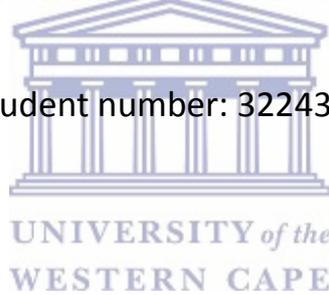


Unfinished Lives: The Biographies of Nokuthula Simelane

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A mini-thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Magister Artium in the Department of History, University of the Western Cape.

ABSTRACT

Nokuthula Simelane, born near Bethal in Mpumalanga, joined the ANC's armed-wing uMKhonto we Sizwe (MK) as a courier while studying at the University of Swaziland in the early 1980s. In 1983 she set out on a mission to South Africa on the pretext of purchasing clothing for her up-coming graduation. Simelane was however abducted, and has since not been heard from nor has her body been found. Her disappearance was one of those examined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa.

These are some facts about Simelane. This thesis seeks to explore how Simelane's biographies manifest themselves across multiple genres and in so doing determine their similarities and differences, with a view to understanding the difficulties of producing the biography of a missing person. The genres of biography I examine relation to Simelane are: the TRC's Amnesty Committee (AC) hearings, the Human Rights Violations Committee (HRVC) hearing, their transcripts and the TRC reports; a documentary film called *Betrayal* directed by Mark Kaplan; and a statue of Simelane located in Bethal sculpted by Ruhan Janse van Vuuren.

In relation to the TRC I found that its production of Simelane is dictated by the framework established by its mandate. A genre of multiple narrations, Simelane, as produced by the TRC is produced by multiple auto/biographers whose speech is filtered through a process of interpretation. Simelane is produced mostly by men, who are also her perpetrators. *Betrayal* allows for greater creativity since it utilizes interviews, photographs, re-enactments, music and song. We are given insight into her family's trauma, their perceptions of Simelane and Simelane's personal life and her life as a freedom fighter. Simelane's statue and its biographies reveal an experience that can be paralleled to

Simelane, the person, as it too undergoes violence by means of theft and vandalism as its sacredness is diminished. The statue also prompts the creation of other genres of biography such as poetry on the plaque and at the statue's unveiling. This thesis argues that each genre determines the production of Simelane's biography/biographies within the prescripts and freedoms of the particular genre.



PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

I, Brent Abrahams, hereby declare that 'Unfinished Lives: The Biographies of Nokuthula Simelane' is my own work. I understand what plagiarism is and all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.



Brent Abrahams

May 2018



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This thesis would not have been possible without the support of various people, to whom I am greatly indebted.

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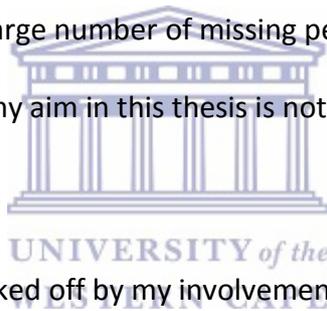
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INTRODUCTION

Nokuthula Aurelia Simelane, born in 1960 near Bethal in Mpumalanga, was the first-born child of Mathew and Ernestina Simelane. In the early 1980s, Simelane went to the University of Swaziland on a scholarship where she became a member of Umkhonto we Sizwe's Transvaal Urban Machinery. In September 1983, Simelane set out on a mission to South Africa as a courier, on the pretext of purchasing attire for her upcoming graduation. She was abducted (at the Carlton Centre, Johannesburg where she had arranged to meet her contact) by the Soweto Intelligence Unit, which had infiltrated MK organizations in Swaziland.¹ Since her abduction in 1983 she was never seen nor heard from again by her family and joined the ranks of a large number of missing persons. While I begin with these bare biographical details of fact my aim in this thesis is not to provide an empirical ordered narrative of Simelane's life.



My interest in Simelane was sparked off by my involvement in the Forensic History Project in the History Department at the University of the Western Cape where I was exposed to reading material on missing anti-apartheid cadres, exhumations, nameless corpses and the identification of remains. Within the abundance of articles I read, one name stood out, a name I had encountered in an online news outlet a few weeks prior – the name, Nokuthula Simelane. Intrigued, I set out to learn more about her life – her biography. Having always had an interest in the genre of biography of significant people but also having developed a critical approach to biography in one of my postgraduate courses, Political Biography and the National Liberation Struggle, I found a means to couple this interest with my inquiry into Simelane's life. Thus, instead of a biographical focus on renowned South African leaders and

¹ *Truth and Reconciliation of South Africa Report*, Volume 2, Chapter 3, Subsection 31 (Cape Town, Juta, 1998), p. 234

freedom fighters, my work focuses on a lesser-known combatant. Furthermore, two events also inspired my work on Simelane – the reburial of Norman Peterson in Paarl and the exhumations of PAC affiliated freedom fighters buried in unmarked graves at Mamelodi Cemetery. The reburial, a political spectacle, revealed numerous biographies of one person being crafted by different people, often with their own agendas. The exhumations were very much about giving the many families of the victims an opportunity to see the bones and attain a long elusive closure. These are events which have not been carried out in the biography of the still missing Simelane.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), in dealing with politically motivated abductions brought to its attention, distinguished five categories of human rights violations to identify each case by. Simelane's case fell within the category 'abductions and enforced disappearances'.² The *Report* defines enforced disappearances as 'persons last seen in the custody of the security forces, as well as those forcibly and unlawfully abducted by other known and unknown parties'.³ Although, today, Simelane still remains missing and the search and inquest into her whereabouts are ongoing, she has been the subject of biographic expression and production throughout the contemporary democratic era of South Africa. These productions, which I will refer to as genres and mediums of biography and examine in this thesis are: the TRC reports and transcripts from the Human Rights Violations Committee (HRVC) and Amnesty Hearing (AH) testimonies; the documentary film,

² In addition to category (a) abduction and enforced disappearances, the categories include (b) disappearances in exile, (c) disappearances during periods of unrest, (d) disappearances regarded as out of the Commission's mandate, and (e) cases of indeterminate cause. See *Report of the Human Rights Violations Committee: Abductions, Disappearances and Missing Persons*. Volume 6, Section 4, Chapter 1 (Cape Town: Juta, 1998), p. 519.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 520.

Betrayal by Mark Kaplan; and the statue located in Bethal, sculpted by Ruhan Janse van Vuuren.⁴

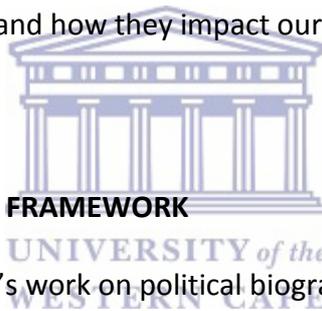
In my analysis of the TRC – the report as it relates to the Soweto Security Branch, and abductions, interrogations and killings, and the hearings wherein the various perpetrators, witnesses, and Mathew Simelane, Simelane’s father, testified – I pay close attention to what witnesses reveal about Simelane and themselves in relation to Simelane. In testifying they are engaging in auto/biographic narration. Furthermore, in each hearing, the person testifying is not alone, but there are various other role-players engaging in dialogue with them and therefore influencing the auto/biographic production. *Betrayal* is a documentary film directed by Mark Kaplan and completed in 2006. The documentary film depicts Kaplan’s, along with psychologist, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela’s and Nokuthula Simelane’s sister’s quest for the truth regarding Simelane’s fate and whereabouts. The film narrates her childhood and her coming to age as a liberation fighter through interviews and footage of key role-players in each phase of her life – from her birth and childhood, to her schooling and adolescence, and her duties and dealings as a MK member. The film also depicts the impact of Simelane’s absence on her relatives. Along with the auto/biographical narration inherent in the interviews, auto/biographic production also emerges in the film’s use of photographs, music and song, and through re-enactments. The statue of Simelane, erected in 2009, and standing tall upon a pedestal, portrays a barefooted Simelane in graduation attire. In its brief existence the statue has been subjected to vandalism and theft as the public respond to the political climate of its era. In addition to the artistic creation of

⁴ It is worth noting that other productions of Simelane exist: the ongoing court case against Simelane’s alleged killers, and also a painting by Christa Myburgh, ‘Ode to Nokuthula’. Although I may refer to these productions on occasion, they are not the focus of this thesis.

Simelane and the physical experiences of the statue, auto/biographic production also occurs in the unveiling of the statue and the inscription of a poem on the plaque.

AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTION

This thesis seeks to explore how Simelane's biographies manifest themselves across different genres and what the differences or similarities are between them, with a view to understanding the difficulties of producing the biography of a missing person. The central aim is to acquire a better understanding of the production of Simelane's biographies and thus understand how a missing cadre is perceived and remembered in post-apartheid South Africa. The research question of this thesis is therefore to determine how a missing person is produced across multiple genres and how they impact our understanding and perception of Simelane today.



THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis draws on Ciraj Rassool's work on political biography. In his PhD dissertation 'The Individual, Auto/biography and History', Rassool describes his initial approach as an attempt to retrieve a chronological account of the political life of Isaac Bangani Tabata, and in so doing, deal with the inadequacies of resistance historiography as it relates to the Unity Movement. However, as Rassool's research developed he soon began to notice a trend in the historiography of resistance history and political biography. Political lives, Rassool found, tended to follow a conventional biographical narration. Conventional biography has the tendency of tracing a subject's development and growth into a prominent political figure – narrating the 'acts, events and works' thereof. In a conventional biography, the biographic subject's life is produced empirically and is characterised by its adherence to chronology, order and coherence. Being inherently masculinist, conventional biography not only focuses

on the undertakings of outstanding men, but in omitting the influence of the private and personal aspects of a life, it highlights the stability, rationality and autonomy of the subject in his undertakings.⁵

South African resistance history's adherence to a conventional biographical paradigm is derived from the work of Thomas Karis and Gwendolen Carter. Together Karis and Carter set out to collect, 'chronologically [arrange] and [group] thematically' political documents and materials related to the black political resistance movements against apartheid.⁶ Their work, however, was not merely an exercise of collecting documentary material. Their work, Rassool asserts 'establish[ed] a framework for the narration of South African resistance history'.⁷ One particular volume in Karis and Carter's collection contains photographs and short biographical details of particular political leaders. These details include the leaders' respective roles in the resistance history of South Africa. This volume's legacy is evident today, as resistance and national histories, according to Rassool, are told by focusing on the life or lives of the leaders of resistance – national and resistance histories told through the medium of biography. A charismatic leader's life, actions and ideas become a window through which to give account of the history of resistance and a political movement's part in it. This biographical approach to history is teleological in nature and is characterised by a 'biographical illusion'. The 'biographical illusion', a term coined by Pierre Bourdieu, is described by Rassool as

⁵ C. Rassool, 'The Individual, Auto/biography and History' (PHD, University of the Western Cape, 2004), pp. 1-28.

⁶ C. Rassool, 'Rethinking Documentary History and South African Political Biography', *South African Review of Sociology*, Vol 41, No. 1, 2010, p. 30.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32

conventional, masculinist (and heterosexist) life history that individuals are in control of their own destiny, as autonomous, intellectual agents, uncoerced by cultural or historical circumstances, of the human career as an ordered sequence of acts, events and works.⁸

Historical narratives although much evolved, are derived from this approach popularised by Karis and Carter.⁹ It is this approach to historical narratives of resistance which Rassool encountered throughout his research for his dissertation. This approach, however, falls short. Rassool asks different questions that do not depend on ordering a life chronologically or that are concerned with empirical details.

In his approach to transcending the popular, conventional approaches to political biography, Rassool emphasises the importance of comprehending the circumstances wherein biographies are produced and the mediations therein. He highlights 'an appreciation of multiple and contending biographical narrations, as well as different genres, mediums and formats in which biographic narratives have been produced.'¹⁰ Rassool therefore broadens biographical productions from the mere production of a book. Instead biography manifests itself 'through images and exhibitions, through archival collections and memorials, through funeral practices and commemorative occasions'.¹¹ As Rassool rejects the limitations and empiricism of conventional biography, I too focus on multiple genres and mediums, their production and dynamics, mediations, narrations and the contestations they are wrought with. The genres and mediums of the biographical productions of Simelane's life, as mentioned above, include: the TRC transcripts of the Amnesty Hearings and Human Rights Violations Hearing, and the Report; the documentary film, *Betrayal* by Mark Kaplan; and the

⁸ Rassool, 'The Individual Auto/biography and History', p. 29.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-42.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

statue in Bethal. This thesis thus avoids as much as possible a conventional biographical approach to Simelane's life, focusing more on biographical production across these genres.

Deriving ideas from the work of Laura Marcus, Rassool underscores the relation between autobiography and biography. In engaging in an autobiographic account of oneself, one inevitably produces biographic accounts of others. Similarly, in producing a biographic account of another, the author writes him/herself into the narrative through identification with the subject. Rassool, furthermore, mentions a third connection between autobiography and biography or auto/biography. This is less relevant to my own work, but still worth noting. The biographer engages with 'autobiographical texts, of narrations of self on behalf of the subject.... biographical texts the subject had a hand in creating and establishing'.¹² Rassool is thus interested in how auto/biography is produced, mediated and intersects one another, creating contestations and similarities as they often relate to issues of: the past and the present; the personal and the political/ private and public; fact and fiction; the subject and the historian. Rassool also advises the historian to be cognizant of his/her own voice in the production of narrative. He states that 'it also requires the recognition that the academic historian's narrative is one "voice" among others'.¹³ Thus, my own voice will intermingle with the various other voices involved in the auto/biographical productions of Simelane.

Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie's work on Manilal Gandhi provides an example of the abovementioned auto/biographical connection. She admits personal factors motivating her to write the biography. Her own autobiography therefore becomes entwined with that of her subject. In addition to this, Dhupelia-Mesthrie's work on Manilal Gandhi is also relevant

¹² Rassool, 'Rethinking Documentary History', p. 46.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 47.

to my thesis as it focuses on what she calls 'South Africa's lesser known' hero and rescues him from the margins of his father's immense shadow. Moreover, Dhupelia-Mesthrie introduces the theme of the silencing of a biographical subject as she concedes to perpetuating Gandhi's shadow over his son in the title of the biography *Gandhi's Prisoner? The Life of Gandhi's Son Manilal*.¹⁴ Perhaps Simelane is being rescued from the margins through the increase in biographic production on her life. However, by bearing the auto/biographical interrelation in mind in my analyses of the TRC, the documentary film and the statue I will consider whether the notion of silencing is in any way prevalent in the multiple narrations of her life.

Although distinct from my approach, yet worth noting, Jacob Dlamini's *Askari* is an example of an unconventional biography. To understand an askari – his biographical subject – Dlamini looks at collective askari biographies. Dlamini states, 'instead of letting Mr X1 (and him alone) stand for collaboration, I place his story in the context of other stories, other truths.'¹⁵ Although I do not pursue collective biographies of missingness, the notion of the singular representing the collective is a theme I explore in my analysis of the statue.

In my analysis of the biographical productions of Simelane, Stephen Clingman's paper on 'Biography and Representation' appears relevant.¹⁶ The biographical subject does not solely represent itself, but is instead representative of the broader social realities. Clingman explores this paradox of the singular's relation to the universal in a novel, and in particular, in biography. Clingman states that the biographical subject, often exceptional, is

¹⁴ U. Dhupelia-Mesthrie, 'Writing the Life of Manilal Mohandas Gandhi', *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 24&25, 2006-2007, p. 189.

¹⁵ J. Dlamini, *Askari: A Story of Collaboration and Betrayal in the Anti-apartheid Struggle* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2014), p. 16.

¹⁶ S. Clingman, 'Biography and Representation: Some Analogies from Fiction', Paper for Presentation at the History Workshop Conference, University of Witwatersrand, February 1987.

nonetheless also representative. Using the idea of typicality, Clingman states that the typical subject 'condenses in extreme and concerted form broader experiences otherwise dispersed variously through many different lives in society.'¹⁷ Taking into account the tumultuous lived experience of Simelane in statue form and the increase in antagonism towards statues in South Africa, I will conceive of the statue as being representative of other vulnerable and target statues in post-apartheid South Africa.

