject poverty plaguing South Africa at present, Serote also engages with the problem of corruption. In the same scene where Keke and Mandla discuss their disappointment with the poverty they see around them, they both frequently think about the four other people who joined The Movement with them and how one of their former comrades “was serving a long sentence for corruption” (Serote 2013: 33). After democracy in 1994, many comrades who were members of The Movement were soon elevated to positions of power because they had the necessary struggle credentials. However, rather than continue the work they had started in the apartheid struggle by actively working to ensure all previously disadvantaged South Africans finally had equality, they abused the power they had been given and instead enriched themselves. Although Serote does not go into much detail here, he criticises the ruling elite for disappointing the people who voted them into power and for their excessive greed. In another scene, Mandla is watching the news on television and sees a banner moving across the bottom of the screen that is “announcing a library burnt, a police car torched and two people seriously injured in a demonstration,” and “a newspaper that read, ‘Municipality workers trash the streets of Johannesburg’” (9, 52). Both these scenes demonstrate a real and increasing dissatisfaction after the ANC has taken over the government due to “persistently emerging corruption scandals, cases of self-enrichment [...] or the downright undemocratic clinging to offices” (Loimeier 2020: 457). In his narrative, Serote illustrates the reality of living in present South Africa.

In another scene, Keke and Mandla discuss their dissatisfaction with the media and how it discredits South African leaders. In particular, he criticises the media's culture for first praising, then later denigrating the leaders: “Now Jacob Zuma was president, praised at first by the press and now vilified, according to the culture of the country's media” (Serote 2013: 3). In this scene, Serote criticises both the media and the members of the ruling party for their failure to deliver on their promises. In another scene, Mandla and his wife are in their home discussing their family and his work, when Mandla remembers a conversation with his uncle. His uncle had shared with him his memory of his time spent in The Movement fighting against the apartheid government and how, in the end, democracy had been achieved. While Mandla agrees that the ANC has done a lot of good, he is also extremely disillusioned because South Africans continue to live in poverty; there is poor service delivery, and corruption; and people continue to protest for their cries to be heard. It is for these reasons that he reflects how the ANC “is surviving” on the “experience [...] history [and] reputation” of The Movement (14).

It is clear from the above examination that the cities represented in the novel – Durban and Johannesburg – while contemporary, hold a significant, yet invisible, amount of traumatic memory. Additionally, I

have also discussed why Serote's most recent novel reflects the sentiments of a disillusioned post-transitional South African society.

3.2 Refractions of Trauma

3.2.1 Keke's Current 'Unhomed' Condition

According to Frenkel and MacKenzie (2010), at the end of apartheid, many South African writers broadened their thoughts and form and began "to frame South Africa in the present, as well as in terms of the transnational relations that connect it to the globe" (4). For instance, much of the post-transitional writing produced after the end of apartheid deals with the effects of the past on the present and other postcolonial themes such as emotional dislocation, the mythic, identity loss, issues of return and home. *Rumours* (2013) follows this pattern as it presents the main protagonist of Keke Sello, an individual struggling to grapple with and process his traumatic past in his present. While Keke has successfully managed to build a future for himself in post-apartheid South Africa, is married, and has two children, the novel depicts an individual on a steady emotional and physical decline as he struggles to find his identity and come to terms with his past. In this section, I will examine the themes of emotional dislocation and alienation as they relate to the protagonist, Keke, and other secondary characters, such as Mandla and the patrons of Twist Street Tavern.

Rumours opens with a nightmare scene Keke is having, and when he eventually wakes up from it, we learn that he is "alone" (Serote 2013: 3). Keke's loneliness is not just a temporary condition, but we also learn that his wife Mmabatho "had [recently] left their home and taken their children" and he confesses to himself that if someone were to ask him about their whereabouts, "he wouldn't be able to answer" them correctly (16). Keke's alienation and loneliness continue throughout Part One of the novel as he further withdraws from his close friends and, later on, from his family. In this scene, Keke is in Durban to visit his closest friend, Mandla, and while taking a walk along the promenade, he feels as if things in his life have stopped making sense. Before arriving in Durban, Keke had recently decided to leave the house he and his family had lived in. Although Keke loves the house, he feels he cannot continue to live there because, without his family, the house is only "an empty shell" (17). It is clear from the novel's opening chapters that, while Keke has managed to build a home and create a family with his wife, Mmabatho and their two children, he has unfortunately lost both. When Mmabatho left the house, she also took all the furniture with her, "right down to the teaspoons, the books, the bedding, everything" (17). Cornelius (2019) writes that the absence of precious possessions means that "the essence of 'home' has been removed from the house and [Keke] has been left in a site of trauma" (192). Having lost everything that made the house a home Keke starts his journey of loneliness and alienation that accompanies him in the first two parts of the novel. At first glance, this dispossession may seem to be the source of Keke's troubles and trauma, but upon further investigation, it becomes clear that repressed trauma from his time spent as a political exile was the cause of his current dissatisfaction.

In the scenes mentioned above, Keke still has a house and he is not yet literally homeless. However, Peter Somerville (1992) argues that while Keke may still have a home in the literal sense, it can be argued that he is already homeless since homelessness can also be the “lack of emotional and physical well-being” (530). Serote, therefore, highlights the point that “homelessness goes much deeper; it is a state of lack of self-fulfilment, control of one’s physical environment, [and] lack of emotional comfort” (Tucker 1994: 184). Keke “had been delighted” when Mmabatho appreciated the house that he had chosen for her and their children, and although he knew he “couldn’t really afford it,” he took on extra work so that his family would be able to live comfortably (Serote 2013: 17). Keke was successful at his endeavour as he worked in a lucrative job as a Marketing Director at Salani, a cell phone company (102). However, when Mmabatho leaves their home with their children and possessions, he suddenly loses control of his environment and becomes isolated, which makes it difficult for him to continue living in the house as it now lacks the emotional support that had made it home.

Since Keke has been stripped of his family and is isolated in “an empty shell” of a house, all he has left are the memories (17). As previously mentioned, Keke nostalgically looks back at the happy times spent with his family in the home he had chosen for them. In addition to his alienation, Keke is also experiencing some confusion. The first source of his confusion comes from his present isolation as he does not know “what had gone wrong” (18). When Keke comes back home from his trip to Durban he experiences what Bhabha calls the ‘unhomely moment’: he is acutely aware of the “deep sense of loss” he feels as he walks through his “empty shell” of a house (16, 17). The ‘unhomely moment’ causes Keke to observe his surroundings “in a state of incredulous terror” which forces him to vacate the house he bought for his family and move into a rental property (Bhabha 1992: 141). While Keke sits alone in his home, he thinks back to an argument that he and Mmabatho had had when they were discussing where their relationship had gone wrong. While Keke blamed the issues he had with his wife on “major external changes,” such as the state of the country, his wife Mmabatho disagreed with his observation (Serote 2013: 18). She admonished him for “looking elsewhere” when it was clear that “the problems are here with [them]” (18). Mmabatho said, “We’re here, we are your reality,” and still, Keke did not understand what she meant (18). In their exchange, Keke’s inability to recognise the dysfunctions in their relationship highlights his confusion and disorientation, further signalling his emotional dislocation. Keke’s disorientation makes him take in “the measure of [his] dwelling in a state of ‘incredulous terror,’” which is why he does not return home for three days after his family has left their house (Bhabha 1992: 141). This initial traumatic point of departure propels Keke on a downward spiral that makes him move from space to space in search of a home, but no matter where he lands, Keke only succeeds in further isolating himself. For instance, the first time Keke goes to Durban to see his close friend, Mandla, he remembers that he nearly decided to cancel their meet-up because “he didn’t feel like meeting anymore” (Serote 2013: 25). In this scene, we see Keke in the beginning stages of his self-inflicted isolation.

While in Durban, Keke takes a walk on the promenade and witnesses a homeless couple arguing over who gets to rummage through the bin. The man argues that the bin and all its contents belong to him, especially the shoes in the bin (Serote 2013: 23-24). Cornelius (2019) believes that Serote draws considerable attention to the homeless couple because he is foreshadowing Keke's eventual homelessness (193). In fact, since he no longer worked at the cell phone company, he could no longer afford to live in his house, meaning "Keke was almost homeless himself now" (Serote 2013: 24).

During Keke's visit to Mandla in Durban, Mandla urges Keke to "find a way to reconcile within [himself]" so that he can make the relationship between him and Mmabatho work again, and Keke leaves Durban feeling optimistic (35). However, his optimism is short-lived because as he wanders "alone [...] in his big empty house, answerable to no one and expecting nothing from anyone," all the hope he had in Durban suddenly evaporates (52). The old negative emotions suddenly come crashing down on him as he walks through his house that seems to echo "with emptiness:" (45) whatever hope and optimism had filled Keke's heart in Durban suddenly disappeared "through the bare windowpanes" of his Johannesburg home (45). Even though Keke knows what it is like to live in an empty house because of his time during political exile when he had "lived in many empty [so-called] safe houses," the experience of living in an empty house now is very different (45). Although his time spent hiding in 'safe houses' was filled with traumatic memories, he felt more fulfilled at the time because his efforts were in service of The Movement. More importantly, sharing the spaces with fellow comrades working towards a common purpose had given Keke a sense of belonging. However, Keke's current experience in his Johannesburg home is in sharp contrasts with the feeling he felt in the 'safe houses' of exile. Cornelius (2019) argues that the emotions Keke feels as he enters his empty family home are different because – as compared with his past – he "merely exists in his current house, having lost everything else, including his sense of purpose" (193). Cornelius has analysed at length Keke's lostness in his house (192 -193).

As a consequence of his emotional trauma, Keke draws comparisons between his time spent in exile – in particular the many 'safe houses' he had lived in – and the empty house he now finds himself in. It is important to note that although Keke looks back at the 'safe houses' positively, very often these houses he temporarily lived in proved to be very unsafe, as two of his very close comrades were killed there.

