**Claiming an “ordinary” female alternative space in Njabulo Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandela***

*Abstract.* Starting from an overview relating to the crucial role and ethical agenda of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, this paper proceeds to investigate the narrative and representational strategies through which, in *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (2003), South African writer and academic Njabulo Ndebele turns away from the “spectacular” towards a more nuanced and introspective dimension. While inspired by the TRC’s hearings concerning gross violations of hu- man rights, this dimension foregrounds (black) women’s endurance, suffering, and psychological distress. my essay highlights the lyrical intensity and open-minded approach informing Ndebele’s portrayal of Winnie Mandela and the imaginary conversations that the (fictionalized) “mother of the Nation” holds with other four women, whose historical models are similarly linked to the TRC’s hearings. The theme of the “women-in-waiting” (for their husbands’ return, but also for their voices to be heard) is examined in connection with the archetypal figure of Penelope, a West- ern myth which Ndebele borrows and moulds in African terms.

*Keywords*. South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, women’s testimonies, the fictionalization of Winnie Mandela, Penelope myth, the politics of Ndebele’s creative writing.

1. ***The TRC’s role and Commitment***

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was formally established in 1995 to help the country face overwhelming challenges and “reinvent” itself as a liberal democracy, which was called upon to acknowledge the hu- man rights violated during the apartheid regime. on the grounds of the promotion of National unity and Reconciliation Act, No. 34 of 1995, the TRC was set up to provide for the investigation and compiling of “as complete a picture as possible” of the nature, causes, and extent of gross violations of human rights committed during a 34-year period of South African history (from 1960 to 1994).[[1]](#footnote-1) under the “Truth: The Road to Reconciliation” banner, the TRC made the most of the fundamental assumption that telling the truth about past traumas could heal and promote reconciliation among the peoples of South Africa. This assumption is in keeping with trauma theorist Cathy Caruth’s argument that “the history of trauma, in its inherent belatedness, can only take place through the listening of another”.[[2]](#footnote-2) The notion that trauma can only be properly understood when dealt with in words and, more significantly, when a sympathetic listener is involved, also informs the work of Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, who emphasize the importance for the victim to talk about his/her traumatic experience, as unheard testimony prevents healing and traps the survivor within a painful repetition compulsion process.[[3]](#footnote-3) This clearly shows the crucial role played by the TRC’s public hearings and the value that the Commission assigned to the cathartic power of testimony.

The establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission allowed victims to tell their stories and share their suffering in public, in addition to inducing perpetrators to acknowledge their crimes and ask for forgiveness.[[4]](#footnote-4) In his memoir no future Without forgiveness, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Chair of the TRC, underlines the relevance of the Christian belief of forgiveness on which the Commission strongly relied. At the same time, he makes clear that “in forgiving, people are not being asked to forget”:[[5]](#footnote-5) rather, it is paramount that people remember, the wrongdoer confesses, and the victim forgives, so that the process of reconciliation can begin. The choice of a Truth Commission was also consistent with a central feature of the African Weltanschauung (or philosophy, world-view), i.e. what is called ubuntu in the Nguni group of languages, or botho in sotho languages. This word is particularly difficult to render in a Western language, because it refers to a typical African philosophy of life and social behaviour. in a Country Unmasked, Alex Boraine quotes its core belief as “‘umntu nugmntu ngabantu, motho ke motho ba batho ba bangwe,’ literally translated as ‘a human being is a human being because of other human beings’”.[[6]](#footnote-6) A person with ubuntu is aware of belonging to a greater whole and perceives all people as interconnected; this means that we become smaller when others are humiliated or oppressed, and that we risk losing our humanity when we dehumanize the other:

None is an outsider, all are insiders, all belong. There are no aliens, all belonging in the one family, god’s family, the human family. There is no longer Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free – instead of separation and division, all distinctions make for a rich diversity to be celebrated for the sake of the unity that underlies them. We are different so that we can know our need of one another, for no one is ultimately self-sufficient.[[7]](#footnote-7)

An ethical stronghold for the TRC, ubuntu deals with responsibility and reciprocity. When looking for further interconnections, this African philosophy appears to have striking similarities with Emmanuel Levinas’s idea of an ethical dialogue with and responsibility towards the other. This French philosopher argued that the subjective being-in-the-world may be fulfilled only when the “I” learns to approach the other as such, that is to say, as an alterity that resists being assimilated into the individual’s ego. According to Levinas, an ethical community comes into being through a “face-to-face” encounter which prevents anybody from ignoring the living alterity and heteronomy of the other person: “the face-to-face is a final and irreducible relation which […] makes possible the pluralism of society”.[[8]](#footnote-8) The South African testimonial process, as Tutu observes, was indeed conceived as a forum for face- to-face encounters among the “wounded people” of the country, where the whole community was compelled to acknowledge the presence of the other and pay attention to his/her story of suffering. In this sense, Mark Sanders points out that the gross human rights violation hearings – namely the victims’ hearings – were staged as an “enactment”, an “exemplification” of ubuntu as reciprocity.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Within this context, where testimony plays a key role in the healing process, the definitions of trauma and gross human rights violations provided by the TRC are bound up with the accomplishment of the goal concerning reconciliation. The promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No. 34 of 1995, states that gross violations of human rights include “(a) the killing, abduction, torture or severe ill treatment of any person; or (b) any attempt, conspiracy, incitement, instigation, command or procurement to commit an act referred to in paragraph (a)”.[[10]](#footnote-10) This definition, however, is based on a conceptualization of trauma that is primarily rooted in Western tradition, since it focuses more on single-event bodily violations than on examples of everyday violence and racial discrimination (as was actually the case with millions of South Africans). Michael Rothberg’s ground-breaking article “Decolonizing Trauma studies: A Response” has therefore called for a rethinking of trauma as “collective, spatial, and material (instead of individual, temporal, and linguistic)”, thus relativizing “the hold of the category of trauma as it had been developed by Caruth, Felman, Laub, and others”.[[11]](#footnote-11) This observation is particularly relevant when considering the types of trauma emerging in a postcolonial, racially-biased context such as South Africa, and we must ask ourselves whether, apart from the ubuntu approach, the tools of a Eurocentric/American-inspired trauma theory were really adequate to address such a condition.

In *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*, Stef Craps contends that the very concept of trauma, as used to describe vexed responses to extreme events across space and time, is very much a Western artefact and fails to properly ad- dress the specificities of trauma in non-Western settings. Focusing on the South African context, Craps calls for alternative conceptualizations of trauma that should be more attuned to postcolonial realities and encompass notions of race, racism, classism, homophobia, and sexism, this being a phenomenology which notably characterized South Africa (and, to a certain extent, still does). He also argues that some criticism levelled at the TRC in connection with its single-event bodily-violation-based approach “resonates with our observation that the current trauma discourse has difficulty recognizing that it is not just singular and extraordinary events but also ‘normal’ everyday humiliations and abuses that can act as traumatic stressors”.[[12]](#footnote-12)

 ***2. Women’s Voices***

The TRC’s assumption that truth-telling can heal and lead towards reconciliation, along with its circumscribed definition of gross human rights violations, acquire particular significance within the context of women’s hearings. Due to historical circumstances, the condition of the black South African woman has often been described as the result of a “double colonization”, as she fell victim to colonial, apartheid rules and patriarchal structures within her own community.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Black South African women were frequently confined to a domestic space, where they were supposed to “passively” take care of the household, while their male partners could take an “active” part in the anti-apartheid struggle. The different kinds of oppression and abuses experienced by women and men seemed to find an equivalent in testimonial practices, with two distinctive patterns which emerged from the very opening of the public hearings and continued throughout the work of the Commission, as pointed out by Fiona Ross in her lucid study on the process of bearing witness:

The first [pattern] was that although approximately equal proportions of men and wo- men made statements, for the most part women described the suffering of the men whereas the men testified about their own experiences of violation. The second was that women who had been active in opposing the Apartheid state seldom gave public testimony.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Ross also observes that, as a consequence, women were frequently regarded as “secondary witnesses” by the media and commissioners themselves. These gendered roles meant that the majority of women who appeared before the Com- mission told the grieving stories of their beloved ones – their men, fathers, uncles, and sons – while their own stories remained in the background. indeed, many episodes of “ordinary” female trauma – i.e., the pain caused by the husband’s absence, the feelings of anxiety and the waiting for the beloved ones to return home, the fear of loss and powerlessness – went unheard because they did not fall into the technical definition of a “gross human rights violations” victim.

As it became aware of the small number of women speaking as direct victims of apartheid brutalities, the TRC decided to organize “special Hearings on Women”, which took place in Cape Town (8 August 1996), Durban (24 October 1996), and Johannesburg (29 July 1997), in order to solicit women’s statements about their hardships and suffering. As emerged from these special hearings, women did experience human rights violations, and they were interrogated and detained in jail as men were. in many female activists’ testimonies, the prison turned into “a space of ugly intimacy, a zone where particular violence and its resultant pain challenged women’s identities and senses of self”.[[15]](#footnote-15) For instance, in her well-known *Country of My Skull*, Antjie Krog refers to Thenjiwe Mthintso, Chairperson of the gender Commission, and quotes from her opening speech at the TRC special hearings on women which were held in Gauteng. Mthintso highlighted the psychological violence, humiliations, and indignities suffered by women in interrogation rooms and cells:

behind every woman’s encounter with the security branch and the police lurked the possibility of sexual abuse and rape. […] When they interrogated, they usually started by reducing your role as an activist. They weighed you according to their own concepts of womanhood. […] And they said you are in custody because you are not the right kind of woman – you are irresponsible, you are a whore, you are fat and ugly, or single and you are looking for a man.[[16]](#footnote-16)

These testimonies suggest that the violence perpetrated against them operated at both the physical and the psychological level, aiming to destroy their sense of womanhood. Annalisa Oboe also observes that at women’s special hearings their testimonies tended to “surface as fragmentary and resistant to language”.[[17]](#footnote-17) Echoing Adrienne Rich’s evocative words in “Cartographies of silence”, where the poet powerfully claims that silence “is a presence / it has a history a form”,[[18]](#footnote-18) Oboe points out that women’s silence “may hide profound psychological truths about the storytellers, and can provide meaningful insights into the formation of gendered cultural identities”, thus leading one to wonder “whether this insistence on the need to open up, to speak openly, to break the silence, to lift the veil of silence”, as promoted by the TRC, “is not a new violence on women, whose reluctance to tell may stem from subcultural codes of gender behavior that should be acknowledged and respected”.[[19]](#footnote-19)

According to the statistics, women made more than half of the statements (the proportion of women vs men being 54 vs 52), but

men were the most common victims of violations. six times as many men died as women and twice as many survivors of violations were men. Hence, although most people who told the Commission about violations were women, most of the testimony was about men.[[20]](#footnote-20)

The Commission acknowledged that “this is not to say that women did not suffer violations themselves – they certainly did suffer – but the focus of women’s testimony was more often about someone other than themselves and those victims tended to be men”.[[21]](#footnote-21) Despite all the workshops and meetings with gender activists, the TRC was unable to systematically address the issue, with the final report devoting no more than one chapter to women. in the face of this, Sheila Meintjes argues that “without a gender lens, women’s power, authority and role in history is erased.”[[22]](#footnote-22)

There are many reasons that might explain the relative absence of women’s voices during the TRC hearings. on one hand, women were more likely to suffer from such “violations” as the effects of forced removals, the separation from men, and the disintegration of the family unit, because they were the ones required to stay in the villages to take care of the children and the house, while the husbands had to go to the city and find a job there. These kinds of abuses were the combined result of apartheid oppression and patriarchal subordination, and they did not fall into the Commission’s definition of gross human rights violations. on the other hand, many women who had suffered from abuses that qualified as gross human rights violations, especially those related to sexual harm, were reluctant to participate in the testimonial process and chose not to appear before the Commission because they were not ready, or willing, to share their pain in public and bear another intrusion of the state – even if the Commission’s intentions were benevolent. Notably, in her opening speech in Gauteng, Ms Mthintso revealed her uneasiness about sharing painful experience; while writing her speech, she realized “how unready I am to talk about my experience in South African jails and ANC camps abroad. Even now, despite the general terms in which I have chosen to speak, I feel exposed and distraught”.[[23]](#footnote-23)

For his part, Mark Libin thinks that the mandate of the TRC answered affirmatively to Spivak’s momentous question, “Can the subaltern speak?”[[24]](#footnote-24) by providing a forum in which victims – mostly African people who had been silenced for so long – could relate the stories of their oppression, the Commission did try to give the marginalized an opportunity to speak. Nevertheless, many voices went unheard, especially those of women, because either the abuses from which they suffered were not contemplated by the TRC’s criteria, or the people were simply reluctant to participate in the testimonial process.

Njabulo Ndebele’s 2003 novel *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* – which I shall discuss in the following sections – powerfully engages with the limits and elisions of the Commission’s work by downplaying the “spectacle” of the TRC process and looking at “ordinary” examples of suffering resulting from years of apartheid oppression and centuries of colonialism. Ndebele is interested in giving voice to those women who have been silenced by both past oppression and the Commission’s limited focus. He thus draws attention to examples of traumas inflicted on them by both apartheid and local patriarchal groups. in line with Spivak’s conception of the female subaltern, the protagonists in *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* are women who find it difficult to speak and be heard, nor have they benefited from the cathartic effect of telling their stories at public hearings, because of their accounts not meeting the Commission’s criteria. Ndebele creates a fictional female gathering as an alternative space to the TRC’s public forum, where the protagonists can finally speak up and share their pain.

At the same time, the author places emphasis on a poignant case of trauma and violence by dealing with such a renowned and controversial public icon as Winnie Mandela and her broadly discussed nine-day hearing. Remarkably, Winnie did not take part in the special hearings reserved to women and did not bear witness to the violence she suffered during the apartheid regime. For his part, Ndebele is less interested in seeking to justify Winnie’s alleged involvement with the crimes perpetrated by the Mandela United Football Club than in presenting her voice as one of the many millions of South African women who suffered from apartheid oppression and brutality. By removing Winnie from the footlights of scandal or the public pedestal, Ndebele thus attempts to give voice to her complex personal history *beyond* the frame of the Mandela United Football Club’s special hearing.[[25]](#footnote-25) While approaching the character of Winnie through a dialogic and self-reflective narrative lens, Ndebele conjures up a more varied and polyphonic kind of telling than the one which informed the TRC’s public proceedings: a mode of telling where silence and voices, truths and lies (or omissions) are inevitably intertwined.