As I consider the statue a genre of biography, this thesis is not limited to auto/biographical productions of people, but is also interested in the biography of objects or things. Igor Kopytoff's and John Randolph's respective work is particularly pertinent for this reason. In relation to the biography of things, Kopytoff draws our attention to the mutability of things and its biographies, as the cultural perceptions around it changes. Not only do people respond to things and objects, but various persons at various moments in history may have distinct perceptions and responses to them. These responses are a reflection of its cultural, political and historical significance or insignificance. Things are imbued with value and experience a 'life' through the prevailing culture surrounding it.¹⁸ Both Kopytoff and Randolph suggest you can write a biography of an object by looking at its physicality, its use and its changes over time. Randolph contends that an archive or an object has a life which is discernible through rigors and changes it undergoes in its use and disuse among people. Randolph is interested in the 'physical history of an archive and its relationship to lived experience, including our own.'¹⁹

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁸ I. Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process' in A. Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 64-90.

¹⁹ J. Randolph, 'On the Biography of the Bakunin Family Archive' in A. Burton (ed.) *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions and the Writing of History* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 209-224.

Kopytoff's and Randolph's ideas on the biography of objects are important to my work on Simelane's statue. In a society experiencing political tensions around monuments, Simelane's statue has experienced opposition from people of a particular political orientation. This opposition creates biography through their interaction with the statue and also the statue's subsequent damage. This damage also signifies a biographical recreation and reality. The statue was made for a particular purpose, however, its experience has impacted and changed its biographical details. If Simelane had a life history/histories, her statue has had its own life history/histories and thus there are multiple biographies of Simelane. This thesis recognises there is no one narrative of Simelane's life but multiple narratives across genres.

LITERATURE REVIEW

I would like to divide my literature review into specific sub-headings. Furthermore, I do not intend a comprehensive literature review but the focus is on those relevant to the thesis and its approach and arguments.

The missing and mourning

Nicky Rousseau's work provides relevant insights into enforced disappearances. In one of her works, Rousseau investigates the mid-1980s insurgencies in South Africa and its neighbouring countries in response to apartheid, and the security police's attempts, counter-insurgencies – illegal attempts – to suppress resistance. '[T]he regime', according to Rousseau, 'turned instead to acting outside its own legal framework... a move to secret killings'.²⁰ Some of the methods of killing included: gunshot to the head, electrocution, and

²⁰ N. Rousseau, 'Death and Dismemberment: The Body and Counter Revolution Warfare in Apartheid South Africa', in Elisabeth Anstett and Jean-Marc Dreyfus (eds), *Destruction of Human Remains: Disposal and Concealment in Genocide and Mass Violence* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), p. 206.

strangulation. Rousseau goes further than identifying the modes of murder but also narrates the lengths taken by the police to dispose of the bodies.²¹ In the case of Simelane, death, the manner of death and disposal of the body are all contentious. Rousseau's work therefore provides us with possible insights into what the security police may have done to her.

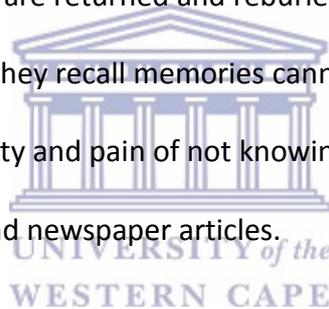
Another of Rousseau's works, 'Identification, politics, discipline', concerns the dead body of a freedom fighter and how it urges people, disciplines and institutions into action. For instance, Rousseau relays the role of forensics in cases of uncertainty regarding identification of the individual and manner of death. Rousseau's work is also of particular interest to me in its narration of the proceedings undertaken when bodies are found and returned to relatives and when funerals and reburials are held. These are often political: 'the coffin, draped in the organisation's flag, is often guarded by veterans in military fatigues, accompanied by songs of the guerrilla movement'.²² Viewed in the light of Simelane and her family, absence and incompleteness are apparent as the biographical productions wrought in the political spectacle of a handover, funeral and reburial cannot and has not occurred. These biographical productions, however, have occurred at the unveiling of her statue.

Shari Eppel, focusing on exhumations of Zimbabwean citizens killed in the 1980s, shows how these exhumations and subsequent reburials impacted and continue to impact the relatives of the victims. Eppel conveys that in instances where the whereabouts of a victim's remains

²¹ *Ibid.* Some of these disposal methods included placing the corpse among mines set by freedom fighters aligned with particular groups. The mines would detonate and obliterate the body. This would further delegitimise and put the struggle and its cadres into disrepute as to the public it would appear that they are being killed by their own weapons of resistance.

²² N. Rousseau, 'Identification, Politics, Disciplines: Missing Persons and Colonial Skeleton in South Africa', in Elisabeth Anstett and Jean-Marc Dreyfus (eds), *Human Remains and Identification: Mass Violence, Genocide, and the 'forensic turn'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p. 190.

are unknown or even buried in 'mass and shallow graves', the victim's spirit is believed to inflict disaster, hardships and tragedy on families and communities.²³ However, when reburial is managed, and the spirit is believed to be at peace, family and communal prosperity is accredited to the ancestral spirit. Considering this in relation to Simelane, the unknown whereabouts of her remains certainly has resulted in emotional and psychological anguish and hardships for her family. Moreover, Eppel states that when remains are justly buried, the manner in which relatives remember and relay their remembrances changes – becoming less 'intrusive [and] destructive'.²⁴ Until found, this change cannot be analysed and discerned in Simelane's relatives. Perhaps healing has slowly occurred throughout the many years but until the remains are returned and reburied its impact on their psychological state and the change in the way they recall memories cannot be determined. For now, however, they lament the difficulty and pain of not knowing the truth, as seen in the HRVC hearing, the documentary film and newspaper articles.



To Sylvia Karl, whose focus is on the dirty war in Mexico, enforced disappearances are a form of the 'dehumanization and desocialization of the other'.²⁵ Enforced disappearances, having psychological implications for the family of the victims, deprives them of four integral elements in the face of death. There occurs a 'denial of bodies', a 'denial of mourning', a 'denial of mortuary rituals', and a 'denial of memory sites'.²⁶ As a result of these denials, the relatives remain in a state of uncertainty and anxiety. This is also appropriate in Simelane's case. Victims, however, can be rehumanised, according to Karl, by putting pressure on the regime to recognise the disappearance. In the context of South Africa, Simelane has

²³ S. Eppel, "'Bones in the Forest" in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe: Exhumations as a Tool for Transformation', *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 2014, p. 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁵ S. Karl, 'Rehumanizing the Disappeared: Spaces of Memory in Mexico and the Liminality of Transitional Justice', *American Quarterly*, Volume 66, No. 3, 2013, p. 729.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 729, 730.

received recognition by the government, through the TRC and a monument, for instance.

However, the denials of 'bodies', 'mourning' and 'mortuary rights' still bear deep psychological implications for relatives, as seen through the TRC and the documentary film.

Such denials are dealt with in various ways by people throughout the world. Relatives of the victims of 9/11 collected the debris and dust to stand in for the unrecovered bodies in an attempt to attain some semblance of closure.²⁷ In addition to this, Mark Sanders, who seeks to determine how apartheid is remembered through the TRC, suggests oral testimony's function in helping victims attain closure. Narrating Joyce N. Mtimkhulu testimony of 26 June 1996, Sanders asserts that she drew on the Commission to mourn and obtain closure.²⁸

Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman's *Mengele's Skull* informs us about the biographical productions that occur when remains are exhumed and identified – in this case the remains sought and found was that of Josef Mengele. What is of particular interest here is not only the exhumation and the identification of the bones, but rather the '*osteobiography*, or the biography of the bones'²⁹, whereby through an analysis of the texture and imprints left on them by the rigours of life, they were able to determine various details of this life. This not only underscores the reality of the missingness of Simelane's bones and the impossibility to pursue such complexities, but it is also relevant to my approach to Simelane's statue as I look to its physical condition to determine whether it can tell us anything about its experience – its biography – since the unveiling.

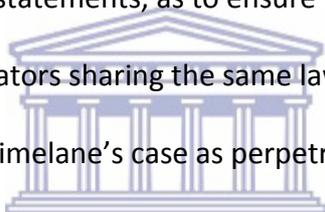
²⁷ M. Sturken, 'The Aesthetics of Absence: Rebuilding Ground Zero', *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 2004, pp. 312-314.

²⁸ M. Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing: Law and Literature in the Time of a Truth Commission* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2007).