As a result of his current unbelonging and alienation, Keke yearns for a place where he can feel he belongs: "one day he would find where he belonged and make new friends" (Serote 2013: 52). However, rather than find his sense of belonging, Keke ends up at Twist Street Tavern, a place where "South Africans, Angolans, Mozambicans, Zimbabweans, West Africans, [and] white people" seemed to gather (56). While he is seated alone at a table, Keke could also "hear snatches of many languages – Sesotho, isiZulu, Afrikaans, Swahili, French, Portuguese and English" being spoken by the many patrons of the

tavern (53). At this stage of his life, Keke had become an alcoholic and was a regular at the tavern to the point of “becoming familiar with the faces [t]here” (53). During one of his visits, Keke has a conversation with a woman who later becomes a close friend, Nomisa, and she asks him why the tavern is attractive to so many different people (55). Keke states that the tavern is a pull to people experiencing “loneliness” and that he has come “to escape loneliness” himself (56). Like the many dislocated people who have gathered at Twist Street Tavern, Keke has come because he is in search of belonging. The Twist Street Tavern draws a multitude of different patrons who, without realising it, share a common bond: they are emotionally lost and burdened by traumatic memories of the past. Moreover, they feel displaced because they cannot return to a place called ‘home’ and therefore feel a profound sense of unbelonging: “They belonged [in the tavern]. And now he did, too” (56).

Although Keke gathers with the many lonely people who frequent Twist Street Tavern, the sense of belonging he initially feels is soon short-lived because he begins to distance himself from the bar, from Nomisa and Ami, two women he had struck up a good friendship with. Since Keke had stopped working quite some time ago, he soon begins to run low on funds and eventually must move out of Melville, Johannesburg; he also sells his car and finds “a back room to stay in” (75). Once again, “the time came when he could no longer afford even the rent for the back room,” and he starts “sell[ing] his clothes to pay his rent” (75). Before long, the rent for the small back room soon becomes unaffordable, and he is “forced to give up the back room altogether” (76). Keke takes what remains of his clothes in the small rented room and “stay[s] at the old non-European hospital in Hillbrow” with hundreds of homeless and poor people who have made the derelict hospital their home (76). As Keke moves from one location to the next, he isolates himself from his friends, “he avoided meeting people,” so that Mandla, Nomisa, Ami and his family cannot reach him (75).

Keke struggles to find rootedness as an ex-political exile in post-transitional South Africa because while in exile, he witnessed the deaths of many comrades: “We never knew what it was to have a permanent home, family, friends or relationships. Even our comrades on the front were just a mirage; they were there one moment and then they had vanished” (214). Interestingly, Serote uses the word ‘mirage’ to express the fleeting relationships between comrades in exile. For instance, on one occasion, he came back to a ‘safe house’ expecting to find his comrades safely waiting for him; instead, he “returned from a mission to find his comrade, Bafana, dead under a mattress [and] Khehla dead too, lying on his back, his face macerated by bullets” (45). Not only are these memories traumatic in the moment, but they are also the deep cause of why Keke struggles to find belonging in the present and to project his life into the future.

It finally becomes clear why Keke has struggled so much to find belonging in the present: his time spent as a political exile was filled with so much restlessness and uncertainty that Keke confirms to be

traumatised and has difficulty finding belonging in present-day South Africa. Serote's novel might fit into the model of contemporary narratives that chart the journey of individuals returning home after spending a significant amount of time away: as Bida would say, the novel "challenge[s] [the] overly optimistic model of a happy return home and, in doing so, also draw out its complexities" (Bida 2018: 4). After returning to South Africa in the early 1990s, Keke, like many ex-political exiles, assumed that he would find a South Africa which felt like home, a place where he could finally find steadiness and belonging. Instead, the idealised home is not realised, and most returnees exhibit signs of having never fully returned home. This can be seen when Mmabatho thinks back on their life together in their home: "Keke was so absent, even when he was at home," she said (Serote 2013: 225). In fact, for many ex-political exiles, "the struggle and exile had dislocated [them] from [their] families and relatives," resulting in a society torn apart by its past (226).

Keke soon reaches rock bottom when he lives with other homeless people in abandoned hospital and also begins selling fruit to school children. One day Keke is brutally assaulted for refusing to pay the 'landlord' rent for living and selling fruit at the derelict hospital where poor and homeless people live (78). When he eventually wakes up in hospital, Keke is told by a nurse that he is in intensive care and that he arrived in an ambulance after a severe beating. At the hospital, Keke finally acknowledges that he is traumatised: "My whole youth was consumed with fighting oppression and thuggery. On political grounds, I was fighting against illegitimacy, oppression and exploitation" (95). In this scene, he is visited by Ami, a spiritual healer, at the hospital, and she urges him to "please find a way to find peace within [himself]" (96). This plea made by Ami to Keke is what begins his journey to emotional healing.

Keke tries and fails to find belonging in three significant places: in his house with Mmabatho and their two children; amongst the many patrons of Twist Street Tavern; and with the hundreds of homeless and poor people who live in the old derelict hospital. Instead of finding a sense of belonging and home in these places, Keke becomes increasingly alienated, and after the assault on him, he becomes very aware of his alienation and loneliness. His painful sense of unbelonging, as well as his willingness to journey into his own past, enables him to process his repressed trauma through traditional African healing methods. In the following section, I will explore Keke's traumatised state and how it is fictionally represented in Serote's novel through the protagonist Keke and other secondary characters.

3.2.2 Keke's Past Trauma: The Consequences of the Transnational Journey of Returnees to South Africa

Keke's 'unhomed' condition is a consequence of his repressed trauma from his time spent as a political exile during apartheid. Like many political exiles who made their way back home at the end of apartheid, Keke tried to adjust to the rapidly changing society. While it initially seems like he has successfully adapted to post-transitional South Africa, soon repressed and unprocessed memories of the past

resurface and present themselves in many ways. In this section, I will examine how Keke's trauma manifests itself in the present. I will also discuss how the past traumatised Mandla, Keke's close friend and comrade in exile.

Caruth states that "in its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (2016: 17). Beatriz Zapata (2021) builds on Caruth's definition of trauma and mentions that it is also:

[c]haracterised by belatedness, the impossibility of knowing what happened at the moment of the traumatic event [...] anxiety, repression, fragmented memory [...] a fraught relationship with communities [...] all of which may deprive trauma victims of any sense of agency and/or capacity to cope with an adapt to the world they are confronting. (2)

Similarly to Zapata's definition, Keke does have some memories of his past in exile that he remembers, but there are many more that he repressed due to their traumatic nature. For instance, in one scene of the novel, he thinks of a dream that he had the night before and thinks about how it "had almost driven him insane. What was it about; why a nightmare like that? He didn't want to tell anyone about it" (Serote 2013: 26). It is clear that Keke's unprocessed memories now presenting themselves as memories are a source of anxiety for him. In addition to anxiety, Keke's repressed memories of his exile past create fear, emotional fragmentation and confusion that consequently negatively affect him in the present. For instance, during a conversation with Ami, Keke finally acknowledges that he is traumatised when he says that his "whole youth was consumed with [...] fighting against illegitimacy, oppression and exploitation" (95). However, during a consultation with Kanore, Ami's father, he admits that although he can remember some traumatic events from his past, there are some memories he cannot recall at all. For example, Keke will sometimes "wake[s] up at night troubled" by nightmares that confuse him (217). The nightmares that scare Keke have been experienced subconsciously, signalling the overwhelming nature of his past experiences that were too difficult to grasp when they occurred.

In the novel, Keke's traumatised state is fictionally represented as a steady emotional and physical decline. Keke's emotional decline also presents itself in the fragmentation of family ties. It first begins with the breakdown of Keke's family when his wife, Mmabatho, notices how "Keke was absent, even when he was at home" (Serote 2013: 225). Before Mmabatho left the family home with their children, she had begun to notice how Keke was emotionally absent and was only concerned with "building the nation" he had fought hard for during exile (35). However, during an argument with Keke, she asked him how he hopes to build the nation up "if [he] can't build a family and a home?" (35). Thus, Keke's traumatised condition first exhibits itself in the deterioration of the core family structure.

From moving out of his family home, renting a small back room, living in an old derelict hospital, and finally sleeping in a park in Yeoville, Keke's disturbing behaviour is a "classic symptom of trauma" (Caruth 1995: 183-184). Caruth states that in addition to nightmares and an inability to recall specific memories of the past, trauma also involves "a compulsive seeking out of similar circumstances" (184). During exile, Keke was repeatedly moved from one place to another because, as a political exile, he evaded being captured by the apartheid authorities. Keke had also been reflecting on his political career thus far: "He was battle-experienced and came in and out of camps" (Serote 2013: 111). The circumstances of political exiles during exile made it so that Keke was constantly moving from one location to another. However, we see him mirror his past in the present through his failure to stay rooted in one place for a long time.

Following an emotional breakdown, traumatised individuals may also begin to exhibit sign of a physical decline, either in their appearance or physical health. For Keke, it begins with him "stay[ing] away from work" and abusing substances to try and remedy his emotional pain: "[H]e drank every night and started smoking" (Serote 2013: 50). Soon he begins to run out of money, can barely afford to feed himself, and his physical appearance begins to decline further: "He was losing weight and his clothes were beginning to look a bit shabby" (75). Even after Keke is discharged from the hospital and is supposed to be showing signs of some physical improvement, Ami thinks back on how poorly he looked: "He was so thin now [...] His clothes were [still] baggy on him, and shabby. He also looked tired; perhaps he was still weak" (113). Even though Mmabatho and Keke are separated, she is still concerned about his physical state: "[S]he was worried for him. Her once impeccable man now looked ragged; it was obvious that he had been through a tempest; something was preventing him from looking after himself" (114). Furthermore, when she asks him why the clothes he is wearing are not ironed, he says that he does not care, which is odd of him because "in the past he would have made sure they were ironed" (114). Mmabatho can see that Keke's lack of care for his physical appearance and the decline in his health is being caused by something much deeper, perhaps an emotional problem.

Although I have been focusing on the character of Keke, in *Rumours*, Serote also includes another important secondary character such as Mandla which I will begin to discuss. Mandla's character fictionally represents the collective alienation of many people through transitional times. Although Keke and Mandla have similar past experiences, they respond very differently to their trauma. While Keke acknowledges that he is traumatised and needs to seek out help; Mandla chooses to respond differently, possibly because he cannot see that he is traumatised.

Mandla, Keke's old friend with whom he fought during apartheid while in exile, is also depicted as an individual who is traumatised and also struggling to find himself in an ever-changing South Africa. Mandla's character also mirrors the experiences of ex-political exiles living in South Africa. In one scene of the novel, Mandla talks to his wife, Thuli, about how his family gathered to support him when his academic credentials were being questioned and how his family's emotional support made him "speechless" (12). Even though Mandla has a very caring and supportive family around him, due to his psychological fragmentation he cannot appreciate that. Instead, he spends his time yearning for the past. According to Cornelius (2019), this is dangerous as "restorative nostalgia does not acknowledge the painful or the traumatic" (187). For instance, Mandla's nostalgia reveals how he is still very much attached to the utopian ideals of the anti-apartheid struggle, and his inability to adapt them to the present causes him a great deal of emotional turmoil. Rather than working towards healing his trauma, Mandla further entrenches himself with the ideals of the past.