***3. Njabulo Ndebele’s* The Cry of Winnie Mandela**

Focusing on the stories of four common women and on the public figure of Winifred “Winnie” Nomzamo Zanyiwe Madikizela-Mandela, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* explores the plight of women who lived in the clutches of uncertainty and loneliness, waiting for their husbands to return after years of enduring absence. As announced by the (frame) narrator in the opening scene of the novel, “this book tells the stories of four unknown women, and that of South Africa’s most famous woman, who waited”.[[26]](#footnote-26) Employing the myth of Penelope as a framework, “the ultimate symbol of a wife ‘so loyal and so true’” (CWM, p. 2), who waited for Odysseus to come home for nineteen years, Ndebele shows, as J. U. Jacobs observes, how “the lives of African women in this country have been overdetermined by the impact of their husbands’ migrant lives”:[[27]](#footnote-27)

In South Africa, the story of Penelope’s exemplary fidelity should strike a special cord. For over a century, millions of her South African descendants have unremittingly been put to the test by powerful social forces that caused their men to wander away from home for prolonged periods of time. Their fate is the product of one of the most momentous social transformations in world history. Modernism, in its ever-expanding global manifestations, took its own form in South Africa. It took the form of massive male labour migrations to the mines and factories of South Africa. in the process, an entire subcontinent witnessed massive human movement that still continues to this day (CWM, pp. 5-6).

Through the stories of Penelope’s virtual five descendants (including Winnie Mandela), Ndebele reflects on the main causes of South African men’s absence and their connections with economic and political realities rooted in colonial and apartheid policies. Chased off the land by white laws, men were forced to work in the mines and factories, and then, in the wake of the country’s economic expansion, they left to pursue other types of careers as teachers, doctors, salesmen, or priests. The banishment of non-white political organizations after the Sharpeville massacre in 1960[[28]](#footnote-28) brought about another wave of dispersion, when many husbands did not go in search of work, but vanished into exile, were detained in jail without trial, or were put on trial for political resistance and sentenced for long periods.

*The Cry of Winnie Mandela* perfectly exemplifies what Ndebele defines as the “rediscovery of the ordinary”.[[29]](#footnote-29) indeed, the author is sceptical about the aesthetic value of the so-called “protest literature” and its acting as a weapon of political struggle. Relying too much on “spectacularization”, this form of literature

documents; it indicts implicitly; it keeps the larger issues of society in our minds, obliterating the details; it provokes identification through recognition and feeling rather than through observation and analytical thought […]. it is the literature of the powerless identifying the key factor responsible for their powerlessness. Nothing beyond this can be expected of it.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Rather than lingering on a rhetoric of the “spectacle” (and continuing to denounce the oppressive conditions under apartheid), Ndebele investigates the nuances and complexities relating to the experience of four ordinary South African women who lived despite apartheid. He also reconstructs Winnie Madikizela-Mandela’s story in a different way from the TRC’s, lending a privacy and intimacy dimension to what Alex Boraine calls “a South African tragedy”.[[31]](#footnote-31) In Dorothy Driver’s words,

Ndebele draws our attention not simply to a particular experience withheld from black South Africans in real life, but also to what he sees as the problems of black South African narrative under white domination. for one thing, he has said, black South African narrative came to a halt under apartheid; for another, it has suffered from a focus on what he calls the “spectacular” rather than the “ordinary”.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Ndebele’s text is divided into two parts, with an introductory section to each part being presented by a frame narrator who points to the fictional status of the characters and of writing itself, in addition to directly addressing the reader.[[33]](#footnote-33) “Part One” consists of the personal accounts of the four “ordinary descendants” of the mythical Penelope: three of them are presented from a third-person perspective (the frame narrator), whereas one is narrated in the first person by the descendant herself (Mamello Molete, aka patience Mamello Letlala). In “Part Two”, the women speak mostly in the first person, either in a dialogue or monologue, as they evoke the figure of Winnie Mandela, “the ultimate public symbol of women-in-waiting” (CWM, pp. 72-73), while having tea together. it might be argued that, by holding imaginary conversations with Winnie, the four women act as a chorus, each of them questioning her and commenting on aspects of her public life before and after her heroic husband’s release.

As Antjie Krog notices, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* is not structured in a linear way: “there was no proper beginning to the novel, nor to the individual stories of these women; there was also no end, because the end of the book, like the conversation with Winnie, was imaginary”.[[34]](#footnote-34) Moreover, its title notwithstanding, Winnie Mandela is neither the main narrator of the story, nor its protagonist; nearly a third of the book is dedicated to the four “ordinary” women’s stories. in this regard, it is notable that the author does not use Winnie’s maiden name – Madikizela – as part of the title, suggesting how, in patriarchal societies, women’s identities are inevitably bound to those of their husbands. And this is especially true of Nelson Mandela’s wife.

In October 2013, ten years after the book came out, Ndebele published a revised edition where, in the introduction, he referred to his decision not to interview Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, since his work was to be considered as a fundamentally creative and interpretative one, instead of a biographical account (“I had not written a biography. it was a fictional interpretation of a life, not the life itself”).[[35]](#footnote-35) This statement poses an important question as to the book’s genre (tellingly, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* was not published in the united states),[[36]](#footnote-36) and Yanna Liatsos sees it as a postmodern example of a “historiographic metafiction” blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, self-conscious invention and historiography, in a creatively inspiring way.[[37]](#footnote-37)

While the four women are realistically presented in “Part One”, the book enters the dimension of fiction when they imaginatively join Winnie and the mythological Penelope in the last chapter. This transition from the real to the unreal, from empirical detail to fabulation and mythopoesis, is also anticipated by the self-conscious narrator in the introductory section to “part Two”, with its drawing on the “imaginary conversation” topos:

is it possible that our four descendants, as instances of thought turning to desire, can find themselves together in a room? Why not? The intangibility and randomness of imagination permit them absolute mobility. […] in these random journeys they take, they are subject to one requirement: to resist the urge to break out of the confines of thought into full desire. They strain at the writer’s leash, wanting to assume individuality of character. but the writer must hold on to the leash, and hope it won’t choke them. That they will have to learn to enjoy movement between the end of the leash and the hand that holds it (CWM, pp. 39-40).

Metalepsis and hybridizations operate at a formal and content level in the text. besides intermingling aspects of fiction, biography, and essay writing, Ndebele creates a mélange between “a novel and a storytelling performance and, consequently, between the reading and the listening experience”.[[38]](#footnote-38) This oral quality is particularly evident in “Part Two”, when the four women gather and share their stories, holding imaginary conversations with Winnie and playing the roles of both storytellers and listeners. in this regard, Ndebele significantly adds that

transgressions of borders between literary genres may be analogous to transgressions of borders between races, ethnicities, social classes, and geographical spaces. These categories are not necessarily eliminated, nor is it necessarily desirable that they should be; rather, the possibilities of their interactions as imaginatively explored may prompt new ways of experiencing community.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Notwithstanding his reservations about protest literature, Ndebele rejects escapism and, as the passage above suggests, he is deeply aware of the need for the South African nation to smash down the strongholds of race and ethnicity. The fluid quality of his textual discourse appears to point right in this direction.