²⁹ T. Keenan and E. Weizman, *Mengele's Skull: The Advent of a Forensic Aesthetic* (Portikus: Sternberg Press, 2012), pp. 18, 19.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The TRC of South Africa has a large body of literature. The following publications, however, have been crucial to shaping my thinking. Regarding the TRC in particular, Catherine Cole's *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission* details the dynamics and mediations in the process of testimony-taking, underscoring the relations between interviewee, legal representatives, commissioners, and interpreters in producing truth. Additionally, Cole considers the effects of language and interpretation on the written translations of testimony.³⁰ Madeline Fullard's and Nicky Rousseau's work on the amnesty process, 'Truth, Evidence and History', reflects on its deficiencies and stresses the lawyers' influence over their clients – the perpetrators – statements, as to ensure the granting of amnesty. Fullard and Rousseau found that perpetrators sharing the same lawyer often made similar statements.³¹ This is relevant to Simelane's case as perpetrators certainly shared lawyers.



In a chapter in his book *Ambiguities of Witnessing*, Mark Sanders discusses the TRC's endeavor to assist victims of gross human rights violations and provide them with reparations. The commission sought to achieve this by means of granting victims the opportunity to testify their experience. This testimony, the commission believed, would promote the restoration of 'victims' human and civil dignity'.³² Pertaining to the pursuit of reparation, various victims or witnesses approached the commission and sought to have 'proper funeral rites to the dead'.³³ In numerous matters brought before the commission, witnesses sought truth regarding the death of victims, the whereabouts of their remains,

³⁰ C. Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission: Stages of Transition* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), pp. 66-78.

³¹ M. Fullard and N. Rousseau, 'Truth, Evidence and History: A Critical Review of Aspects of the Amnesty Process', in C. Villa-Vicencio and E. Doxtader, *The Provocations of Amnesty: Memory, Justice and Impunity* (Cape Town: David Philips Publishers, 2003), p. 205.

³² Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing*, p. 36.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

and requested exhumations thereof. According to Sanders by requesting these things, the witnesses wanted a more complete right to mourn. The commission, in an act of condolence, granted their requests for assistance. A continued denial of the requests would in effect be a denial for the victims and witnesses to mourn.

There is abundant literature critiquing the TRC. A contemporary example of this is Sonali Chakravarti's *Sing the Rage*. Chakravarti emphasises that her work diverges from various others on the TRC that focused on compassion. Hers, instead, centers on anger and despair, which she argues is not granted the same freedoms to be expressed and flourish within a commission which attempts to give voice to victims. Chakravarti seeks to show the significance of anger within testimony and within the nation-building project.³⁴ These readings are relevant to my work on Simelane as they give us an idea of the conditions in which testimony is relayed and a life is produced by the TRC. They provide an understanding of what the TRC sought and how it endeavoured to achieve it. We therefore attain insight into the inherent issues involved in the TRC's production of Simelane. Created within a flawed system, the Simelane we come to know through the TRC is a product of what it sought and its means of attaining it.

Deborah Posel validates this in her assertions regarding the commission's report. Posel states that '[t]he report contains a version of the past that has been actively crafted according to particular strategies of inclusion and exclusion, arising from the complexities of the TRC's mandate.'³⁵ Furthermore, Posel considers the various pressures the commission faced in fulfilling the aims its mandate set. These pressures included reconciling with

³⁴ S. Chakravarti, *Sing the Rage: Listening to Anger after Mass Violence* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014).

³⁵ D. Posel, 'The TRC Report: What Kind of History? What Kind of Truth?' in D. Posel and Graeme Simpson (eds) *Commissioning the Past: Understanding South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2002), p. 148.

objective versus subjective truths revealed through testimony and how much of this truth was necessary to attain reconciliation and nation-building.³⁶ Posel's inquiry into the commission's mandate help to discern which truth the Amnesty hearings and the HRV hearings, respectively, sought and to what degree it was sought. Whereas factual truth was pursued in Amnesty hearings and narrative truth at HRV hearings, to what extent is this truth in Simelane's case?

Film and visual representation

Mark Kaplan's documentary film on Simelane, *Betrayal*, requires an analysis of the literature on film and history. Robert Rosenstone's 'History in Images/History in Words', discusses the films *Reds* and *The Good Fight*, respectively, and examines the validity of history as produced through film, particularly in the current climate of the public's perceived disinterest in history as told by the historian and the emergence of film's role in making it palatable to the public. In evaluating the critiques on history in film, for instance, its ability to represent events and places in a less linear manner, versus its inability to verify, correct and rebut criticisms, Rosenstone finds that our understanding of the past is being changed by film. Rosenstone states: 'If short on traditional data, film does easily capture elements of life that we might wish to designate as another kind of data. Film lets us see landscapes, hear sounds, witness strong emotions as they are expressed with body and face, or view physical conflict between individuals and groups'.³⁷ This is certainly the case with *Betrayal*, a documentary film.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 150-153.

³⁷ R. Rosenstone, 'History in Images/ History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History on Film', *The American Historical Review*, 93, 5 (1988), p. 1179.

Rosenstone does have his say on the documentary film format. According to Rosenstone, documentary film and the dramatic feature are similar as both are mediated and truth is created.³⁸ To Rosenstone ‘fiction almost always enters [documentary film] in generous amounts’.³⁹ Rosenstone reminds us that the documentary film format does not show us the events themselves, nor the events as experienced by its witnesses. Rather, Rosenstone asserts that the viewer sees ‘selected images of the events carefully arranged into sequences to tell a story or to make an argument’.⁴⁰ *Betrayal* would therefore be no different – images, interviews and narrations arranged and constructed to convey what the director wishes. Rosenstone’s assertions thus encourage me not to hold the documentary film to a higher standard and legitimacy in the production of history and the life of Simelane than film would in its representations of the past. Like any dramatic film, *Betrayal*, a documentary film, is also subject to creative construction. Furthermore, to Rosenstone ‘the meaning of stories [are] shaped by the medium of telling’.⁴¹ He therefore asserts the role of music and sound in assisting the visual in producing and portraying a particular narrative. In *Betrayal* music emerges as an imperative part of Kaplan’s strategy to develop the biographical narrations of Simelane.

Hayden White, in a critique of Rosenstone, also considers whether history on film, historiophoty, is able to justly convey intricate historical events. However, instead of condemning historiophoty, White emphasises historiography, written history’s own inaccuracies in representing the past: ‘No history, visual or verbal, “mirrors” all or even the

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 1179 – 1180.

³⁹ R. Rosenstone, *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 7.

⁴⁰ R. Rosenstone, ‘History in Images/History in Words’ p., 1180. In addition to this, on documentary film, Rosenstone states that ‘truths are not reflected but created’, p. 1179.

⁴¹ R. Rosenstone, *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past*, p. 7.

greater part of the events or scenes of which it purports to be an account'.⁴² Therefore, viewing *Betrayal*, I cannot expect the Simelane produced by the documentary film to be a complete portrayal of her life, for even the written record of her life is fallible.

Whereas Rosenstone reflects upon dramatic historical film and documentary film, respectively, Nigel Worden focuses on a low-budget experimental film, *Proteus*. *Proteus* differs from other historical films in that it is set within a sparsely-covered and little-known era and place in film – the Dutch Cape Colony of the 18th century. Worden argues that *Proteus* obscures notions of 'truth' in its portrayal of the intersection of distinct eras in the history of the Cape and points to the fallibility of the archive as only the written record.

Notions of truth are additionally challenged in the film's traversing of the dominant cultural norms regarding racial and sexual relations during this period.⁴³ This is important to my own work not only for its allusions to the issues with the archive, but also as *Proteus* is an intriguing representation of history made under financial constraints.



Rob Nixon's work on the dramatic historical film genre focuses in on four films, *Cry Freedom* (1987), *A World Apart* (1988), *A Dry White Season* (1989) and *Mapantsula* (1988). Each film was attempts to direct the public's attention towards and support the anti-apartheid struggle outside South Africa. With the exception of *Mapantsula*, Nixon identifies a common theme within the films. The films either use a white character as a mediator between the black character and the audience, emphasising the budding friendship between the black and the white character in a racist regime, or the films compromise the freedom fighting character's ideology, making him/her palatable to a liberal audience. *Cry Freedom* and *A Dry*

⁴² H. White, 'Historiography and Historiophytoy', *The American Historical Review*, 93, 5 (1988), p. 1194.

⁴³ N. Worden, "'Where are we?': *Proteus* and the Problematizing of History" in V. Bickford-Smith and R. Mendelsohn *Black and White In Colour: African History on Screen* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), pp. 82-96.