Mandla also feels dislocated emotionally because he struggles to adapt to a changing society. This is because the South Africa he envisioned and the realities of the country he presently lives in are so unaligned; he cannot reconcile these two different images. Therefore, Mandla continues to hold on to the visions of the future made in the past when he declares that his purpose in life "is to find a way to overcome the abject poverty in this country that devours bodies and spirits" (Serote 2013: 32). Mandla's purpose is admirable as, in spite of all the negatives, he expresses further possibilities for change rather than the "hope fatigue" that usually accompanies ex-political exiles (Tsehloane 2010: 81). Mandla's positivity is welcome but I also believe that Serote is saying that it is problematic because his goal seems to come before the emotional well-being of his daughters. Mandla's nostalgic memories of the past prevent him from seeing that his daughters are emotionally traumatised and are in need of urgent help. Both Keke and Mandla embody Serote's broader message: that political exiles who came back to South Africa in the early 1990s are still having difficulty establishing a sense of home and belonging in a foreign land.

Mandla's and Keke's characters also highlight the real experiences of returning ex-political exiles in a rapidly changing South Africa and how they process – differently - and respond to their psychological fragmentation in the present. While Keke eventually acknowledges his traumatised state and chooses to begin his journey of healing, Mandla is so fixated on nostalgic memories that he does not recognise his traumatised state, leaving his past unresolved and susceptible to resurfacing at any moment.

Not only does Serote's *Rumours* depict the harmful impact that trauma can have on an individual, but it also represents the real-life social trauma that entire communities and generations can feel because of

past oppressions such as “slavery, colonialism, apartheid [and] imperialism” (Serote 2013: 41). In what follows, I will discuss Serote’s engagement with trans-generational and collective trauma.

Although Caruth’s examinations of trauma are important, Stef Craps (2013) argues that they fail to move beyond their “Eurocentric biases,” which means that they do not consider the “suffering of those belonging to non-Western or minority groups” (2, 3). Craps argues that the Eurocentric examination of trauma is limited because by only examining trauma as an individual experience, larger historical traumas caused by colonial oppression are disregarded by “academic researchers, including activist scholars fighting for public recognition of the psychic suffering inflicted on the socially disadvantaged” (21). Novels like Serote’s that engage with trauma are especially important because not only do they depict individual trauma, but they also fictionally represent the real-life historical and societal trauma of a previously colonised country. Additionally, as a post-transitional novel, *Rumours* details how collective trauma can also be transmitted and “felt more pressingly in the second generation” (Zapata 2021: 27).

In different parts of the novel, Serote points to the fact that the whole of South Africa is scarred: “The struggle had been costly [...] in so many unimagined ways. The nation had to repair these physical, mental and spiritual wounds” (Serote 2013: 177). In addition to discussing societal traumas, non-Eurocentric examinations of trauma in postcolonial countries such as South Africa allows for “both oppressor and oppressed [to] be described as traumatised” (Fasselt 2014: 93). In his novel, Serote (2013) does mention how both perpetrators and victims are still traumatised by the apartheid past when Ami, a spiritual healer, sharply identifies Keke’s trauma and how it represents the collective trauma felt by South Africans when she says: “All of you, whites as well as blacks, have been injured spiritually” (108). Serote’s decolonised exploration of trauma also highlights how the emotional wounds from apartheid “can be collective, social and individual” (Ivad 2020: 64). Furthermore, Serote identifies how individuals are still emotionally scarred in contemporary South Africa and that to heal them you must first “heal the whole” (108). In Part Three of the novel, Serote shifts his narrative and seems to address the whole – South Africa – and points to how going back to our roots can help us find healing based on a profound understanding of inter-generational trauma.

According to Zapata (2021), ‘transgenerational trauma’ is “the insidiousness of historical and collective traumas that persist through multiple generations” and live on in the “psyches of different generations” regardless of the fact of them not directly experiencing the traumatic event” (25). According to Anne Whitehead (2004), postcolonial writers engage with the idea of traumatised generations being haunted by a past they themselves did not experience as it is a “powerful and effective means of exploring, and

representing, the lasting and ongoing effects of traumatic events” (29). The transgenerational transmission of trauma is evident in *Rumours* through Mandla’s daughters, specifically his eldest daughter, Wanjuri, who ends up committing suicide.

Unlike his friend, Keke, who becomes aware of his traumatised condition and seeks out help, Mandla is not aware of his own traumatised state. Unfortunately, his inability to acknowledge his trauma also means that he does not take note of his daughter, Wanjuri, suffering. Furthermore, he is so focused on making politics his vision of South Africa a reality that he fails to see that his unresolved and repressed painful memories have resurfaced in his daughter’s psyche. From the very beginning of the novel it is clear that Mandla and his wife, Thuli, are very dedicated to their professional careers, and because their daughters attend boarding school in Johannesburg they also do not spend a lot of time together as a family. The girls end up spiralling out of control, consuming drugs, and getting into trouble with their school for committing a sexual act at school (85, 222). However, Keke’s daughter, Thalitha, is close to the girls and, during a discussion with her father, she mentions that she is worried about Waha and Wanjuri and that “their parents must embrace them quickly” (Serote 2013: 131). After finding out about their daughter’s dangerous and reckless behaviours, Thuli decides to stay at home full time and take care of them. Even though Mandla and Thuli begin taking their daughters to counselling sessions and engage with them in open conversations, Wanjuri’s emotional state does not improve. In fact, she states how she believes that “it[s] futile to go on talking. It was a waste of time” (250). After Wanjuri shared her thoughts with her family she left the room and while they continued on with their discussion, she entered the bathroom and killed herself. Wanjuri’s trauma is not from her own experiences of exile and apartheid, but they are in fact the experiences of her father and his own traumatised psyche that have affected her.

In the novel, Wanjuri’s suicide serves as a warning of the consequences unprocessed trauma can have on future generations of South Africa. Through the fictional character of Mandla, Serote highlights how many ex-political exiles living in contemporary South Africa “are still struggling in the face of [...] historical traumas and that the responsibility to work through these traumas must be a collective one” (Zapata 2021: 48). More importantly, Serote’s engagement with transgenerational trauma highlights how historical and societal traumas that go unprocessed can affect both the present and future generations. I argue, that Serote’s overarching message with regards to trauma is that by refusing to talk about the past, traumatised individuals and societies only harm themselves more. However, the act of remembering recorded and unrecorded histories through literature enables the process of healing to take place and it also ensures that the horrors of the past never take place in the future.

Serote's novel also looks beyond the borders of South Africa at the historical trauma of many Africans across the world. For instance, Serote introduces a character named Vincent, an African-American, who is also in search of healing. Like Keke, Vincent spends time at Kanore's homestead because he feels he has lost his African roots and is also suffering from the effects of trauma:

Africa must never forget that experience, nor should humanity ever forget the cruelty and pain inflicted by humans on humankind, as people were wrenched from these shores by the millions, bound and blindfolded, shipped in dank darkness non-stop day and night to an unknown destination. (2013: 151)

Similarly to Keke who had journeyed to Mali to heal from his past traumatic experiences during exile, Vincent made the journey back to Africa in order to connect with his African "roots and the history of [his] people" (150). Through Vincent's character, I suggest that Serote is making the statement that healing through African spirituality is not only for those who live in Africa. It is open to all those with African roots.

3.2.3 The Fictional Representations of Past Traumas and Present Consequences

Similarly to Mhlongo's *Way Back Home* (2013), *Rumours* (2013) also opens with a nightmare scene in which Keke is having. Both Mhlongo's and Serote's characters are affected by acts they committed in exile. However, while Keke processes his trauma, Keke fails to do so. Their nightmares are the mind's way of expressing what was not properly processed at the time. In addition to illustrating trauma's emotional impact on individuals, Serote fictionally represents trauma through the novel's somewhat fractured structure. Therefore, in this section I will discuss the present consequences of Keke's unprocessed past trauma and how Serote fictionally represents trauma in his novel.

Due to unresolved past traumatic memories, Keke suffers from an emotional decline that presents itself as repeated confusing and frightening nightmares. In the novel's opening chapter, Keke is having a nightmare where he is running away from a dangerous and sinister force. Keke's nightmares are so frightening that they almost drive him "insane" (26). Nightmares are not the only symptoms of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) that Keke exhibits. According to Irene Visser (2011), other symptoms of PTSD also include substance abuse, depression, isolation, flashbacks, "emotional numbness [and] a total absence of recall." (272). Ivad (2020) also states that if these symptoms do not get treated, "patients might suffer from anxiety, confusion, upsetting memories to the point where they are unable to function in daily life" (38). These symptoms may appear immediately after the traumatic events, or as in Keke's case, many years after the event has taken place. When we meet Keke, we learn that his wife had recently left their family home with his two children and belongings. We also learn that Keke recently stopped going to work where he held the position of Marketing Director. So, although Keke has managed to

buy a big, beautiful house for his family and holds a high position at his work, his life soon begins to fall apart because the effects of an unprocessed past begin to impact his present.

In order to cope, Keke begins drinking excessively with the other patrons of Twist Street Tavern. However, since he is no longer working, he is forced to continually downgrade his living arrangements, and soon finds that he can no longer afford his drinking habit. It is not long till Keke finds himself living among the homeless people of Johannesburg, in an abandoned hospital. Although he has no money and place to live, he seems to suppress his current homelessness: “He hoped something would happen so that he could find a place. That was all” (Serote 2013: 75). He was not prepared to think too long and hard about his present state. Perhaps his current circumstances are too stressful for him to comprehend, or he might be emotionally numb. Emotional numbness is typically associated with trauma and it is the temporary inability to feel emotional stresses and pain (Caruth 1995: 4). Keke chooses to not think about his situation because it could potentially cause him further emotional distress.