One last observation, before discussing the two parts of the novel in more detail, must be made in relation to the author’s crucial choice to focus on female characters. in an interview with Charles Cilliers, Ndebele remarked how often he had been asked about this challenge for a male writer:

It is one of the questions that necessitated an introduction. Nadine Gordimer wrote to me of some of her impressions of reading the novel. on this particular issue she wrote: “Here’s a feminist fiction of strong emotional conviction written by a man. perhaps could only be written by a man”. I treasure this comment from a Nobel prize-winning woman of enormous literary accomplishment. I confess, however, to having been somewhat uneasy about the work being described as “a feminist fiction”. I feared that such a well-meant statement might become a label, and I fear labels. While having their uses, they do often simplify and take away depth from anything they are meant to describe. in reality if there is any feminism in *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* it was one outcome among others, rather than a driving intention.[[40]](#footnote-40)

if uncomfortable with Gordimer’s label of “feminist fiction”, he seems to agree with her idea (expressed elsewhere)[[41]](#footnote-41) that the writer is to be seen as a metaphorically androgynous being, in the sense that no strict definition of gender should limit, or affect, the writer’s encompassing imagination when telling a story. As a matter of fact, anyone who wants to tell a story that has seized hold of them can enter the lives of people who are not their own, who live in countries not their own, who are men when she is a woman, and who are women when he is a man.[[42]](#footnote-42)

All things considered, The Cry of Winnie Mandela aims to address a dimension of apartheid experience that was somewhat neglected by the TRC. The disruption of family and home, the suffering of “ordinary” women who have been “living in the zone of absence without duration” (CWM, p. 8) after their husbands’ departures, did not fall into the categories contemplated by the Commission’s criteria. As I shall argue, the author tries to create an alternative female setting, where “Penelope’s descendants” might find a place to share their stories and recover from suffering.

3.1 The opening scene is in tune with Ndebele’s portrayal of the black South African woman: “departure, waiting, and return: they define her experience of the past, present, and future. They frame her life at the centre of a great south African story not yet told” (CWM, p. 1). As anticipated, the novel tells the stories of four ordinary women who, like their mythological ancestor (Penelope), have been waiting for their husbands to return over a span of many years. These four protagonists, as Betine Van Zyl smit observes, “represent different social strata, different regions, rural and urban”.[[43]](#footnote-43)

’Mannete Mofolo enters the genealogy of Penelope when her husband decides to leave their impoverished homestead and find a job in the Johannesburg mines. He eventually starts a second family and relinquishes the responsibility of providing for the children from his first marriage. ’Mannete, however, never stops hoping that he might come back.

The husband of Delisiwe Dulcie S’khosana, Penelope’s second descendant, goes to Scotland to study medicine and become the first black doctor from his township. His studies continue for years thanks to the financial support of Delisiwe, who copes with his absence by having short-lived affairs, one of which leaves her pregnant. When he finally returns, after fourteen years, and finds Delisiwe with a four-year-old child, he divorces her, marries a nurse and moves into the rich white suburbs.

The husband of Mamello Molete – the third descendant and only character who speaks in the first person in “part one” – goes into exile and is then arrested for taking part in the anti-apartheid struggle. During the transitional period (1990- 94), when political prisoners are released, he files for divorce and marries a white comrade from the resistance movement.

The fourth descendant, Marara Joyce Baloyi, is married to a womanizer who eventually loses his job because of his moral excesses. Raised according to the principle of marital fidelity, Marara stays with her husband until his death. she subsequently buries him in a costly casket to live up to her role of a good and loyal wife – although, as she admits in her account, “in truth, he had become a rag to- wards which she no longer felt any emotion” (CWM, p. 37).

As highlighted by Jane Poyner, these are the stories of “Everywoman”.[[44]](#footnote-44) Stressful waiting is a condition shared by most south African black women, who risk being reduced to passivity by both white domination (from a colonial system to apartheid) and African patriarchal culture. David Medalie thus identifies two main peculiarities within this scenario of waiting:

The first is economic and political, for the waiting of the women is a symptom and a consequence of a society which has separated men and women, either by forcing the men to seek work elsewhere, or by driving them into exile; and the second is related to gender in- equality, which turns women into those who wait while others travel and do, which reduces them to enforced passivity.[[45]](#footnote-45)

In addition to this, men expect women to be uncompromisingly faithful. Hence Ndebele’s reference to Penelope, who waited nineteen years for Odysseus to return from his wanderings, and became “the embodiment of female virtue that gives comfort to them [men], allaying their fears and pampering their vanities” (CWM, p. 5). However, although the four descendants’ communities expect chastity and patience from them, and although the women have internalized these expectations, they do not seem to stand passively waiting: Mmofolo goes out in search of her husband, albeit unsuccessfully; Delisiwe, deeply responsive to her longings, embarks on extramarital love affairs; Mamello tries to get her husband back by writing him a letter.

Furthermore, in “Part Two”, they are bound to recover their agency by setting up an *ibandla labafazi*, a Zulu phrase that refers to a gathering of waiting women, where they can share their stories of suffering. it can be argued that this kind of forum manages to question the boundary between the “private” and the “public” as much as the TRC’s hearings did. However, I think there is a fundamental difference between the TRC’s institutionalized dimension and Ndebele’s “alternative” space: these women have the opportunity to choose the listeners they want to share their own pain with. Differently from the TRC’s public or recorded hearings, Penelope’s descendants know that they will be heard within a circumscribed female circle. This very space also allows them to engage in imaginary conversations with the most famous south African woman-in-waiting, that is to say, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela:

because Winnie waited too. The only difference between us and her is that she waited in public while we waited in the privacy of our homes, suffering in the silence of our bed- rooms. […] only Winnie was history in the making. There was no stability for her, only the inexorable unfolding of events; the constant tempting of experience. The flight of Winnie’s life promised no foreknown destinations. it was an ongoing public conversation, perhaps too public to be understood (CWM, pp. 44-45).

By touching upon aspects of Winnie’s public life, especially in light of her waiting for Nelson Mandela’s return, the four women investigate the meaning of private and public spheres, asking themselves: “is it possible to have an intimate conversation about such a public figure? Was there any intimacy about her [Winnie]?” (CWM, p. 46). At the same time, their conversations with Winnie represent a possibility to regain their female agency, “a way we can look at ourselves. A way to prevent us from becoming women who meet and cry. or if we do meet and cry, that we do so out of choice” (idem). Sam Raditlhalo notes that these women’s comments on Winnie’s life range from her much publicized and embarrassing letter to her lover, Dali Mpofu (in Delisiwe’s section), to her inability to live up to the dream of Nelson’s return (in Marara’s section),[[46]](#footnote-46) and to the uncertainty of what she would actually do on her husband’s return.[[47]](#footnote-47)

The *ibandla* stages what Poyner defines as “an informal and Africanized ‘truth and reconciliation commission’”,[[48]](#footnote-48) through which Ndebele draws attention to stories of everyday suffering which the historical Truth Commission failed to address. Liatsos also emphasizes the importance of Ndebele’s choice to give voice to ordinary women who suffered the ordinary consequences of the apartheid laws, within a private and intimate dimension counterbalancing the public spectacle of the HRVC hearings, “whose quality resembled that of the testimonial/protest literature Ndebele criticized in the 1980s, constructing innocent victims pleading to be rescued from the abuses of villainous masters”.[[49]](#footnote-49) Although I would argue that the main goal of the Commission was not to construct “victims pleading to be rescued from the abuses of villainous masters”, but rather to promote reconciliation through the truth-telling process, it is undeniable that both the TRC hearings and protest literature relied on the most spectacular and “extraordinary” aspect of apartheid violence and trauma. in contrast with this, the stories of Penelope’s descendants (including Winnie) focus on the nuclear home and its undermining by apartheid laws and the migrant labour system, which forced family members to live apart.