White Season uses the buddy-film framework, while *Cry Freedom* and *A World Apart*, according to Nixon, obscures the radical ideologies of the film's liberation fighting characters, Steve Biko and Ruth First, respectively. *Mapantsula*, a low-budget production, differs from the prior mentioned films in its central portrayal of a black character, unsanitised by the white-mediated framework.⁴⁴ Nixon's written work on these films urges me to consider issues regarding the mediator/s and/or narrators in *Betrayal* and how they portray Simelane and to what end.

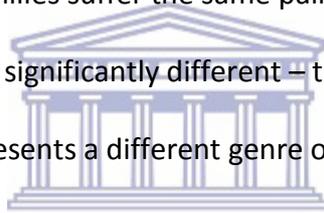
Similarly to Nixon, Peter Davis emphasizes the role of the buddy film in mobilising the anti-apartheid struggle abroad. Davis analyses the films, *Cry Freedom*, *Dry White Season*, *The Power of One* (1992), and juxtaposes them against *Mapantsula*. The buddy film is not only a means of mediation, but also represents black and white unity towards a common cause and importance of the continuation of such unity after the struggle. The buddy film, we deduce from Davis and Nixon, undermines the black man's and black woman's role in the liberation struggle.⁴⁵ Thus it is relevant to consider whether the mediations and narrations in *Betrayal* diminish Simelane's significance and silence her.

Vivian Bickford-Smith, critical of their focus on the buddy film framework which silences the black character, focuses instead on the information provided in the film and the legitimacy and accuracy thereof, whilst also analysing them within the historical context they are set in. In the case of *Cry Freedom*, Bickford-Smith finds that the portrayal of Biko's and Woods' friendship does not betray Black Consciousness ideology as Davis asserts. In relation to *Cry Freedom* and *A Dry White Season*, Bickford-Smith underscores that the history they portray

⁴⁴ R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood* (New York, 1994), pp. 82-95.

⁴⁵ P. Davis, *In Darkest Hollywood: Exploring the Jungles of Cinema's South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1996), pp. 102-122.

is relatively true to the historical record or can be considered “true invention”.⁴⁶ The above works are relevant to my analysis of *Betrayal* as they conjure questions regarding how and by whom a story is told, for who and for what purpose it is told and its budget. The documentary film *Betrayal*, is mediated by narrators and interviewees. Simelane’s life is produced through each one person of whom has various insights to share about her life, whether private or public. Some of the films mentioned above were commercial endeavours made to bring apartheid to the public’s attention. *Betrayal*, made after apartheid (and with a smaller budget), focuses on a missing cadre and a family’s anguish, and therefore brings apartheid’s legacy of trauma and injustices to an audience perhaps ignorant of it via the small screen – for many more families suffer the same pain. Unlike *Cry Freedom*, the audience intended for *Betrayal* is significantly different – the latter was never intended for Hollywood success and thus represents a different genre of film.



My focus on history and film, in relation to *Betrayal*, also requires an analysis of photography, particularly family photographs. Gillian Rose has argued that family photographs are not limited to the domestic space, as they enter into the public sphere – through television and newspapers – subsequent to occasions of violence. Rose points out that, a public is constituted when words or imagery are heard, read or seen. The public, who are strangers to one another, therefore see and absorb family photographs, and are thus able to ‘identify with bodies and to repudiate that identification in an oscillation between compassion and humor’.⁴⁷ Family photographs evoke emotions of empathy among the public and may mobilise some into action. Simelane’s photographs also enter the public

⁴⁶ V. Bickford-Smith, ‘Picturing apartheid: with a particular focus on ‘Hollywood’ histories of the 1970s’, in V. Bickford-Smith and R. Mendelsohn *Black & White in Colour* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), pp. 256-278.

⁴⁷ G. Rose, *Doing Family Photography: The Domestic, the Public and the Politics of Sentiment* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), pp. 75-84.

sphere through the documentary film and the audience is therefore invited to empathise and perhaps join in the continued struggle to attain justice for the many families still experiencing the hardships of the past.

Additionally, Rose seeks to understand family photographs not only for what they portray, but also by what is done to them as objects, and why. As a consequence we are able to understand how family photographs are perceived within the domestic sphere. In her interviews with various women regarding their family photographs, Rose determines that the photographs are engaged with – looked at and circulated – more when the person it represents is absent or distant. This absence is emphasised by where and how the photographs are placed – family photographs are usually arranged in groups.⁴⁸ In my work I will look at how Simelane’s photographs are placed within the family home (as seen in the documentary film) and what it tells us about the family’s life and regard for Simelane. I also look at how the photographs are used to enhance narration of the film and convey insights about Simelane.

Memorialisation

As Nokuthula Simelane has also been memorialised in the form of a statue, erected in Bethal, Mpumalanga, this thesis draws from the literature on memorialisation. Sabine Marschall’s work *Landscape of Memory* focuses on post-apartheid monuments and aims to uncover contestations and obscurities imbued within them. Post-apartheid monuments, which represent prior suppressed and hidden histories of a formerly oppressed people, still however, evoke tensions as sections of society may disagree with what it represents. This is conveyed in Marschall’s narration of the vandalism of the uMkhonto monument in

⁴⁸ G. Rose, Family Photographs and Domestic Spacings: a Case Study, *Trans Institute of British Geographers*, NS, 28, 2003, pp. 6-12.

Mamelodi by right-wingers and the PAC.⁴⁹ This is particularly relevant to Simelane's statue as it too has incurred vandalism from a disapproving section of society. Annie E. Coombes, in a chapter in her book *History After Apartheid*, focuses instead on the Voortrekker Monument, which is representative of an Afrikaner nationalist past. Coombes seeks to show how its perception and significance has evolved in post-apartheid South Africa among people on opposite ends of the political and cultural spectrum. Coombes also introduces important factors regarding the creators of post-apartheid monuments and the criticisms of both the creators and what the monuments may represent.⁵⁰

Marschall's work 'Gestures of compensation' views the post-apartheid surge of monument-making through the lens of Human Needs Theory, which suggests that there are certain basic human needs which are universal across place and eras. Marschall, using this in the framework of post-apartheid South Africa, sees the need for 'recognition and acknowledgement' as evident. This recognition is manifested in monuments and memorials.⁵¹ In another of Marschall's work 'How to honour women', Marschall considers how artists have chosen to represent women in public monuments as part of the *Sunday Times* Heritage Project. Marschall finds that the artists either sought to transcend the conventional trends of memorials and monuments, or that they inadvertently perpetuate gender roles, for instance honouring Lilian Ngoyi, a political activist, with a monument of a sewing machine.⁵² This is compelling as Nokuthula Simelane's statue, I show, is constructed

⁴⁹ S. Marschall, *Landscape of Memory: The Commemorative Monuments, Memorials and Public Statuary in Post-apartheid South Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 49, 50.

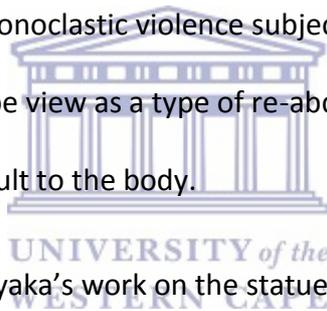
⁵⁰ A. E. Coombes, *History After Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2003), pp. 22-26.

⁵¹ S. Marschall, 'Gestures of Compensation: Post-Apartheid Monuments and Memorials', *Transformation*, 55, 2004.

⁵² S. Marschall, 'How to Honour Women: Gendered Memorialization in Post-Apartheid South Africa', *Critical Arts*, 24 (2), 2010, pp. 261-272.

within the more conventional understanding of monument and memorials – a figure made of bronze and standing upon a pedestal.

In her book *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, Katherine Verdery, focusing on Eastern Europe in the post-socialist era, equates the statues and monuments of prominent leaders to actual bodies. These statues, or bodies, when political transitions occur, are disposed of, torn from their pedestals, and the values they represent disassociated with. Similarly, this transition period also sees the construction of new statues and monuments, with which the new regime identifies with. An attack on and toppling of a statue is therefore an attack on the body of the person it portrays and what s/he represented.⁵³ This is an interesting way to view Simelane's statue and the iconoclastic violence subjected upon it. The theft of Simelane's statue can therefore be viewed as a type of re-abduction and the instances of defacement another type of assault to the body.