Unlike Mhlongo’s protagonist, Kimathi, (who does not have genuine friendships with the people around him) Keke has friends who truly care about his wellbeing and would not hesitate to reach out and provide him with assistance. When Nomsa and Ami learn of Keke’s recent hospitalisation, they ask him why he did not reach out to them for help: “Keke [...] we’re your friends, you know! Why didn’t you let us know you were in trouble? [...] Did you have to stay at that homeless place?” (Serote 2013: 82). Keke also does not ask his close friend, Mandla, for help. Instead, he altogether “avoided meeting people” and isolated himself from those who cared about him (75). According to Zapata (2021), “individual trauma may lead to isolation and moving away from society” (37). Due to his traumatised condition, Keke is unable to recognise that “there are people who love [him]” and would offer him any assistance they could (Serote 2013: 82). Instead, he chooses to isolate himself: he stops visiting the tavern, cuts off all contact with his friends, and lives among the homeless.

In *Way Back Home*, Kimathi and his business associates often refer to each other as ‘comrade’ even though it is clear that their friendships are not real; the use of the word ‘comrade’ gives Kimathi the false sense of belonging and closeness he desperately yearns for and is lacking in the present. This is different for Keke, as the friendships he made in exile are genuine. During his hospitalisation, Khensani, a former comrade of Keke’s and present business partner at the same cell phone company he works at, calls Keke “commander” – Keke’s military ranking while in exile (Serote 2013: 103). In another scene of the novel, Mandla addresses Kimathi by ‘comrade’ and reminds him that he will always be there to support him: “We’re comrades, you and I. We need each other...so don’t sit there all by yourself if you’re feeling depressed...you call, man. You come down [to Durban] or I’ll come to you [in Johannesburg]!” (51). In Keke’s case, the word ‘comrade’ or ‘commander’ is not just used carelessly, but it has a charged significance.

Further evidence of Keke's traumatised state is fictionally represented in his inability to recall some traumatic events from his time spent as a political exile. While it can be said that being unable to remember traumatic memories is a symptom of emotional trauma, Whitehead (2004) argues that one can also be plagued by memories of the past:

Although the event remains in a vivid and precise form in the traumatic nightmare or a flashback, it is simultaneously accompanied by amnesia [...] The connection in trauma between the elision of memory and the precision of recall – so there is simultaneously too little and too much memory of the event. (140)

Traumatic events are both fully recalled and forgotten because at the time that the events took place the individual was forced to contend with unexpected and shocking circumstances that could not be processed in their minds. Therefore, “not fully integrated at the time that it occurred, the event remained unchanged and returned, in its exactness, at a later date” (140). For instance, in one scene of the novel Keke is in the middle of a bath when “his mind drift[s] back to Angola, to the camps” and he remembers the letter Lwazi, a young recruit “submitted on arrival at the camp in Kukalama” (Serote 2013: 173). Although there is a lot that Keke does not remember from exile, he is able to recall exactly the words in young Lwazi's letter and this surprises him: “Keke was surprised at the precision of this memory” (173). While Keke is able to recall a distant memory from his time in exile, he has difficulty remembering recent nightmares he had while he was asleep. In another scene of the novel, Ami is counselling Keke during a ritual when she asks him: “Do you not wake up at night troubled, knowing that you've gone through a nightmare, even if you can't remember it?” Keke answers Ami's question with some uncertainty and says, “Well, yes, I'm not sure” (217). Keke's confusion is also a symptom of trauma.

In addition to his nightmares, Keke also frequently experiences flashbacks which are fictionally represented. According to Ivad (2020), in novels that employ the theme of trauma “memory is a recurring theme” (57). The return of intrusive and repressed/unprocessed memories in the form of flashbacks and nightmares “reveal[s] how profoundly the past can hold traumatised protagonists in thrall” (57). As mentioned in one of the scenes above, Keke's mind often drifts back to memories of his past. Serote does not only include nightmares and flashbacks into his narrative to highlight Keke's emotional distress; these narrative devices are used to convey the disruptive nature of trauma to the reader. According to Michelle Balaev (2008), writers will often employ “an assortment of narrative innovations” in their writing to “convey a diversity of extreme emotional states” (159). In *Way Back Home*, Mhlongo primarily used a fragmented timeline throughout his novel that continually shifted from Kimathi's past in exile, to the present, where he operated as a corrupt, politically-connected entrepreneur. In *Rumours*, Serote utilises flashbacks and nightmares to illustrate how they are “a form

of recall that survives at the cost of willed memory or the very continuity of conscious thought” (Caruth 1995: 152). The unsolicited return of forgotten memories in the form of nightmares and flashbacks immediately forces traumatised individuals to relive and consciously confront their past. Equally, Serote’s insistence of nightmares and flashbacks are a skilful novelistic device meant to emphasise the profound effect of trauma on the psyche.

The numerous flashbacks also suggest the existence of two timelines in Serote’s narrative. Keke’s flashbacks force the reader to journey into the past with him and they also provide insight into his present state of mind. Traditionally, narratives will move in a linear fashion, but this is not always the case in trauma novels like *Rumours*. By departing from a linear time frame, Serote also highlights how forgotten histories have the unpredictable power to insert themselves in the present and demand they finally be acknowledged. According to David Punter (2000), recounting traumatic experiences “is not a voyage that can be consigned to the sea of history, [or one] that can be placed neatly within a sequence of historical facts” (67). Rather, it is chaotic and complex, as past traumatic memories continue to return in the present, forcing us to learn their traumatic impact on the present and the future, thus enabling us to engage with the past in order to finally process and find closure. Through the character of Keke, Serote reveals the arduous journey of piecing together one’s past in order to make sense of it and build a future.

The structure of Serote’s chapters in the novel further points out the effects of trauma on the psyche. The chapters vary in length: some are barely four pages, while others stretch on far beyond that. Such abrupt changes, from one scene to the next, unsettle the reader’s perceptions of time. For example, in the novel’s opening chapter we are thrust into a nightmare that Keke is having in his Johannesburg home. However, after four pages we are swiftly thrust into Chapter Two, where we are introduced to Mandla in his Durban home. This literary technique mirrors the protagonist’s own trauma, and fictionally represents that experience to the reader. According to Balaev (2008), this strategy allows “the author [to] structure the narrative into a form that attempts to embody the psychological action of traumatic memory or dissociation” (159). Serote’s decision to make abrupt narrative shifts abruptly expresses the disorientating nature of trauma on individuals. It can sometimes be difficult to vocally express the debilitating effects of trauma, which is why Zapata (2021) believes that literature is “one of the best mediums that best [...] reflect trauma”; it “articulate[s] that which cannot be put into words” (12).

Having explored the refractions of trauma on Keke due to unprocessed memories, in the subsection that follows I will chart Keke’s journey to healing and the various methods employed. I will also highlight why African traditional healing methods work on Keke and why it can be used by societies across the continent still traumatised by different forms of colonial oppression.

3.3 Spirituality and Traditional Knowledge as Represented in *Rumours*

During Keke's stay in the hospital, he and Ami have a conversation where he finally acknowledges that he is traumatised and must find healing. Through traditional African healing methods, Keke is able to come to terms with his past and cultivate a future for himself that is free of the burdens of his traumatic past. In *Rumours*, Serote explores how African spirituality and traditional indigenous knowledge can be used to process trauma and find healing, identity and belonging. This section will critically examine the novelistic representations of how African spirituality and traditional indigenous knowledge enable Keke to process his traumatised condition and find belonging by discussing the various methods used in his journey to healing.

When white colonialists and settlers first arrived in Africa, they dismissed as primitive the traditional cultural values, medicines and healing methods Africans practised, and imposed Western practices and medicines on the population. Bojuwoye (2005) states, that in spite of colonial oppression and “very strong foreign Western cultural influences, a majority of indigenous African people of Southern Africa hold on to their traditional cultural values” (61). Although Western medicines dominate the medical community, for many Africans, Western medicines are not used in isolation from the whole person, and most people will therefore choose to consult with a traditional health practitioner after being released from hospital. After Keke is released from hospital, he travels far into the jungles of Mali with Ami to meet with Kanore (Ami's father), a shaman – also known as a sangoma in South Africa – in order to begin his healing process.

According to Atindanbila and Thompson (2011), African traditional medicine and healing methods date “back as far as 4,000 years and [are] still the main form of therapy for nearly 60%-90% of [patients] in Africa whether physical or mental disorders” (463). Although Serote advocates for healing by using traditionally-based African methods, I do not believe he suggests that we entirely dismiss Western cultural healing medicines and practices. In fact, in contemporary Southern African societies, people “employ both Western and African perspectives to understand health and illness” and will often utilise both methods to help with their illnesses (Ndlovu 2016: 20). For example, in South Africa, there is “a pluralistic system of healthcare,” which means that both modern Western practices and African indigenous methods coexist and are used by all kinds of people (Mothibe and Mncengeli 2019: 6). African traditional healing and Western practices coexist in many African communities because they do share some characteristics. For instance, both Western and African healing practices are “based on a relationship of trust with unconditional love and acceptance, empathy, listening and genuineness” (Sandlana and Mtetwa 2008: 127). Both respect, accept and emphasise that the client should be allowed their own treatment method. Lastly, they both express the importance of providing judgement-free spaces where clients can verbally express their feelings.

Even though similarities exist, some significant differences also exist between African traditional healing and Western medical practices. Mekada Graham argues that although Western and African healing practices can exist side-by-side, the African-centred paradigm is more appealing to Africans than conventional Western healing and therapeutic methods “which [...] can nevertheless be oppressive toward black individuals and families” (2005: 212). Serote represents this tension via the character of Kanore, who is frustrated with the effects of colonialism on African medicines:

Europeans took over our symbols – of mourning, prayer, rituals, medicines and gods – and turned them into decorative artefacts [...] Are you telling me that the thousands of African medicine men and women in our continent have no cure?” (2013: 188-189)

Mainstream healing and therapeutic practices are rooted in Eurocentric understandings of mental and physical health that are historically racist and exclusionary. Graham states that as a consequence of colonial oppression, psychological analysis and practices are in need of “new pathways toward healing and well-being” (2005: 210). While African-centred approaches have managed to transcend and survive years of racism, hostility, and exclusion, new techniques must integrate black communities and their traditional healers to create healing practices that address black communities’ lived experiences. Engaging with traditional healers ensures that their understanding of specific human behaviour and health is considered. Also, established medical institutions and practices may become aware of alternative resources and healing methods to serve black patients.