3.2. Following the four descendants’ imaginary conversations, Winnie’s character finally steps into the narrative: “locked into an eternal embrace with you [the four descendants] across time and distance”, Winnie perceives that she “can take the risk of unburdening myself to you without feeling violated” (CWM, p. 103).

Antjie Krog underlines the difficulty and possible danger of writing about Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, the “mother of the Nation” who was involved in the murderous actions of the Mandela United Football Club, her group of “bodyguards”,[[50]](#footnote-50) a fact which emerged before and during the work of the TRC: “it was never easy to be against Winnie, but it was even more difficult to be on her side”.[[51]](#footnote-51) Krog’s assertion poses a well-known quandary as to Winnie’s alleged double-dealing and the nature or extent of her involvement in the struggle against apartheid and its aftermath.

In Ndebele’s novel, Winnie, “the child of major Theunis Swanepoel born in his torture chambers” (CWM, p. 125), recalls her past history of suffering – i.e., the separation from Nelson; the police searching and “violating” the intimacy of her house; the abuses and brutalities endured at the hand of major Theunis Swanepoel, a security policeman; the banishment in Brandfort – and depicts a personal journey which turned her into the very “law of struggle” (idem), “the embodiment of disruption” (CWM, p. 108). she describes herself as the offspring of an ominously extreme situation: “I am not a politician. I am what politics made me. What politics made me, is not me. But what politics made me has become a part of me, a part of what I am” (CWM, p. 136).

Ndebele does not seem to justify Winnie’s alleged crimes, nor does he want to judge her choices and actions. Rather, his portrayal of her becomes a metaphor for an ambiguous “grey zone” within the liberation movement, which was not immune from allegations of gross human rights violations, as occurred, for instance, in its training camps in Tanzania. in this sense, Brenda Munro’s definition of Winnie as “the mother of the struggle who fell from grace”[[52]](#footnote-52) is enlightening, because it captures the feelings of both love and hatred that she would inspire among south Africans, as well as the violence she suffered and the one she endorsed in her fight against the apartheid regime. The following extract from the novel conveys the contradictions and the ambivalences of Winnie’s character, “representing the ambiguity of post-apartheid society itself”:[[53]](#footnote-53)

I am your pleasure and your pain, your beauty and your ugliness. your solution and your mistake. your hell and your heaven. I am your squatter camp shack and your million rand mansion. I am all of you who maim and rape. I am all of you who give love and succour. I am your pride and your shame. your honour and your humiliation (CWM, p. 137).

The complexity of Winnie’s personality is further reflected in the dialogical structure that informs the narrative section focusing on her character. Aiming to unburden herself and share her personal story with Penelope’s other descendants, Winnie engages in an intimate conversation with a part of herself, her private self, and, in doing so, she tries to leave aside the “‘false’ self of public posturing”, as Poyner points out:[[54]](#footnote-54)

your testimonies have restored to me some measure of self-criticism. I’m easy and calm. Although I’m not in your physical presence, I’ve stretched my legs in front of me, and feel deeply the comfort of your presence. […] I, too, Winnie Mandela, will speak to Winnie. I’ll write to her. Address her. I’ll plead with her, cajole her, charm her, scold and rebuke her, interpret her, ask her to answer all your questions, and respond to your insights, if she can remember them all. I, Winnie Mandela, holding on to my precious space of anonymity, will speak to my namesake (CWM, pp. 110-11).

Adopting a confessional mode, “Winnie” proceeds to give a self-questioning and non-linear account of some episodes from her life by addressing the four wo- men, her public personality (“Winnie Mandela”), and, sometimes, her former husband, Nelson. Her discourse unfolds through a chain of self-referential questions, as the following passages illustrate:

You could be anywhere. Are you at home? Are you in a court? Are you at the clinic? Are you shopping? Are you at a rally? Here’s hoping you arrived early. Are you at a funeral? Are you dropping in on the poor and the needy at the squatter camp? (CWM, p. 111).

What damage has been done to me by the men’s punches all over my body? Huge, hairy, fists with sausage fingers. […] Did I become your daughter, Major Swanepoel? Was your way around the immorality Act to play out your desire through violating a woman’s body by torture? (CWM, p. 120).

And he continued to love me, desiring me with the same purity of memory. And me? What about me? Did I remember his body? I’m terrified by the possibility of answers (CWM, p. 131).[[55]](#footnote-55)

These are just a few examples showing Winnie’s need to undertake a journey through her memories in order to reconstruct a “truthful” version of herself. When compared with the TRC’s testimonies, this dialogic and self-reflective strategy develops according to a different kind of telling. people who wanted to tell their stories before the Commission were first asked to give statements by answering a series of pre-set questions. once selected as potential witnesses, the whole testimonial act resulted in a guided process, where the accounts of those classified as “perpetrators” were punctuated by cross-examination on behalf of the Amnesty Committee and/or the family of the victim, while victims’ testimonies were usually “directed” by the commissioners’ interventions. Consequently, the type of testimony per- formed at the TRC public hearings lacked the power of agency and polyphonic dimension characterizing Winnie’s account in Ndebele’s text.

It is then no surprise that, in the section of the novel entirely dedicated to Winnie’s account, Ndebele should also refer to Winnie’s TRC hearing, the spectacle and buzz of which collide with the intimacy and privacy connoting the waiting women’s *ibandla*. Describing the hearing as a “hell” and a “heaven”, Ndebele’s character remembers saying on that occasion that she could not take responsibility for things which went wrong:

“so”, I said to the world, “you want me to acknowledge my involvement in ‘terrible things’? How can I make a definitive acknowledgement of responsibility for events that arose out of multiple causalities? How can I take responsibility for actions engendered by conditions that fostered human folly? Tell me. The least I can do is to acknowledge some events. They happened. but I would never go on to do what many want me to do. I will never accept responsibility. This allows you all, all of millions out there, wondering about me, to make your choice. you can either love me or condemn me. Take your choice […]” (CWM, pp. 134-35).

As a matter of fact, neither did the real Winnie Madikizela-Mandela confess her wrongdoings before the TRC. Following Archbishop Tutu’s plea, she rather acknowledged that some “things went horribly wrong”[[56]](#footnote-56) and that she was deeply sorry for that, but, at the same time, she was very careful not to admit any personal responsibility for those actions. Conversely, the context of the novel allows Winnie to relinquish “the art of technical denial” (CWM, p. 134) that she supposedly employed at the hearing, and to confide sincerely in Penelope’s descendants regarding her true feelings and emotions. in this connection, Driver observes that “responding to the intimacy the four women offer, Winnie gives an account of herself that abandons political posturing and turns instead to self-reflection and self-doubt”.[[57]](#footnote-57) Ndebele transforms Winnie into a spokesperson for a private dimension of reconciliation when she expresses doubts on the kind of “collective” and “public” reconciliation fostered by the TRC:

There is one thing I will not do. It is my only defence of the future. I will not be an instrument for validating the politics of reconciliation. for me, reconciliation demands my an- nihilation. No. you, all of you, have to reconcile not with me, but with the meaning of me. for my meaning is the endless human search for the right thing to do. I am your pleasure and your pain, your beauty and your ugliness. your solution and your mistake. your hell and your heaven. […] The journey to your future goes through the dot of loving me, despite myself, on the world map that lays out journeys towards all kinds of human fulfilment (CWM, pp. 137-38).