Gary Minkley and Phindezwa Mnyaka's work on the statue at Duncan Village which commemorates those who fought, those who were injured and those who died in the massacre of August 1985, is also relevant. Minkley and Mnyaka emphasise the contestations and discontentment among the public regarding what the statue was perceived to represent. The monument, depicting a Zulu warrior with shield and spear in hand – an allusion to MK – did not resonate with the more Xhosa public. Thus it was felt that the statue did not represent those who fought and died in the massacre, nor did it represent their recollection of it. Moreover, the statue was perceived as a means to further the narrative of heroism of the ANC in the anti-apartheid struggle.⁵⁴ This urges me to consider

⁵³ K. Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Burial and Post-socialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 3-7.

⁵⁴ G. Minkley and P. Mnyaka, 'Seeing Beyond the Official and the Vernacular: The Duncan Village Massacre Memorial and the Politics of Heritage in South Africa' in D. R. Peterson, K. Gavua and C. Rassool (eds) *The*

how Simelane has been represented visually in statue form and consider what impact this representation may have had on her and the statue's biography. The Duncan Village statue was intended to represent a people who fought and were killed in a massacre. Publicly contended, however, it failed at this. Simelane, too, was sculpted with an intention in mind. I could therefore consider whether the artist's intentions coincide with the statue's experience and public reaction. The statue at Duncan Village is further significant as locals, in protest to the statue, flung stones at it. This image is reminiscent of the stone throwing during the massacre. Just as this statue's experience, Simelane's statue's theft and vandalism can also be paralleled with Simelane, the persons, life experience.

Leslie Witz et. al. is not only relevant to the broader theme of the 'range of historical genres and producers of history' which I apply to biography, but they also interrogate the visual representations of the past – monuments, photographs, brochures and paintings – for what they create. To Witz et. al. these representations of the past evoke not only debates but contestation as opposing groups may claim authority over how a monument, for instance, should be portrayed. They state

Pasts that are produced in the public sphere are often the results of negotiations and conflicts between opposing groups over its constituent elements, what events and personalities should be included and excluded and how they should be represented.⁵⁵

This certainly encourages me to consider how Simelane has been represented in the form of a statue and whether her portrayal overtly signifies her political allegiance to MK and ANC or a more personal and private depiction of her. It is therefore also worth determining who played a role in the making of the statue and what they attempted to convey. It also urges

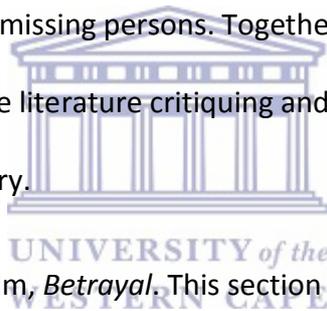
Politics of Heritage in Africa: Economies, Histories, and Infrastructures (London: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 57-63.

⁵⁵ G. Minkley, C. Rassool, L. Witz, *Unsettled History: Making South African Public Pasts* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), p. 15.

me to reflect whether her portrayal as a statue could be directly related to its theft and vandalism or is it merely that it represents the broader struggle against apartheid and not MK and ANC in particular.

METHODOLOGY

There are various mediums and genres which mediate the production of Simelane's biographies, my primary focus, however, will be the TRC Report and transcripts from Human Rights Violation testimony and Amnesty applicants; the documentary film, *Betrayal*; and the statue located in Bethal. Regarding the TRC, I analyse the Report and transcripts as they relate to Simelane. This section also requires an understanding of the TRC's mandate, its notions of truth, and the issue of missing persons. Together with Report and transcripts, these issues will be read alongside literature critiquing and providing further insight into the commission's production of history.



I also analyse the documentary film, *Betrayal*. This section not only includes a conversation with its director, Mark Kaplan, but my analysis is also achieved with a particular emphasis on photographs, for their own sake, and as they relate to oral history and film. In addition to this, I also provide attention to re-enactments, and music and song as they relate to the film. These components are significant as Rosenstone says, 'aural elements – music, dialogue, narration, and sound – ... can underscore, question, contradict, intensify, or lead away from the image'.⁵⁶ In addition to this, my focus on the statue also requires a grasp of literature on memorialisation, the biographies of objects, whilst also drawing on newspaper articles published on the statue and its life. I not only look at the statue as a further biographical genre, but I go further by recounting its own biography.

⁵⁶ R. A. Rosenstone, *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 10.

In understanding how Simelane has been represented and remembered in post-apartheid South Africa, I not only analyse the respective genres and mediums of biography on their own, but I also analyse the genres and mediums within them, bearing their own auto/biographic narrations and productions.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter One, 'Lives Revealed Through the TRC' conceives of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, the Amnesty Committee (AC) and the Human Rights Violation (HRV) Committee, the Report and transcripts, as producing auto/biographical accounts of Simelane, her family and the perpetrators. The chapter lays out the dynamics of production, for example, mandate, mediations among role-players in the hearings, issues of interpretation and translation. These matters are highlighted to indicate that the auto/biographies fashioned within the Commission are complex. Thereafter, I engage with the Report and the HRVC and AC transcripts as they relate to Simelane to determine how she has been produced, represented, remembered and perceived. In this chapter I identify the inherent issues in the production of Simelane in the TRC. Simelane is made under certain conditions – these conditions do not allow for a complete picture of Simelane. The Simelane produced in the TRC is silenced, contested among auto/biographers, diminished and represented mostly in relation to her political undertakings.

Chapter Two, '*Betrayal: Lives on Film*' provides an analysis of the documentary film *Betrayal*, directed by Mark Kaplan, as a 'genre of biography'. This chapter seeks to understand auto/biographical production in the documentary film by an analysis of the use of interviews, photographs, reenactments, and song and music. The chapter also draws on a conversation with the director. Together these various themes are viewed alongside

literature on film and history as to come to an understanding of the production of Simelane through the film. This chapter shows that within the biographical genre of the documentary film, various other genres emerge – photographs, music, interviews, re-enactments – and further broaden our understanding of Simelane and the auto/biographers.

Chapter Three, '*A Statue*' examines the statue erected of Simelane in Bethal, Mpumalanga.

This chapter accounts for its construction, its unveiling in 2009, the first vandalism it

incurred, its theft in 2011, its reconstruction, and its defacement in 2015, as incidents in the statues' and Simelane's biographies. This chapter engages with literature on

memorialisation, biography of objects and media reports on the statue. This chapter also

considers the various auto/biographers involved in the production of Simelane's biographies as seen through the statue, and the biography of the statue itself. Moreover, I also consider

the biographic genres created as a result of the statue, for instance, its unveiling and the

poem on the plaque. In addition to this, regarding Simelane's statue as vulnerable, this

chapter considers whether her statue is representative of other vulnerable statues in South

Africa. This chapter considers the statue to have its own biography and complies with the

more conventional characteristics of biography, adhering to chronology, coherence and

linearity. This chapter therefore conveys a further widening biographical genres Simelane is

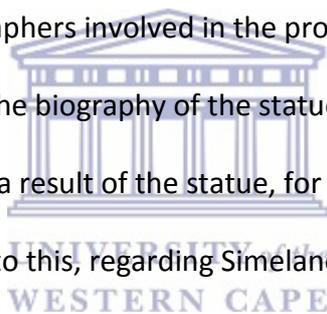
constructed in. She is not only produced in the form of a statue which has its own

biography, but Simelane is also produced in its unveiling and a poem.

My conclusion reflects upon the three prior chapters and reverts to the original question

which I have posed that seeks to understand how the biographies of a missing person are

produced across multiple genres of biography.

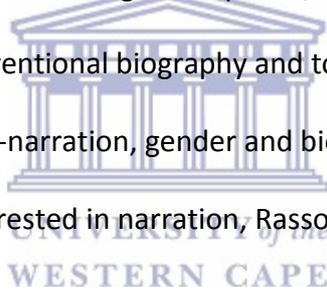


CHAPTER ONE

LIVES REVEALED THROUGH THE TRC

Introduction

Were one to assess the genealogy of political biography within the context of historical inquiry, one would find an overwhelmingly prevalence of lives, as narratives of progress, perseverance amid plight, directed towards ultimate success. These were predominantly chronological and coherent narratives of the public lives of 'great men', unrestrained by the unpredictable impact of the more personal and private aspects of life on their process of becoming the achievers, heroes, 'great men'. This is known as conventional biography.¹ In spite of its popularity in academia and the general public, however, Ciraj Rassool appeals for scholars to move away from conventional biography and to instead ascribe greater significance to 'narration and self-narration, gender and biography's relationship with autobiography'.² Particularly interested in narration, Rassool asserts its importance:



This emphasis on narration is also concerned with multiple genres, locations and formats through which lives have been presented and represented, through oral narrative, academic text and public historical production.³

Rassool not only broadens the sphere of biographical work, but also promotes an inquiry into the processes at work within the production of the biographies. The 'emphasis on narration [as] concerned with multiple genres, locations, and formats...' is significant to my own research of Nokuthula Simelane, as it allows for the TRC hearings to be analysed as a genre of biographical work. This would indeed bring added significance to Rassool's assertion that 'biography can develop a way of going beyond untheorised chronological

¹ Rassool, 'The Individual, Auto/biography and History', pp. 17-29.

² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

narrative procedures and take seriously the existence of multiple narrations of lives'.⁴

Simelane's biographies are narrated not only in the HRVC hearing and the AC hearings, but within each hearing there are various narrators and dynamics involved in the making of her biography. This will be further explicated throughout the chapter. This chapter first lays out some of the prominent critiques of the TRC as a means to clarify some issues involved in producing the biographies of Simelane, and to therefore show that from the outset Simelane's biographies are fated to be flawed, obscured, disputed, fragmented and unfinished. Thereafter, it moves to an analysis of the testimonies and the reports relating to Simelane, with a view to demonstrate how these flaws, obscurities and contestation manifested themselves in the production of Simelane before the commission.

The TRC and auto/biographical production

It is important to examine the TRC's objectives as stipulated by its mandate, and how these objectives may or may not have dictated the production of Simelane's biography. The TRC's central objective was to 'promote national unity and reconciliation'.⁵ It would accomplish this objective by attaining four fundamental facets. Firstly, the commission sought to determine 'as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature and extent of gross human rights violations' within the period 1960 to 1994. In addition, it also attempted to establish 'the antecedents, circumstances, factors and contexts of such violations'. Secondly the commission, by means of acquiring complete disclosure from perpetrators of gross human rights violations within the context of political motivation, intended to 'facilitate the granting of amnesty'. Thirdly, the commission desired to determine the 'fate or whereabouts of victims', pursue the restoration of human and civil dignity of victims, and

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁵ *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Volume 1, Chapter 4 (Cape Town: Juta, 1995), p. 55.

allow for them to convey their own experience in their own words. Finally, the commission aimed to assemble a 'report providing as comprehensive an account as possible of activities and findings' and offer recommendations to avoid such violations from happening in the future.⁶

These objectives would thus form the framework of what we will come to know of Simelane's biography through the genre of the TRC hearings – transcriptions and report. That which the commission sought is what guided and dictated the narrations and lines of questioning within the genre of testimony of the TRC. By means of the mandate, and the methods used to accomplish its goals, we learn how Simelane is perceived, represented and remembered in post-apartheid South Africa. The TRC's mandate thus informs and constrains the biography of Simelane. The auto/biographical genre which is the TRC, does not allow for an all-encompassing understanding of Simelane because its mandate encouraged inquiry into particular things, and restricted inquiry into others.



The commission, and therefore the construction of Simelane's biography, however, confronts the problem of truth, as the various persons approaching the commission in testifying, brought with them their own agendas, lapses in memory, and conceptions of truth. As oral history tells us, '[p]eople do not simply remember what happened, they often consciously and unconsciously change their memories to fulfil personal wishes'.⁷ Thus, the commission, cognizant of the fluidity and complexity of truth, distinguished four spheres of truth in its pursuit of its objectives. Factual or forensic truth concerned with verifiable, impartial evidence. Personal or narrative truth took into account the pain of the narrator,

⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁷ V. Bickford-Smith, S. Field and C. Glaser, 'The Western Cape Oral History Project: the 1990s', *African Studies*, 60, 1, 2001, p. 17.

and the restorative power of narration. Thirdly, social truth sought to create an environment wherein people in all their diversity could come before the commission and have their views considered. And lastly, healing and restorative truth.⁸ Truth, as told from the various auto/biographers in Simelane's story, complicates and fragments Simelane, as the narrators convey contrasting conceptions of her.

Together with the matter of truth, the actuality of multiple narrations and the synthesis of auto/biography, would thus make for a biographical work rife with obscurities and contestations – matters that, according to Rassool, are integral in transcending conventional biography. The commission's objectives, its conceptions of truth and the dynamics among auto/biographers would therefore impact our understanding of Simelane's life as a production of biographies. The TRC is widely critiqued amongst scholars – critiques which I have held in consideration in my reading of the hearings regarding the Simelane matter. These critiques broaden our knowledge of Simelane's biography, and also complicate and obscure it.

Simelane's biographies, as produced at the TRC hearings, are produced and reproduced by various people in the procedure of the hearings. This reality is significant in biography, as conveyed by Rassool. He states that the interviewer has 'an active role in shaping the personal narrative'.⁹ Instead of one interviewer, however, there are numerous role-players in the narration throughout the many hearings. Some of the role-players in the Simelane matter included: The Chairperson; Mr Visser, legal representative of perpetrators Willem Coetzee, Anton Pretorius, John Frederick Williams, Frederick Mong and Jacobus Ross; Mr Lamey, legal representative of Norman Mkhonza, Nimrod Veyi and Mohapi Lazarus

⁸ *TRC Report*, Volume 1, chapter 5, pp. 111 - 114.

⁹ Rassool, 'The Individual, Auto/biography and History', p. 20.

Selamolela; Mr van den Berg, representative of the family of Simelane; and Ms Thabethe, representing the TRC as evidence leader.¹⁰ At various stages within the hearings, these various role-players often interject with questions and statements throughout the cross-questioning process. These constant negotiations, mediations and interactions between victim/perpetrator and cross-examiners are essential in the construction of a complex, contested, contentious and fragmented auto/biographical genre of the TRC.

Within the telling, mediations and interactions apparent in the production of Simelane in the hearings, contestations and differences are not only prevalent in the HRVC hearing and the AC hearings, but within each respective AC hearing we find numerous occasions of contestations, of which will be disclosed. With regards to the HRVC hearing versus the AC hearings, Catherine M. Cole conveys obvious differences in narrative styles. The HRVC hearings were outright in its conveyance and allowance of emotion within the testimony, whereas the AC hearings strongly invoked the 'legal protocols of the courtroom'. While the HRVC hearings generally allowed for victims to forthrightly convey their experiences, unrestrained by the parameters of time, the AC hearings were subject to the formalities of legal process.¹¹ This also evokes the two conceptions of truth: factual and forensic truth assigned to amnesty hearings, and narrative and personal truth as predominant in HRVC hearings.

Considering this in the context of Nokuthula Simelane, it would not be unthinkable to expect an obvious binary in the details being relayed of her life. On the one hand, her father, Mathew Simelane, testifies before the HRVC, whereas on the other hand, in pursuit of

¹⁰ Cross-examination of Willem Coetzee at Amnesty Hearing, Johannesburg, 17 May 1999, available at http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/originals/amntrans/1999/99050321_jhb_990517jh.htm, accessed 12 April 2017.

¹¹ Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission*, p. 73.

amnesty, perpetrators testify. This structure of the TRC – victim testimony/perpetrator testimony – viewed within the context of biography further perpetuates a long criticized binary – the separation of the public and the private. In this regard Mathew Simelane is the purveyor of the private, and the amnesty applicants, the producers of the public life of Nokuthula Simelane. Were one to assess the history of political biography, the perpetuation of the separation of the public and private life of the subject is apparent. Rassool asserts that the “personal” was perceived as a separate space’.¹² However, when they do interact, the private is viewed in relation to the public, political life – serving to validate the public. Perhaps our analysis of the transcripts may complicate this binary.

The TRC allowed for various victims to convey their experience of suffering within the apartheid era. Cole describes the TRC as being ‘designed to restore voice, to give people who had often suffered in isolation an opportunity to publicly articulate their experience’.¹³ Victim testimony, as envisaged by the TRC, also served as a means to attain its goal of, where possible, providing ‘reparation and rehabilitation of “victims”’. Within the parameters of reparations and rehabilitation was the responsibility to restore the civil and human dignity of the victims. A means of achieving this was to afford them the opportunity to testify of their experience ‘in their own words’.¹⁴

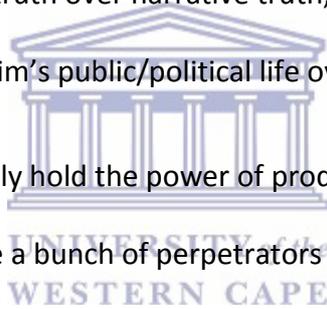
However, viewing this in the context of the Simelane matter, how could the voice of a missing person – a person unable to speak for herself – be restored? Nor can her remains, due to its absence, speak for her by being used as evidence. Nicky Rousseau asserts that when exhumations occurred, ‘bodies [rose] from their graves... to accuse’ perpetrators who

¹² Rassool, ‘The Individual, Auto/biography and History’, p. 29.