For this reason, some Africans will often consult with a traditional healer after a hospitalisation. According to Sithabile Ndlovu (2016), Western and African worldviews approach psychological issues very differently. According to Ndlovu (2016), the Western approach to health and illness focuses on the individual, whereas the African perspective on life takes a more comprehensive view of psychological illnesses by offering an explanation for why a person might experience specific issues at a particular point in time (23). During a consultation with a traditional healer, the diagnosis of an individual’s issue is not solely reliant on the information shared but also on the healer’s intuitive assessment. Bojuwoye also states that in other cases, even without being told, the traditional healer identifies the issues a patient has during a consultation and provides a diagnosis. For instance, in the novel, when Keke and Ami are first introduced at Twist Street Tavern, Ami – a sangoma trainee – had noticed that Keke had been hiding behind alcohol and asks him: “Why are you fighting yourself so hard?” (Serote 2013: 67) Like the many patrons of the tavern, Keke had decided to drink there to drown his emotional alienation. However, Ami identifies another reason why Keke is there, and this makes him feel “instantly exposed;” it is as if she had peered beyond his superficial bravado, leaving him instantly naked to her discerning eye (67). Keke is unnerved by her and unable to respond. Later in the novel, Ami looks beyond Keke’s physical decline and recent hospitalisation, and recognises that Keke is experiencing a “spiritual illness” (104).

According to African tradition, an individual's health/illness are not considered in isolation; instead they are seen holistically and can be attributed to superior forces. In this same scene mentioned above, Ami says that "people can be ill physically, mentally or spiritually, but the most serious is spiritual. If we are physically or mentally ill, the illness also emanates from the spirit" (104). This scene reinforces the African belief and understanding that when one presents physical signs of illness, it can sometimes be attributed to a spiritual illness. Therefore, to heal the physical, "a spiritual cure" must be found first (107). The scenes above support Bojuwoye's argument that healers can identify and diagnose an individual's illnesses using their intuition.

As opposed to Western medicine – which is primarily concerned with the illness of one's "physical body [...] and is based on the principles of science, technology knowledge and clinical analysis developed in North America and Europe" – the African holistic approach is more appealing to Africans as it is an approach that embodies the collective traditional indigenous knowledge that has been transmitted from one generation to the next (Adu-Gyamfi and Anderson 2019: 82). In the novel, Ami is characterised as a spiritual being who not only commits herself to help Keke, but who also wants to help a close friend, Nomsa, who is also traumatised by her past. Ami's spirituality and indigenous healing knowledge partially comes from her shaman father, and has also been passed down to her by the elders in her family: "I come from a line of shamans – what you might call sangomas – and I am training to become one" (107).

The holistic African approach also asserts "a connection with the supernatural [which] provides the patient with a sense of safety as one is assured and comforted with the knowledge that they are not alone: "supernatural forces" – such as one's ancestors – are believed to be with them during and after processes such as rituals (Sandlana and Mtetwa 2008: 123). This is because the African approach "offers an intervention or treatment plan that is inclusive of the interpersonal world" (Ndlovu 2016: 23). The belief in supernatural forces also reassures clients that when challenges present themselves in the future, they will not have to endure them alone. Such assurance increases the client's confidence as they become aware of their "potential and connectedness to the supernatural world" (Sandlana and Mtetwa 2008: 128). Once they become aware of their undeniable connection to the supernatural world, the client will experience their ancestors' love and support, enabling them to open up to the people around them. Having a relationship with the supernatural world also reassures the client that they will always have assistance and advice from supernatural forces during times of difficulty. In a healing ritual conducted by Kanore, Keke seeks a connection with his ancestors: "Hear me Moloantoa [clan name] I ask you please to tell me what to do. I am your great-great-grandson, and I have agreed to search for your spirit. I don't know what else you want me to do" (Serote 2013: 179). At this stage of his journey, Keke has been informed of his roots and seeks to grow nearer to his ancestors. Above all, Keke pleads with his ancestors for guidance and help. Later in the novel, Keke no longer feels alone as he feels spiritually

close to his ancestors. When Ami asks him what he feels now after having experienced closeness with his ancestors, Keke responds by saying that “[He] fee[s] all of them all the time” close to him (212). Keke’s heart-felt belief supports the African belief that “people do not exist in a vacuum” (Melato 2000: 61). According to African tradition, people do not exist in isolation, but holistically, as part of the world and community around them. One’s ancestors also play an essential role in their life; it is believed that the departed “play a very pivotal role in the lives of the living” (Ndlovu 2016: 2003). As stated before, this approach is very different from the Western medical system, “which operate[s] from an individual perspective”: contemporary methods primarily manage a patient’s illness from an individualistic perspective (Melato 2000: 61).

Atindanbila and Thompson (2011) also state that patients may consult traditional healers for health-related and spiritual disorders because it is more affordable than conventional “allopathic medicine” (459). That is not to say that it is only lower-earning people who use traditional healing practices for illnesses. Seeking the help of traditional healers “is a common practice across most sectors of the black African population and is not merely confined to the poor, rural or uneducated users” (Mothibe and Mncengeli 2019: 7). Black Africans may also choose to participate in traditional healing practices as they hold “the belief that health can only come about through harmony with the ancestors, the community and the environment” (Ndlovu 2016: 8).

Serote’s Keke in *Rumours* is an educated, well-to-do cell phone company marketing director who is shown that the journey of healing also includes members of one’s family, ancestors, and their community. Similarly, in *Way Back Home* Mhlongo’s protagonist, Kimathi, is a politically connected person who lives a lavish life (and although he is diagnosed and treated in a hospital) he also trusts the African traditional route of healing his emotional trauma. In both novels, the protagonists could have chosen to use exclusively Western procedures to deal with their illnesses, but they chose African practices because they believed they will be the most helpful.

As mentioned above – in Serote’s *Rumours* – Ami identifies that Keke is experiencing a “spiritual illness” that is displaying itself physically and emotionally; thus, he needs to deal with his spiritual illness before he can process his emotional trauma and physical health (Serote 2013: 104). When Keke first admits that he is ill, he also accepts Ami’s help and is primarily prepared to process his emotional trauma:

What did he even want to happen? Not to feel what he was feeling, he realised [...] He wanted clarity about what everything meant, about how he had come to be where he was now [...] He didn’t like the pain in his heart. (84)

When he arrives at Kanore's homestead in Mali, Keke's intentions change from only seeking Ami's help with his current dissatisfaction, to him mourning his past and thus admitting his past wrongs through establishing a connection with his ancestors. While in Mali, Keke also learns that he will have to live with the memory of traumatic events forever; therefore, he is also shown how, through small rituals, he can cope with the hurtful and traumatic memories of the past and still live a full life. Keke's interest in African healing is genuine; even after his stay at Kanore's, Keke continues practising some rituals which aid in his continued healing journey.

3.3.1 The Role of the Traditional Healer in *Rumours*

Traditional healers have operated for thousands of years in Africa, and although many Western authorities opposed their practices in an attempt to undermine their validity, traditional healers have continued to serve their communities by applying indigenous knowledge to heal both physical and mental illnesses. In addition to curing physical illnesses with herbs, they "serve many roles which include but [are] not limited to [being] custodians of the traditional African religion and customs, educators about culture, counsellors, social workers and psychologists" (Mokgobi 2014: 24). This section will examine the role of traditional healers in contemporary society and Serote's portrayal of spiritual healers, namely Ami and Kanore, and how they help Keke on his journey of emotional and spiritual healing.

According to Bojuwoye (2005), there are different understandings of what a traditional healer is, but most definitions seem to agree that traditional healers are (64):

[i]ndividuals who are recognised by their communities as competent to provide health care services, using a range of substances and methods based on the community's social, cultural, and religious systems. Southern African traditional healers who fit this definition are the herbalists (*inyanga*) and diviners (commonly known by their Zulu name, *sangoma*, but also called *amagqirha* [Xhosa], *ngaka* [Sotho], and *nanga* [Venda]). (64)

Similar to Western doctors who specialise in different fields, there are also other kinds of traditional healers. Bojuwoye's article primarily focuses on the roles and abilities of diviners, also known as spiritual diviners and herbalists in Southern Africa, and how they provide holistic healing through their connection with the ancestors and ritual ceremonies. Diviners and herbalists approach health based on the belief that illness suggests something is out of balance – such as a lack of connectedness to one's environment, community and ancestors, affecting one's ability to function well. Although diviners and herbalists have similar roles, there are some distinctions. According to Clemmont Vontress (2005), herbalists are unique in that they know what plants, roots or bark to gather for each sickness and "they

are aware of the nosology [classification of disease or] sickness and can predict the course of each illness when a specific herb is introduced into the body” (128).

Bojuwoye (2005) argues that diviners can also operate as herbalists because some have vast knowledge about herbs and plants and what dosages to prescribe to sick patients. According to Mothibe and Mncengeli (2019) – with their “extensive knowledge of plants, herbs, insects, animals, birds and snakes” – herbalists practice the art of mixing their medications and administering them to ill patients (13). Herbalists believe that for every physical ailment and mental illness, there is “a corresponding plant or animal product that can neutralise its effect” (Okpapaenwe and Odigwe 2018: 17). The gathered ingredients are processed into various forms of medicines such as ointments, oils and mixtures which can then be administered either orally or in bath water, via enemas or inhaled. For some patients, prescribed herbal remedies can be taken without them having to undergo any rituals; at other times, these mixtures are part of a particular process in a ritual or ceremony used to treat a patient. Unlike diviners who receive their healing gift from the ancestors, herbalists “acquire their powers and skills from relatives through training and the oral tradition” from elders who pass down their knowledge (Atindanbila and Thompson 2011: 459). Herbalists often gather their materials from the surrounding environment, and because they assist members of their community, “they are mostly the first contact people for clients who manifest mental distress” (459). In the novel, Kanore works as both a spiritual diviner and herbalist, and he is described as being “filled with the knowledge of ages” (Serote 2013: 138). For instance, in one scene of the novel, Kanore is seated outside when one of his wives relays the news that “one of the children the village had given to them [for treatment] was recovering well after receiving the herbal mixture Kanore had prepared for her” (140). Although this scene does not elaborate on what specific herbs were included in the medication used to treat this patient, there is evidence that Kanore is a well-known spiritual healer, and many people experiencing all kinds of illnesses and ailments trusted him to diagnose, treat and even cure those (142).