Winnie’s opposition to becoming an instrument of reconciliation in the new South Africa, along with her wish to be accepted despite her shifty sides, undermine the thrust of the TRC, the goal of which was to establish as coherent a picture as possible of apartheid history – its nature, causes, and the violations committed – in order to move on and build a better future. Liatsos comments on this:

Where the South African truth commission desired to abolish the contradictory perspectives that undermined the creation of a single, moral conclusion of apartheid’s historical memory, Mandela advocates a dual orientation toward the past, whose contradictory insights stimulate the imaginary deftness – that which, according to Ndebele, is contained in “the ordinary” life of the south African black consciousness, and constitutes the formal effects of his latest novel.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Foregrounding Winnie Mandela’s inner conflicts and their relationships with a nuanced and multilayered reality also means questioning the philosophy that underlay the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s work. The author’s interest in imagining Winnie’s thoughts and emotions is even more evident in the corresponding section of her account in the 2013 edition of the novel. This is, in fact, the section in which Ndebele makes more revisions, especially in relation to Winnie’s memory of the TRC special hearing. He includes some passages from the heartrending testimonies by Nicodemus and Caroline Sono (whose son, Corlett “Lolo” Sono, had been kidnapped and killed by the Mandela United Football Club), in addition to imagining Winnie’s reaction to their words. This extract from her interior monologue confirms her resistance to publicly acknowledge the harrowing consequences of her actions for the black community itself:

It was hard listening to Mr and Mrs Sono. Her testimony, in particular, was excruciating. When she opened her arms to pull towards her bosom an imaginary son returning, crying out, and her husband wiped his right eye with a white handkerchief, it was searing. What they felt was real. I knew of the facts that caused their feelings. but could I acknowledge publicly those facts? My posture at the hearing was my answer. So I listened: my face showing no emotions, except a simulated sneer, a contemptuous chuckle: inner confirmations of my external repudiations. The turmoil inside of me, I would not, would never, show.[[59]](#footnote-59)

This passage points to the presence of a “double consciousness” in Winnie’s character, with a public posturing self showing no pity and a private “I” caught up in an emotional turmoil. Winnie’s words might also be interpreted as a way for Ndebele to criticize the public spectacle begotten by the TRC hearings. He seems to read Winnie’s decision not to acknowledge her wrongdoings at the hearing as a form of protest against the TRC’s procedures, rather than as a sheer manifestation of cynical indifference. Indeed, it is not long before Winnie proves to be perfectly aware of the brutalities and crimes committed by the liberation movement when she asks: “How possible is it to lead a lawful life in future after a lawless struggle?”[[60]](#footnote-60) The 2013 edition of the novel, then, sets out to scrutinize the complexity of Winnie Mandela’s character, of which justice Michael Stegmann’s definition as a “calm, composed, deliberate, unprincipled and unblushing liar” (CWM, p. 136) seemed to catch only one side among many.[[61]](#footnote-61)

3.3. The last chapter of the novel, entitled “A stranger”, provides an example of what Van Zyl smit defines as “a touch of magic realism”,[[62]](#footnote-62) that is to say, the appearance of Penelope herself in the story. While travelling on a “holiday that validates a special kind of reconciliation: reconciliation with themselves” (CWM, p. 142), the five women (the four ordinary descendants and Winnie) meet a white woman with a strange accent who asks them for a lift to Durban. The stranger turns out to be Odysseus’s wife, Penelope, the very (Western) paradigm of the faithful and submissive spouse.

Penelope says she has embarked on a special kind of reconciliation pilgrimage for more than two thousand years and expresses her desire to meet the five women of the *ibandla*. As she explains to her African descendants, there is a part of her own story that “has never been told” (CWM, p. 145) and that stems from the end of the (male-oriented) Homeric poem, when Odysseus left their home once more to go and perform cleansing rituals. This is when she decided to leave him, too, and go “on my own cleansing pilgrimage” (*idem*):

[Odysseus] should have returned not only to Greece, but to me as well. it was not enough for him after our rather anxious first lovemaking in nineteen years, to give me an account of his adventures as if he could silence my years of waiting with one night of love- making and storytelling. We needed to go on holiday. For him to claim civic responsibility towards Greece was not enough. He also needed to assert personal responsibility towards me. My Odysseus had no idea he had to reconcile himself with me as well. But such was the state of the world’s consciousness at the time. Nevertheless, I did not want to lament that realisation; I made the decision to undertake my own journey (*idem*).

In a similar manner to Winnie, Ndebele’s Penelope takes pains to establish her own agency and affirm the right to autonomous decision-making. one can thus notice with Krog that, “instead of Africa being dictated to by a Western frame- work, Ndebele smartly uses Winnie to create an alternative route and African framework for Penelope”:[[63]](#footnote-63) this “new” Penelope has given up her traditional role of patient, sympathetic, and faithful wife, choosing instead to actively mould her own destiny.

Driver asserts that Ndebele “initially uses [the myth] in the novel in order to evoke the European attempt to redefine an African femininity and thus to represent Europe in its moment of overbearing colonial contact with Africa”;[[64]](#footnote-64) but, by subverting Penelope’s myth through the example of her five extra-genealogical descendants and a different portrayal of the Greek woman herself, the author ends up rewriting the encounter between Africa and Europe, so that an all-embracing “Woman” can now claim her own agency and femininity. in the upshot, concludes Van Zyl smit,

Ndebele has freed not only Penelope from the confines of unconditional waiting for and subjection to her husband but has made the new Penelope the symbol of hope for women in the twenty-first century, not only south African women, but women everywhere. He has set Penelope free, and through her, all women. Women should have the courage of their convictions to undertake their own journeys.[[65]](#footnote-65)

In her engaging study, *Black Odysseys: The Homeric Odyssey in the African Diaspora since 1939,* Justine McConnell explores the *Odyssey* paradigm as it has emerged through the works of postcolonial poets, novelists, playwrights, and directors of African descent since 1939, the year Martiniquan Aimé Césaire published the first version of *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*. Notably, McConnell highlights a striking difference between some postcolonial responses to the *Odyssey* and Ndebele’s rewriting of the Greek myth. The journey undertaken by the contemporary Penelopes in *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* is no longer conceived as centripetal (in line with the nostos trajectory), but as centrifugal, outward-directed, and actively exploring:

These modern Penelopes are learning to forge identities for themselves – in part similar to the Homeric Odysseus achieving his long-sought *nostos* by asserting his identity at home, yet these women have no wish to “return”: their journey is, in James Joyce’s terms, centrifugal rather than centripetal.[[66]](#footnote-66)

McConnell observes that postcolonial responses to the odyssey, although at- tuned to different geopolitical contexts, tend to focus on Odysseus’s desire to return home and that they place particular emphasis on the nostos-like parable concerning regained identity. in a postcolonial reality, “it is the theme of returning home (metaphorically or literally), and of regaining an identity that has been temporarily taken away by the hardships that the hero has suffered, which has particular resonance”.[[67]](#footnote-67) on the other hand, Ndebele’s “modern Penelopes have no intention of returning to any past situation: these women are searching for independent identities, but there is no doubt that their quest will be a centrifugal one”.[[68]](#footnote-68) Quite significantly, in the final chapter they are all travelling on a minibus together and singing the *Iphi’ndlela* song (“Where is the way?”, CWM, p. 139).