During a consultation with Keke, Kanore and another spiritual diviner, Tambu, scatters some bones on a table and share with Keke what they reveal. Kanore and Tambu point out to Keke that although he still has a long and difficult journey ahead of him, “it will be a safe one” (Serote 2013: 164). Without Keke having to share details about his life, they mention that back home in South Africa, his two children are unhappy and “a woman of about forty,” Mmabatho, is also dissatisfied with how things between her and Keke have turned out (164). Keke is assured that, while it may seem he is alone in his healing journey, he must move on with the knowledge that he is not alone because he is protected by the spirit of his ancestors and those who died in the Struggle. The diviner, Tambu, sensed Keke’s deep disconnect from his ancestors, as well as from his family. Before arriving in Mali, Keke had thought about something Ami had said during one of their first encounters: “there was a reason they [Ami and Keke] had met; there was no coincidence in their meeting,” which Tambu seems to answer now during this small ritual

(84). Tambu also mentions she can sense that Keke left broken home in South Africa and that he and Ami were destined to meet as she would support him in getting help (164). Kanore finishes the ritual by promising Keke that he will feel lighter in the future if he goes home and slaughters a chicken. On the day of his arrival in the small village of Mali, Keke sceptically wonders about the things he is hearing and witnessing and also why he agreed to come here:

He wasn't sure he should be here at all. Did he know what he was doing? What was all this superstition, witchcraft, belief? Why believe in what God has made and not in God? Why believe in ancestors? He was an MK commander, a communist. What the hell was he doing here so far from his homeland? Why did he ever come? (142-143)

Kanore senses Keke's frustration and doubt and he encourages him to "trust others, and [his] ancestors" as they always have and will be there to support him. Keke gradually learns to embrace the various procedures that are conducted by Kanore, and on occasion, by Tambu.

Diviners also occupy many social roles in their communities: either as psychotherapists, treating patients with emotional problems and mental illnesses like PTSD; or as historians as they hold and share stories that have been passed down orally from generation to generation; or fortune tellers as they can predict future events (Bojuwoye 2005: 64). As Bojuwoye states, through their ability to reconcile strained and broken relationships between living and non-living people, they act as therapists and judges (64). Diviners are also distinct in that they can reach supernatural states and connect with their ancestral family and the ancestral spirits of patients seeking help. The diviner may find, and consult with, a patient's ancestral family to find out why the individual is ill and, combined with the healers' knowledge, what the best treatment method is. For instance, these methods could include dream analysis, throwing bones and interpreting the pattern they fall in, dance, and other rituals and ceremonies like slaughtering animals, cleansing and mourning rituals. In isiZulu, a diviner is called iSangoma, and a herbalist is known as iNyanga, and although they are different, they are both considered African shamans.

Serote's portrayal of Ami is one of a spiritually connected individual who supports Keke on his spiritual journey. Ami comes from a long "line of shamans" and she is in the process of training to become a traditional healer (Serote 2013: 107). She uses her spiritual connection to her ancestors and the spiritual realm to discern and identify people suffering from emotional trauma. Ami is depicted as a stagnant character whose sole purpose is to provide emotional support, counsel and advice to characters experiencing different forms of emotional distress. For instance, before meeting Keke at Twist Street Tavern, Ami befriends a prostitute by the name of Nomsa. Similarly to Keke, Nomsa is emotionally scarred by memories of her past when she was molested by Sister Mary, and she is also burdened by the guilt she feels over giving away her children (67, 101). Like Keke, who abandons his family and chooses

to isolate himself among the many lonely people at the tavern, Nomsa intentionally isolates herself from home and her family out of guilt: “I have people who love me. I have a home. I have friends, but none of it makes sense. I’m lonely among them, and I run away from there to come to the Twist Street Tavern” (55). Although Nomsa judges herself negatively and believes that she is undeserving of companionship, Ami continues to pursue a genuine friendship with her and they eventually grow very close. According to Okpapaenwe and Odigwe (2018), traditional healers utilise “a lot of applied psychology and counselling” to assist their patients by allowing them to speak about what may be worrying them (18). Ami’s friendship with Nomsa exemplifies the many roles taken on by traditional healers, including those of compassionate counsellor, therapist and psychologist. These multifaceted roles create a safe and supportive space for traumatised individuals to speak about their past and possibly delve into their memory and uncover repressed memories thus helping them heal and move on from their past. During a particularly difficult and heartfelt conversation between Nomsa and Ami, Nomsa reveals her true feelings about herself by referring to herself as “a dog” (Serote 2013: 99). The genuine friendship and emotional support provided by Ami allows Nomsa to be vulnerable. Ami remains supportive and even encourages Nomsa to “find fresh courage” every day, thus imploring her to stay strong even when she is experiencing emotional turmoil (99). Ami goes further by declaring that she and Nomsa, including Keke, are “spiritual comrades” (99). Through this heartfelt declaration, Ami means to say that they, Nomsa and Keke, are important people in her life.

When Keke begins to frequent Twist Street Tavern he first meets Nomsa, who later introduces him to Ami. From the moment that Keke sees Ami he is intrigued by her and wonders who she is: “Who was she?” (Serote 2013: 55). Keke is intrigued by Ami and he may not be certain as to why he is drawn to her but he “knows that this young woman has something to offer” (Cornelius 2019: 178). As the friendship between them deepens, Ami takes Keke to her father’s homestead, so that he can process and overcome his past traumatic memories. The healing journey that Ami takes Keke on also enables him to unearth repressed memories of his years in exile. She even helps him unearth the memories of how his former comrades died in exile. Ami’s spiritual gifts enable her to reach beyond her friendship with Keke and Nomsa. (For example, she also intuitively senses that Keke’s friend and Struggle comrade, Mandla, is suffering from emotional distress and his daughters are in danger of falling victim to unprocessed trauma).

Although Bojuwoye (2005) only mentions diviners and herbalists, there are two other types of traditional African healers: faith healers, and traditional birth attendants. Faith healers are different from diviners as they “blend their traditional values and those of Christianity in their healing rituals” (Atindanbila and Thompson 2011: 459). In their approach to healing their patients, they also use psychotherapeutic methods. Traditional birth attendants, on the other hand, are elderly, respected women within the community. They have gained their expertise through extensive training and practical knowledge, or by

being chosen by guiding spirits that aid in the safe delivery of infants (Mokgobi 2014: 30). Their skills are “transferred from one generation to the other,” which means that, in addition to receiving the calling of one’s ancestors, “any older woman can become a birth attendant” (30). Traditional birth attendants can be likened to midwives. While some women may prefer to use a traditional birth attendant, more and more African women prefer to consult with Western doctors (gynaecologists) and give birth in a hospital, leaving the practice in danger of extinction.

3.3.2 Ancestors and Traditional Healing in *Rumours*

When Keke accepts Ami’s help, his intention is to overcome his traumatic memories of exile. In order to achieve this, Kanore and Tambu help Keke connect with his ancestors. Re-establishing a link between Keke and his ancestors allows him to find a sense of belonging with his family, and to let go of the identity he had forged in exile, in order to cultivate a new one. Before any healing rituals for Keke can commence, a connection with his ancestors must first be established. Kanore and Tambu’s approach is based on the African approach to holistic healing, which not only takes into account a person’s emotional, physical and spiritual health, but the process also includes the people in the patient’s life – this means that healing also involves “the living and the dead, the natural and the supernatural, in relation to the problem[s] presented by the patient” (Melato 2000: 31). Therefore, before any healing rituals can take place, Keke must first be connected with his ancestors.

According to Mothibe and Mncengeli (2019), communication with one’s ancestors is usually facilitated through a traditional healer who acts as a guide on how to connect and communicate (13). In the novel, a diviner begins this facilitation by calling on the ancestors “of the Wolofs, and the Kanores where [they] are hosted, and the ancestors of this young man [...] I ask you to preside over this moment” (Serote 2013: 144). In this scene, the diviner, Diop, extends beyond Keke’s ancestors by calling upon the assistance of the ancestors of those in the community. Mothibe and Mncengeli (2019) state that this is not an uncommon practice: when trying to assist an individual, a traditional healer may ask for help from “the ancestors of the village, the tribe or the community” (12). Oftentimes, this assistance is succeeded by a particular ceremony that might include the sacrifice of an animal, like a goat, cow, or chicken, determined by the nature of the ritual. Within African healing practices, it is important that one establishes a spiritual connection with their ancestors when attempting to find their identity. Once established, the spiritual bond with one’s ancestors must continually be nurtured and renewed. In the novel, this renewed connection between Keke and his ancestors marks a major milestone in his healing journey because he learns how to anchor himself in his lineage.

The spiritual healer, Tambu, begins by helping Keke understand that he does not exist in a vacuum, that he exists as a continuation of those who lived before him: “Inside you is a spirit that links you to other spirits” (Serote 2013: 143). This holistic perspective highlights the African belief that people do not

exist in isolation; therefore it is important that one's ancestors, family and community be involved during healing. She goes on to say that it is important for Keke to "learn to speak, to listen, to see them" as it will assist him in his healing journey (143). The diviner, Diop, also identifies that Keke has been ill, and warns of the consequences that will follow if he continues to ignore his ancestors:

You have been very sick in a social way, and it will soon become physical. You have lost everything because you have not addressed your bloodline, your people. You don't know how to hear your ancestors, who have been trying to contact you [...] You are of the fire, and it will consume you unless you reshape your life so that you can grow [...] And now that you know, you can no longer go on as if you have not heard. (146)

According to Vontress (2005), ancestors are "omniscient, omnipresent, and perpetual monitors" that have a substantial influence on the health and behaviour of the living (126). Neglecting to adhere to traditions, customs and rituals of reverence "may cause the invisible overseers to exact punishment with a vengeance by sending trouble [or] illness" (126). In the novel, this belief is supported by diviner Diop's statement that Keke has lost his job and family because he has not communicated with his ancestors. Diop's facilitation and encouragement enable Keke to connect with his ancestors and discover his clan name, Moloantoa (Serote 2013: 146). After he learns about his clan name, Diop states that the connection between Keke and his ancestors will be cemented "with the life of a bird," a sacrifice (147).

Learning about his ancestral roots, positively impacts Keke's emotional well-being. Later, as he looks at the mountains from his hotel room, he reflects on his soul-search so far, and realises how much he has changed for the better. Keke's 'journey' of ancestral discovery not only enables him to cultivate a deep connection with his ancestors, but it also allows him the chance to find his identity as a child of the Moloantoa clan. It is important that Keke find his identity as – in African culture – "you can't deal with a person's health unless you have access to [their] identity" (Serote 2013: 191). Through this initial process of self-discovery, Keke also begins to explore his belonging in a changing society.

In his novel, *Rumours*, Serote describes his characters as individuals enduring psychological, spiritual and emotional decline and distress. They begin exhibiting these traits after they return from exile to a society in transition. For instance, the character Keke lives a relatively happy life with his wife and two kids but soon the nightmares of the past Struggle years begin to creep into his psyche, thus disrupting his peace of mind. His relationship with his wife, Mmabatho, begins to fail and she later moves out of the family home with their two children, leaving Keke alone with his memories. Keke is so alienated and overcome with loneliness that he starts longing for his former Struggle self and his years in exile. It becomes clear that he identifies mainly with his former self, as he often glances back nostalgically when confronted with uncomfortable and unfamiliar situations in present-day South Africa. For instance, upon

arriving, at healer Kanore's homestead, he begins to feel out of place. As he sees the village make preparations for a ritual and he seeks reassurance in his old familiar identity as a source of comfort: "He was an MK commander, a communist. What the hell was he doing here so far from his homeland?" (Serote 2013: 142-143). As he reminisces, Keke's "mind drift[s] back to Angola, to the camps [where] he had been a different man" (173). Despite the uprootedness of exile and of repeatedly witnessing the tragic loss of friends and comrades, Keke will often sentimentally reflect on those years, because they filled him with great purpose, and gave him an identity: that of an anti-apartheid rebel, a soldier and MK Commander.

His engagement with healers (Diop, Tambu and Kanore) enables Keke to let go of the man he used to be and construct a new identity in the present. People will often consult with traditional healers so that they can find their identities through an engagement with those who came before them, their ancestors. Once people learn about their roots, the spiritual connection established between them and their ancestors "provides [them with] a sense of security [and] anchoring" thus validating them as individuals and as members of a larger spiritual family (Mothibe and Mncengeli 2019: 13).

Through a genuine engagement with African spirituality, Keke relinquishes his past identity as an MK soldier and creates a new identity in the present. Keke's spiritual journey is in sharp contrast with Kimathi's (Mhlongo's protagonist). At first, both Keke and Kimathi look back at their exile days with a great sense of yearning. However, while Keke is successful in cultivating a new identity, Kimathi fails dismally. While Keke roots himself in his ancestral identity and becomes spiritually connected with his family, Kimathi roots himself in a political past he will never be able to attain again.

3.3.3 Methods of Healing: Medicines and Rituals

As stated before, a large majority of Africans will turn to traditional healers who utilise their knowledge of herbs, plants and animals to make traditional medicines for the client to consume and employ in various way, such as during a ritual. According to Adu-Gyamfi and Anderson (2019), many South African academics agree that traditional medicine can be defined "as the sum total of knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures that are used to maintain health, as well as prevent, diagnose, improve or treat physical and mental illness" (73). Traditional medicine is associated with herbs, spices, plants, roots, animals, oils and mixtures alongside the guidance of a traditional healer. In *Rumours*, various indigenous medicines are used by traditional healers for all kinds of illnesses. When used alongside specific rituals, indigenous medicines prove to be very effective in assisting Keke reconcile with the traumatic memories of his past and the impact it has had on his present. Moreover, the medicines he uses and the rituals he acquires give him the tools he will need to efficiently navigate future traumatic effects should they arise. This section will examine the impact that African traditional medicine and rituals have on Keke's traumatic 'hauntedness.'

After connecting with his ancestors through finding out his clan name, Keke is told that he will now undergo a ritual intended to “cleanse [him] because many, many souls cling to [him]” (Serote 2013: 147). This cleansing ceremony will then be followed by the sacrifice of an animal. African customs dictate that before a ceremony commences, a cleansing ritual must precede it “in order to cast away evil spirits” and any negative energy that may be following the ill person (Sandlana and Mtetwa 2008: 124). There are other reasons why animals such as goats, chickens and cows are slaughtered for a ceremony. For instance, the novel states that “as the beast’s life dissipates into the spirit world, it will cleanse [Keke] and remove the barriers within [him] that are blocking [his] spirituality” (Serote 2013: 146). According to Mokgobi (2014), the spilling of animal blood is an important part of African customs and rituals, as it “serves as a bond between the ancestors and their descendants” (27). As I mentioned in Chapter Two, in some cultures, such as the rituals conducted by Zulu people, “some parts of the animal are separated as the ancestors’ share” as an offering of gratitude that the ceremony went well (Bojuwoye 2005: 69). Sometimes “some parts are smeared on the sick person” to ward off evil spirits, and everybody present at the ceremony or ritual can enjoy eating the meat of the animal that was slaughtered (69).

As mentioned above, “traditional methods of treatment are not [only] confined to the use of medicine” (Melato 2000: 48). Rituals are also an essential part of the healing process because communication between the spiritually-ill patient and their ancestors also takes place. Moreover, because rituals often involve family and the community, they are of “therapeutic value” because the patient is strengthened by the support around them (48). Serote shares the same sentiment as Melato when he states that “each individual is strengthened by the community [since] few rituals are done by individuals” (Serote 2013: 138). Leading up to Keke’s healing ceremony, there are many rituals that must be performed, as it is believed that “a variety of rituals could be involved in a single ceremony” (Sandlana and Mtetwa 2008: 125). Kanore fictionally illustrates Sandlana and Mtetwa’s reflection by stating that “you have to work towards a ritual” (Serote 2013: 138). This is in fact the case in the novel, as many rituals take place before Keke’s healing ritual can finally take place. He is first encouraged to find his spiritual connection and identity by connecting with his ancestors. Then, he undergoes a cleansing ceremony so that he is freed from any barriers that may inhibit his spiritual journey. Only once these have been successfully completed, do Kanore and Ami assist Keke with his actual healing ceremony.

For Keke to effectively process past traumatic experiences, it is important that he enters a phase of “mourning” (Serote 2013: 170). Kanore recommends this process as it is important for Keke to address the negative memories of experiences in his past as a political exile (160). Since Keke has now connected to, and spoken with, his ancestors, he enters his period of mourning knowing that he is not alone: his ancestors are there for emotional support. Kanore walks him through what he will experience during his

mourning period, and encourages him to include his ancestors in his journey. In this scene of the novel (173), Keke boils a bag of raw herbs and covers himself with a blanket to inhale the fragrances released by the leaves. The herbal mixture induces deep thoughts and his mind wanders through many thoughts and emotions: “Ami, South Africa, Mali, Africa, the world. His thoughts ran every which way as if chasing themselves: Tambu, Nin, Salif, Yusuf” (171). Even though his consciousness wanders from one thought to another, it eventually “drifted back to Angola, to the camps” (173). As his mind goes through the memories of every murdered comrade, it becomes vividly clear that their untimely deaths still haunt him. The nostalgia created around the false sense of safety he had conjured around the ‘safe houses’ of exile also begins to dissolve as he remembers the fear and uncertainty he felt at the time: “Only during those long days of waiting in exile in Maseru had he realised that he might never see his parents again, never know if they were dead or alive, never get the chance to bury them” (177). Keke’s mourning period is essentially “a process of remembering [his] past and present suffering” and also a process of going “through the pain of being born again” (187). After three days in isolation and uninterrupted reflection, Keke’s mourning comes to an end, and he is reintroduced back into the community.

Because they were used correctly and responsibly, the rituals performed and the herbal mixture given to Keke take him to an altered state of consciousness where he gains the clarity and the strength necessary to confront painful memories, even those he has long-since forgotten. In addition to rituals and specialised ceremonies, Keke personally witnesses the spiritual effects of dance and music. According to Sandlana and Mtetwa (2008), “African traditional dance and music play[s] a major role in the restoration of equilibrium” (125). When he first arrives at Kanore’s homestead in Mali, Keke feels out of place; however, when he witnesses the elders around him begin to dance, ululate and sing, something within him stirs. He no longer feels like a mere observer: “Keke was no longer hearing just through his ears but through his whole being, which was beginning to feel saturated, as if the world has ceased to exist for him” (Serote 2013: 137). Bojuwoye (2005) states that drumming, dance, ululation and music are some of the most common ways trances are induced (67). Additionally, music and dance have the power to transport someone to the spirit world (Sandlana and Mtetwa 2008: 123). Keke experiences this when he begins to feel as if the world around him is melting away. In this scene, Keke appears to be surrendering to the ensuing ceremonies and rituals that ultimately play a significant part in restoring his equilibrium and connection with his ancestral identity.

As represented in the novel, when African traditions are correctly observed, they form the bases of Keke’s support on his journey of healing and change. According to Okpapaenwe and Odigwe (2018), the most important healing method used by traditional healers is a detailed analysis of a patient’s medical and personal history where the healer “takes a very detailed physical and psychological history of the client” (18). It was Ami’s relationship with Keke that initiated this process and she uses her sharp perception to assess him and also suggest a diagnosis for his spiritual illness. As the novel continues,

the various traditional healers that Keke encounters in his healing journey also assess and assist him in different ways. For example, the bones belonging to the spiritual diviner Tambu reveal that Keke left behind a broken home in South Africa. Yet, the bones do not only point to Keke's despair; they also suggest that there is hope in the future for Keke – although difficult, his healing journey would be positive in the end. Kanore is often at the centre of all ritualistic proceedings and he welcomes Keke into his homestead where he is surrounded by a community that supports him throughout his stay. Leading up to his healing ceremony, Kanore also diagnoses and treats Keke. After identifying that part of Keke's illness is due to the wrath of his ancestors (because Keke had neglected them for too long), Diop helps in the facilitation of a reconciliation between Keke and his ancestors. Together, these two traditional healers gather baseline information to diagnose and treat Keke. Furthermore, they empower him by teaching him how to conduct rituals that will keep the traumatic hauntings of his past away.

When Keke leaves Mali and returns to South Africa, Ami takes over (from Kanore) Keke's spiritual journey. She begins by taking a detailed assessment of Keke's current spiritual state. She asks him whether he feels spiritually connected to his ancestors yet and he responds by saying that he is: "I feel all of them all the time," and he can feel the different roles they play in his life (Serote 2013: 212). Although Ami is pleased with this news, she tells him that the bones have shown her that he has "never recognised [his] ancestors, nor done any rituals to thank them, ask them, or report to them" (213). Thus, through Ami and Kanore, Keke learns that he is inherently a spiritual being and that the illness he was experiencing was because he was spiritually disconnected. Keke learns to conduct these rituals himself, so that he has the continued support of his ancestors (216).