Echoing one of Winnie’s previous statements – “you’re even more. you are mil- lions of other women who are on this journey with you” (CWM, p. 142) – the five travellers stand for the women who have decided to undertake an identity journey (in a literal and metaphorical sense) towards freedom and self-reconciliation, after enduring the suffering caused by apartheid and a patriarchal society. The epilogue in the 2013 edition confirms the crucial importance of women’s interconnectedness and sisterhood:

They cannot explain why they miss Penelope so deeply after they have just been with her and so briefly. maybe they desire to know the worlds she has been to and new ones she has yet to visit. soon they sense their inexplicable longing as disorientation. They have to restore the sense of their presence to one another. They are on a pilgrimage of their own making to recover intimacy, affection, resolve, and their presence in the world.[[69]](#footnote-69)

Within the framework of a revisited Penelope myth, Ndebele’s novel envisages a relatively private space where “ordinary” women can share their personal stories. By rejecting labels, they “reclaim [their] right to be wounded without [their] pain having to turn [them] into an example of woman as victim” (CWM, p. 35). Ndebele offers the five half-fictional descendants (alongside Penelope) the opportunity to regain their own agency and freedom of choice within a female companionship dimension.

*The Cry of Winnie Mandela* thereby provides an alternative to the “spectacle” of the TRC’s hearings, as well as a critique of the Commission’s selection criteria concerning the status of “victims”. Ndebele is interested in posing questions about the extent to which the TRC succeeded in dealing with “ordinary” trauma, especially in connection with women and family life. When interviewed on the occasion of the publication of the novel’s revised edition, he argued that very few black families had actually benefited as yet from South Africa’s democratic transition:

Circumstances, I’m afraid, do not appear to have changed significantly in the last 20 years. Let’s face it, it has taken some 200 years of colonisation and imperialism to systematically destroy the African family in South Africa. When we achieved our democracy in 1994, our new government did not focus on ‘the family’ in its various manifestations, as a priority in the search for a new social order. Equally so, did we not have a national project of the century to rebuild the human spatial environment? Our living conditions continue to assail the family. Many fathers, uncles, brothers, husbands and sons went down in Marikana,[[70]](#footnote-70) dislocating more families in a continuous replay of what the British began in breaking up the African family to exploit African labour. Colonial legislators must be celebrating in their graves for their continuing achievement. Black, African mining magnates have accorded new legitimacy to this history.[[71]](#footnote-71)

The Cry of Winnie Mandela can be approached as a socially constructive example of historiographic metafiction aiming to address issues and gender realities that South African politics has somewhat pushed aside. According to Ndebele’s well-known idea of a “rediscovery of the ordinary”, the book participates in “confront[ing] the human tragedy together with the immense responsibility to create a new society”.[[72]](#footnote-72)

To cite this article: Francesca Mussi, “The TRC and Njabulo Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*: Claiming an Ordinary Female Space”, *Anglistica Pisana* XIII, No. 1-2 (2016), pp. 79-100.

1. “Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report”, Vol. 1, Chapter 2, par. 2; url: http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/Volume%201.pdf [last accessed October 8, 2016]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history* (Baltimore: johns Hopkins U. P.., 1996), p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Those who wish to critically explore this dynamics in more detail can start from Charles Villa-Vicencio and Wilhelm Verwoerd (eds), *Looking Back Reaching Forward: Reflections on the Truth and reconciliation Commission of South Africa* (London: Zed books, 2000) and Lyn S. Graybill, *Truth & Reconciliation in South Africa: Miracle or Model?* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without forgiveness* (London: Rider books, 2000 [1999]), p. 219. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Alex Boraine, *A Country Unmasked: Inside South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Cape Town: OUP Southern Africa, 2000), p. 362. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, pp. 214-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne U.P., 1969), p. 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See Mark Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing: Law and Literature in the Time of a Truth Commission* (Stanford: Stanford U. P., 2007), pp. 24-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. “Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report”, Vol. 4, Chapter 10, par. 17; url: http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/Volume%204.pdf [last accessed October 8, 2016]. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Michael Rothberg, “Decolonizing Trauma studies: A Response”, *Studies in the Novel*, Xl: 1-2 (March 2008), p. 228. On the need for a re-assessment of trauma theory from a postcolonial perspective, see also Irene Visser, “Trauma Theory and postcolonial literary studies”, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, XLVII: 3 (2011), pp. 270-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma out of Bounds* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See on this point Robin Visel, “A Half-Colonization: The problem of the White Colonial Woman Writer”, *Kunapipi*, X: 3 (1988), pp. 39-45. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Fiona Ross, *Bearing Witness. Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), p. 17. Although this aspect cannot be dealt with in detail here, it should be kept in mind that there is a significant number of exceptions to the received idea of the South African “passive woman”, as shown by South African female authors writing about their (extra) ordinary lives. in the last few decades, their literary production has thrown light on the private and public daily harassment of black and coloured women, both at home and in the outside world, or throughout the struggle (see Sindiwe Magona, Zoë Wicomb, Miriam Tlali, and Ellen Kuzwayo, among others). For further reading, see M. J. Daymond (ed.), *South African feminisms: Writing, Theory, and Criticism, 1990-1994* (New York and London: Garland, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Fiona Ross, *Bearing Witness. Women and the Truth and reconciliation Commission in South Africa*, p. 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Quoted in Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull* (New York: Random House, 1998 [London: Vintage Books, 1999]), p. 272. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Annalisa Oboe, “The TRC Women’s Hearings as Performance and Protest in the New South Africa”, *Research in African Literatures*, XXXVIII: 3 (2007), p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Adrienne Rich, “Cartographies of silence”, in *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974- 1977* (New York: Norton, 1978), pp. 17-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Annalisa Oboe, “The TRC Women’s Hearings as Performance and Protest in the New South Africa”, p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. “Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report”, Vol. 1, Chapter 6, Appendix 2, par. 23; uRl: http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/Volume%201.pdf [last accessed October 8, 2016]. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Ibidem*, par. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Sheila Meintjes, “‘Gendered Truth?’ Legacies of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission”, *African Journal on Conflict Resolution,* special issue on Gender and Transitional Justice in South Africa, IX: 2 (2009), p. 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull*, p. 273. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See Mark Libin, “‘Can the Subaltern Be Heard?’ Response and Responsibility in South Africa’s Human Spirit”, *Textual Practice*, XVII: 1 (2003), pp. 119-40. In relation to the “subaltern” concept, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Colombia U. P., 1994), pp. 66-111. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The Mandela United Football Club’s special hearing took place in Johannesburg between 24 November and 4 December 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Njabulo Ndebele, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (Cape Town: David Philip publishers, 2003 [Banbury: Ayebia Clarke, 2004]), p. 1. Subsequent citations refer to the Ayebia Clarke edition and will be given in the text within brackets, with the acronym CWM followed by page numbers. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. J. U. Jacobs, “Diasporic identity in Contemporary South African fiction”, *English in Africa*, XXXIII: 2 (2006), p. 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The tragedy that went down in history as the Sharpeville massacre (21 march 1960) refers to an episode of violence occurring at the police station in the township of Sharpeville (in former Transvaal). A crowd of five thousand protesters against the pass laws was eventually attacked by the police, who later claimed that the marchers had begun to stone them. As a consequence, sixty-nine people were shot death and about two hundred suffered injuries. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See Njabulo Ndebele, “The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa”, in *South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (Manchester: Manchester U. P., 1994), pp. 41-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. *Ibidem*, p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Alex Boraine, “A South African Tragedy: Winnie Madikizela-Mandela”, in *A Country Unmasked: Inside South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, pp. 221-57. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Dorothy Driver, “‘On these premises I am government’: Njabulo Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* and the Reconstructions of Gender and Nation”, in Maria Olaussen and Christina Angelfors (eds), Africa Writing Europe: Opposition, Juxtaposition, Entanglement (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. In connection with this last element, it is worth underlining that the narrator tries to involve the reader through the use of first plural person pronouns or adjectives: “Let’s begin with” (CWM, p. 1), “Let’s consider” (CWM, p. 7), or “Our second descendant” (CWM, p. 17). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Antjie Krog, “What the Hell is Penelope Doing in Winnie’s Story?”, English in Africa, XXXVI: 1 (2009), p. 56. The following contribution by Krog is also helpful in relation to the TRC and women’s participation: “locked into loss and silence: Testimonies of gender and Violence at the South African Truth Commission”, in Caroline O .N. Moser and Fiona C. Clark (eds), *Victims, Perpetrators or actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence* (New York and London: Zed Books, 2001), pp. 203-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Njabulo Ndebele, “Introduction” to *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, rev. ed. (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2013), Kindle Edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. In his introduction to the new edition, Ndebele mentions the “experimental” nature of the novel, the book’s small size and the fact that the topic was rather distant from an American readership, as some of the possible reasons why *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* was not published in the USA. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Yanna Liatsos argues that “[in] assuming the form of a historiographic metafiction, the novel challenges the stable boundaries separating fact from fiction to explore the potential of their cross-fertilization”. See “Truth, Confession and the Post-Apartheid Black Consciousness in Njabulo Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*”, in Jo Gill (ed.), *Modern Confessional Writing: New Critical Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 123 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. *Idem*. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Njabulo Ndebele, “introduction” to *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, rev. ed. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Charles Cilliers, “Winnie’s Cry Resonates a Decade on”, City Press, November 3, 2013; url: http://www.news24.com/Archives/City-press/Winnies-cry-resonates-a-decade-on-20150430 [last accessed October 8, 2016]. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See Nadine Gordimer, “Selecting My Stories” (1975), in *The essential Gesture: Writing, Politics and Places*, ed. Stephen Clingman (Harmondsworth: penguin, 1988), pp. 111-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Njabulo Ndebele, “Introduction” to *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, rev. ed. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Betine Van Zyl smit, “From Penelope to Winnie Mandela: Women Who Waited”, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, XV: 3 (September 2008), p. 402. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Jane Poyner, “Rerouting Commitment in the Postapartheid Canon: TRC Narratives and the Problem of Truth”, in Janet Wilson, Cristina Șandru, and Sarah Lawson Welsh (eds), *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New Directions for the New Millennium* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. David Medalie, “*The Cry of Winnie Mandel*a: Njabulo Ndebele’s post-Apartheid Novel”, *English Studies in Africa: a Journal of the Humanities*, XLIX: 2 (2006), p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. In connection with this, Driver highlights the fact that “for many black South Africans, the novel implies, the reunion of these iconic figures, Winnie and Nelson Mandela, would have symbolized the restoration of the African nation”. see Dorothy Driver, “‘On these premises I am government’: Njabulo Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* and the Reconstructions of Gender and Nation”, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. See Sam Raditlhalo, “‘Private, Intimate Conversations’: *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* – Njabulo Ndebele”, in Njabulo Ndebele, The Cry of Winnie Mandela, rev. ed. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Jane Poyner, “Rerouting Commitment in the Postapartheid Canon: TRC Narratives and the Problem of Truth”, p. 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Yanna Liatsos, “Truth, Confession and the post-Apartheid Black Consciousness in Njabulo Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*”, p. 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. A notorious episode that soon comes to mind concerns the kidnapping, beating, and killing of fourteen-year-old Stompie Moeketsi Seipei in 1989. This black boy was an ANC activist and a suspected police informant, who was eventually murdered by Jerry Richardson, a member of “Mama Winnie’s” team. On the Mandela United Football Club’s slaughters and Winnie Mandela’s nine-day public hearing, see Alex Boraine, “A South African Tragedy: Winnie Madikizela-Mandela”. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Antjie Krog, “What the Hell is Penelope Doing in Winnie’s Story?”, p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Brenda Munro, “Nelson, Winnie and the Politics of Gender”, in Rita Barnard (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to nelson Mandela* (New York: Cup, 2014), p. 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. David Medalie, “*The Cry of Winnie Mandela*: Njabulo Ndebele’s Post-Apartheid Novel”, p. 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Jane Poyner, “Rerouting Commitment in the Postapartheid Canon: TRC Narratives and the Problem of Truth”, p. 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. The first extract refers to the moment in which Winnie begins to address and question her public self; the other two passages are recollections of, respectively, her being tortured by Major Swanepoel and her longing for an encounter with Nelson. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. In relation to this, see Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, pp. 134-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Dorothy Driver, “‘On these premises I am government’: Njabulo Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* and the Reconstructions of Gender and Nation”, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Yanna Liatsos, “Truth, Confession and the Post-Apartheid Black Consciousness in Njabulo Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*”, p. 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Njabulo Ndebele, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, rev. ed. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. *Idem*. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Michael Stegmann was the presiding judge at the 1991 trial investigating Winnie Mandela’s involvement in the abductions and beatings of four boys, one of whom, the already mentioned Stompie Moeketsi Seipei, was later found dead. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Betine Van Zyl smit, “From Penelope to Winnie Mandela – Women Who Waited”, p. 404. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Antjie Krog, “What the Hell is Penelope Doing in Winnie’s Story?”, p. 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Dorothy Driver, “‘On these premises I am government’: Njabulo Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* and the Reconstructions of Gender and Nation”, p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Betine Van Zyl smit, “From Penelope to Winnie Mandela – Women Who Waited”, p. 404. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Justine McConnell, *Black odysseys: The Homeric Odyssey in the African Diaspora since 1939* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p. 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. *Idem*. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. *Idem*. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Njabulo Ndebele, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, rev. ed. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. The Marikana Massacre, or Lonmin Strike, began in August 2012 as a wildcat strike at a mine owned by Lonmin (a British public company) in the Marikana area, in the North West province of South Africa. There were a series of violent episodes involving the South African police service, Lonmin security, the leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), and the strikers themselves. As a result, thirty-four (or thirty-six) people died, the vast majority of whom were striking mineworkers who got killed on 16 August 2012. Only in 1960 at Sharpeville did the South African security forces respond with such brutality against civilians. For a collection of media articles and press releases which reconstruct this tragic event, along with comments on the findings of the commission of inquiry specifically appointed by president Jacob Zuma, see “Marikana Media Articles and Press Releases”, 2012-15; url: http://seri-sa.org/index.php/10-advocacy/media/142-marikana-media-articles-and-press-releases [last accessed October 8, 2016]. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. This interview is in Charles Cilliers, “Winnie’s Cry Resonates a Decade on”. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Njabulo Ndebele, “The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa”, p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)