In the final part of the novel, Serote does not show us a completely healed Keke; but rather an individual well advanced on his way to healing. Keke reconnects with those he got estranged from: he reconnects with comrade Mandla, and we see the true depth of their friendship. Although Mandla and Keke referred to each other as 'comrades' in the Struggle, we later see that the word is not merely familiar Struggle rhetoric, but that it reflects a real friendship; as Mandla says, "I'm your comrade. Always" (224). Keke also reconnects with his children and his wife, who immediately notices a renewed calmness in his behaviour that was missing before. At the end of the novel, Keke's healing journey is not complete; rather, it is an on-going process.

Serote fictionally represents the challenges of one's continuing healing journey, in order to highlight the stark realities that many ex-political exiles were faced with upon returning to South Africa in the early 1990s. Through Keke's healing journey, Serote highlights how African indigenous healing practices can help heal those impacted by past traumatic experiences, thus ensuring that future generations will not

be devastated by the consequences of unprocessed trauma. In the African worldview it is believed that people do not exist in isolation, but rather holistically and in connection with their family, friends, community and the spirits of the ancestors. Therefore, the holistic approach to healing acknowledges that the scars of the past do not only affect the individual, but can also affect future generations.

By embracing traditional methods of healing, and making his healing journey into a collective endeavour (that also includes his family), Keke breaks the cycle of pain that his children might have suffered in the future. Additionally, Keke's and his wife's (Mmabatho's) families come together to sacrifice a sheep, goat and two chickens with the purpose of reconciliation, so that the illness that struck Keke does not happen to his children in the future (Serote 2013: 232). By involving their children in the ritual, Keke connects them with both their parents' ancestral families. Moreover, he is introducing them to their culture and teaching them the various ways it can help them overcome the effects of emotional damage and devastation.

In *Rumours*, Serote contrasts the characters of Keke and Mandla. Keke's uplifting trajectory represents the positive effects of healing repressed traumatic memories. In contrast, Mandla's stagnant trajectory illustrates the negative consequences of choosing not to open up about past traumatic memories. Furthermore, Serote demonstrates the destructive consequences that past unresolved trauma can have on later generations through Mandla's daughters, Waha and Wanjuri. Ami expresses her concern for his daughters on numerous occasions: "I'm concerned about Mandla and Thuli's children. How can we claim to educate our children when we teach them not to be themselves, but to enter a culture that's alien to them?" (222). While Keke manages to successfully heal his repressed traumatic memories, Mandla does not. Mandla is so disillusioned with post-transitional South Africa that he refuses to share the memories he has about the past. His huge silences deprive his daughters Waha and Wanjuri of the ability to learn about history and their parents' past experiences during apartheid. Mandla's mind is so preoccupied with thoughts of the past – while also striving to create the South Africa he imagined during exile – that he does not see how emotionally affected his daughters are suffering from transgenerational trauma. It is only when Wanjuri commits suicide that Mandla becomes aware of his own, and his daughter's, severely traumatised state.

In the final two chapters of the novel, Serote's own authorial voice is strongly present as he expresses openly how he hopes to "challenge [...] African intellectuals [...] to link indigenous knowledge to the collective human knowledge," so that the true value of indigenous knowledge be finally realised (Serote 2013: 264). I also believe that he is addressing Africans across the world when he writes: "our culture was disrupted, which caused alienation and marginalisation, and that we have to renew and recreate ourselves" (260). More specifically, Serote is inviting all those suffering from emotional trauma due to apartheid to turn towards African indigenous medicine and practices as a reservoir of knowledge and

wisdom that can be used for their healing. By exploring African traditional healers, healing rituals, indigenous medicine, ancestral connections, traditional beliefs, Serote sheds light on how – by embracing one’s cultural roots – people can help both individuals and communities find a sense of belonging and identity in rapidly changing societies.

4. Chapter Four: Conclusions and Brief Comparisons

My dissertation has analysed the collective disillusionment and emotional dislocation in post-transitional South Africa as represented through the characters of Niq Mhlongo's *Way Back Home* (2013) and Mongane Wally Serote's *Rumours* (2013). Through an engagement with these South African novels, I have explored the connection between societal disenchantment, the personal disillusionment experienced by ex-political returnees in the early 1990s, and the return of repressed apartheid memories. More specifically, I have investigated how these memories of apartheid-induced trauma manifest themselves in the present, and how individuals seek to process and move past their traumatic 'hauntedness' through engaging with various forms of African spirituality.

I selected these two novels based on my desire to explore two contemporary South African novels that discuss issues of home, belonging, trauma, healing, and emotional 'hauntedness.' Mhlongo's and Serote's narratives share significant similarities in that they fictionally represent the lived experiences of ex-political exiles and their difficulty integrating themselves into a rapidly changing post-transitional society. Additionally, I have been interested in analysing how the repressed traumatic memories that refuse to be forgotten impact their present life, thus threatening to cripple their futures. I have also attempted to explain how historical trauma is fictionally expressed in representations of affected individuals, communities, and even generations. It is most noteworthy to point out that both authors portray protagonists who seek assistance from traditional African healers in order to reconnect with their cultural identity as foundational for a future in present-day South Africa.

Although the novels share significant similarities, the trajectories of the main characters – Kimathi and Keke, respectively – ultimately yield different results. In *Way Back Home*, through Kimathi's total moral collapse, Mhlongo seems to point to the difficulty of finding healing through African spirituality. In contrast, in *Rumours*, Serote's protagonist, Keke, is depicted as having an upward spiritual trajectory as he not only finds a sense of belonging in the present but also emotional healing from past traumas. Throughout my dissertation, I have explained this difference at length.

In *Chapter One*, I introduced my study by focusing on the main concepts used: home, trauma and African spirituality, and emphasised their importance and relevance within the South African context. I argued that knowledge surrounding the understanding of trauma needs to be decolonised, and highlighted the importance of trauma fiction. Additionally, I explored how African authors engage with concepts of African spirituality in their contemporary narratives and pointed to the growing body of works that offer representations of rituals and healing practices in contemporary South African literature. I concluded the chapter by providing a literature review in which I discussed the critical reception of my selected novels, focusing on their exploration of disillusionment, belonging, trauma and African spirituality.

In *Chapter Two*, I analysed Niq Mhlongo's *Way Back Home*. I began my analysis by focusing on Johannesburg as a metaphor for repressed traumatic memories and societal disillusionment, and explored Kimathi's struggle with feeling 'unhomed.' Mhlongo's portrayal of the difficulty of belonging in one's home country upon returning from exile highlights the problematics of loss of home and ancestral land. Despite seeking emotional healing from traumatic memories through traditional healing methods, Kimathi's journey is not successful. It ends with his tragic death as he is not fully committed to confronting his past actions and embracing the rigours of spiritual healing. The other secondary characters, Senami's parents – on the other hand – strongly believe in the possibility of finding emotional healing through a genuine engagement with traditional indigenous healing. I argue that he illustrates his support of African spirituality as a valuable source of emotional healing as he spends considerable narrative time describing certain rituals and their positive impact. These secondary characters fully believe and immerse themselves in healing through traditional indigenous healing methods. Additionally, the animals that Africans endow with various spiritual meanings are also included and reflected on throughout the narrative.

Chapter Three delves into Mongane Wally Serote's novel, *Rumours*. As stated before, Mhlongo's and Serote's novels share significant similarities (this is why I decided to structure this chapter similarly to *Chapter Two*). However, unlike Mhlongo's protagonist, Kimathi, who fails to find healing due to his severe moral shortcomings, Serote's main character, Keke, successfully anchors himself spiritually and finds emotional healing. The chapter begins with investigating the contemporary cityscapes of Johannesburg and Durban, reflecting South Africa's historical scars. Keke's descent into trauma-induced isolation is depicted alongside his eventual reconnection with African spirituality, facilitated by a traditional healer. Serote's overall narrative advocates for African indigenous healing methods to overcome emotional trauma. Keke's engagement with African spirituality yields positive results as (unlike Kimathi) he takes the rigours of spiritual immersion in rituals seriously.

While the novels selected for my dissertation may not have identical character trajectories, I have illustrated how both writers incorporate traditional indigenous knowledge in their narratives. Perhaps the dissimilarities portrayed in their characters stem from Mhlongo's and Serote's generational divide as writers. As mentioned, Mhlongo is part of a younger generation of writers reporting on the challenges of living in contemporary South Africa. Mhlongo's novels leading up to and including *Way Back Home* mirror the younger generation's cynicism regarding post-transitional South Africa. In strong contrast, Serote is part of an older generation of writers who emerged at a time in South African history when apartheid sought to silence black voices. Therefore, Serote has witnessed the various complex changes

that South Africa has undergone – from oppression to democracy – and his writing reflects his deep trust in and commitment to moral and spiritual healing.

Therefore, in contrast to Mhlongo's novel, whose protagonist does not redeem himself morally and spiritually, Serote's narrative presents a character with an upward moral and spiritual trajectory. However, I firmly believe that despite these differences, both writers believe in the potential value of traditional healing as a means of finding one's sense of identity in the turbulence of the present.

In their attempt to heal their traumatic memories, both protagonists actively appeal to the help of traditional healers. Intriguingly, although the protagonists are portrayed as having similar social and political experiences, they do not respond similarly to African spirituality. Mhlongo's character, Kimathi, is selfish in his healing journey and is not interested in taking moral responsibility for his past violence, which is why he fails to find inner peace and belonging in the present. In contrast, Serote's protagonist, Keke, takes a genuine interest in the healing process, and he fully immerses himself in the required ceremonial and ritualistic proceedings, being prepared to take moral responsibility for his wrongdoings. Therefore, he succeeds in overcoming the pain of trauma and finding inner healing.

It is my hope that my analysis of both Mhlongo's and Serote's novels has illustrated the complex novelistic representations of the ex-political exiles' emotional dislocation upon returning to their homeland, South Africa, in the early 1990s. As represented in Mhlongo's and Serote's novels, the return home proves to be emotionally very difficult and worsened by the protagonists' still 'unhomed' traumatised state. Both writers suggest that African spirituality is a potentially valuable resource for consideration in processing emotional 'hauntedness,' as both offer a strong reminder of the need to reconnect with one's cultural traditions.

Briefly then, the overall findings of this study have illustrated the difficulties associated with the ex-political exiles' returning home after apartheid, and the link between current social/personal disenchantment and the repressed memories of apartheid-induced trauma. I hope my study has further contributed to the investigations of home, belonging and trauma in post-transitional South Africa. Within this context, the main contribution of my research rests, I hope, in having suggested ways in which the protagonists have processed (whether successfully or not) traumatic 'hauntedness' through recourse to African spirituality and traditional indigenous knowledge.

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