¹³ Cole, *Performing South Africa’s Truth Commission*, p. 63.

¹⁴ The notion of ‘testify[ing] in their own words’ will, however, be interrogated and disputed, and with it the idea of restoring the dignity of Nokuthula Simelane, and victims of gross human rights violations, in general. See Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing*, p. 36.

deny their part in gross violations of human rights.¹⁵ Simelane's voice cannot really be rendered. She is therefore spoken for by means of the testimony of her father and, although problematic, certain details of her life – her assault, torture and inevitable fate – is told by the perpetrators in the AC hearings. Here emerges a significant problem in the rendering and production of Simelane's biographies in the TRC hearings – it is told and produced mainly by the perpetrators, her father being the only one speaking before the Commission on behalf of her family. Thus the perpetrator's voice is more prevalent in the production of and negotiation of the narrative of Simelane's life. The perpetrator is provided the power to produce Simelane. This does not only do little justice to Simelane's life, but also evokes the notion of the privilege of factual truth over narrative truth, legal formalities over the volatility of emotion, and the victim's public/political life over his/her private.



However, do the perpetrators truly hold the power of production? Madeleine Fullard and Nicky Rousseau assert that where a bunch of perpetrators are represented by the same lawyer for the same incident, as has been shown to be the case in the Simelane matter, similar versions would be prepared and presented before the AC. Fullard and Rousseau state that '[t]his acted to silence their clients, who were herded into a common narrative'.¹⁶

These factors are mentioned as a means to show that from the outset, coming to an understanding Simelane's biographies is not only problematic but cannot wholly be achieved, as the TRC favours particularities of life, political life and its legal process produced a casting narrative.

¹⁵ Rousseau, 'Identification, Politics, Disciplines: Missing Persons and Colonial Skeletons in South Africa', p. 178.

¹⁶ Fullard and Rousseau, 'Truth, Evidence and History: A Critical Review of Aspects of the Amnesty Process', p. 205.

However, writing on the Eichmann trial, Sonali Chakravarti describes the ‘inclusion of emotion in the legal process [as] the renegotiation of public and private’.¹⁷ The TRC therefore, despite its short-comings and privilege of the public, to an extent surpasses the boundaries between the public and the private, which in turn makes for a complicated, more complete and compelling telling of a life, in spite of its preference for the public life. Thus, although the objectives defined in its mandate required the privileging of the public, the commission allowed for emotion, the private, the personal.

This is further conveyed in Catherine Cole’s comprehensive work on witnessing and testimony. Testimony is not only thwarted through constraints on time, but Cole emphasises that the ‘mediated nature of proceedings shaped what kind of speech and witnessing were possible’.¹⁸ This I discern, not only refers to the legal-centered procedures favoured by the Commission’s mandate and various persons involved in the hearings, but it also refers to the fact of the immense media coverage the Commission received – a vast audience was thus watching and listening with interest – and it was therefore all the more important that the Commission’s goal to promote reconciliation was upheld by means of maintaining control over what is said.

Chakravarti underscores the Commission’s failure to further explore instances of rage in testimonies. Its potential, she asserts, was instead curtailed by the Commission’s ambitions to emphasise the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation, as a means to legitimise and successfully usher in the new regime, the new South Africa. Chakravarti states that the ‘theological use of the concept of forgiveness served to limit the commission’s ability to

¹⁷ Chakravarti, *Sing the Rage*, p. 38.

¹⁸ Cole, *Performing South Africa’s Truth Commission*, p. 64

respond to emotions of anger and despair within the context of victim testimony'.¹⁹ She also evokes testimony as it relates to the Nuremberg Trials, stating victim testimony's role in conveying the strength and resilience of the Jewish people. These ideas and issues are all factored into my analysis of the Simelane matter, as I believe Simelane's life story cannot be understood outside the framework of the TRC's agenda and methods. Therefore, because the TRC, generally, did not provide conditions for the expression of anger, Simelane's life in its entirety, and the impact of her missingness, cannot fully be fathomed.

One method used by the Commission in the relaying of testimony is that of simultaneous or live language interpretation.²⁰ Keeping with its intention to 'restore voice' and the human dignity of the formerly oppressed, the TRC allowed witnesses to speak in the language they preferred.²¹ This, however, required interpreters. Note that this adds various other persons in the role of constructing the biography of Simelane. Simelane's biography would thus not only be produced by numerous interpreters, but each interpreter would, by consequence of language variations and the fallibility of interpretation, produce a fairly different testimony, and therefore, an adjusted biography. Cole explains that 'those who appeared before the commission should be able to testify in the language of their choice, their words could be heard in a number of different tongues, as headsets placed throughout the hearing venues broadcast multiple language translations of testimony.'²² This is relevant in the hearings regarding Simelane, as English was rarely the medium of speech and there were multiple narrations in multiple languages.

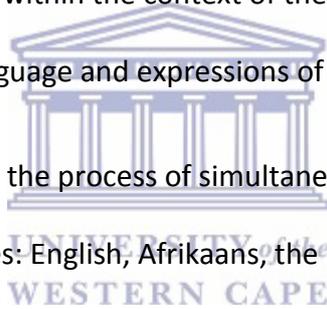
¹⁹ Chakravarti, *Sing the Rage*, p. 51.

²⁰ It is here perhaps important to distinguish between interpretation and translation. As opposed to interpretation which involves the immediacy of the live audience's need to follow, translation, as defined by Catherine Cole, requires the transcription of the spoken word. It is thereafter translated from the transcription. Translation would thus provide a more accurate version of the speaker's words.

²¹ Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission*, p. 67.

²² *Ibid.*

The role of the interpreter, as explained by Cole, was to convey the speaker's testimony reliably. However, although interpreters were not expected to relay the exact words of the speaker, they were expected to remain true to the essence and meaning the speaker wished to convey. This is therefore problematic in a pursuit of determining what it is the interviewee tells us of not only their lives, but in this case, the life of Nokuthula Simelane. Cole asserts that '[i]nterpretation thus conveys a reduced truth'.²³ Once more we are confronted with the reality that Simelane's life, as told through the perpetrators and her father, before the commission, cannot be wholly and truly known and told, as their own words/accounts were changed and condensed by the interpreters. Language interpretation, especially interpretation enacted within the context of the TRC, does not justly and accurately convey nuances of language and expressions of tone of voice.



Cole identifies further issues with the process of simultaneous interpretation. Testimony was translated into four languages: English, Afrikaans, the main language spoken in the particular area the hearing was held, and another dominant language spoken in the area. Cole describes the interpretation process as not only a 'relay interpretation', but she also goes on to liken it to the childhood game 'telephone' or as we had called it growing up, 'broken telephone'.²⁴ English, Cole states, was the foundational language in the process – all testimonies were first translated to English, thereafter it would be interpreted into the other three languages. For instance, a Zulu-speaking witness would first be interpreted in English, and thereafter from English to Afrikaans, English to Xhosa, and English to SiSwati. Moreover, in many cases, Cole emphasises that the interpreters were not always strongly skilled in English, thus creating even greater flaws in the relaying of testimony.

²³ Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission*, p. 68.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

These flaws are further perpetuated as it was translated from English to the other three languages. As testimony is interpreted, for example, from Xhosa to English, from English to Zulu, the product produced by the Zulu interpretation could be vastly different to the original Xhosa testimony. Cole states, using the ‘telephone’ analogy: ‘By the time the starting phrase travels around the circle, it has been mangled, its syntax, vocabulary, and meaning utterly transformed’.²⁵ Simelane’s biography is thus narrated in four different languages, with each language producing subtle differences.

Furthermore, as a means of asserting the fallibility of interpretation, Cole cites an occurrence conveyed by an interpreter wherein he/she, ‘the first voice’, had not understood an important word. This led him/her to misinterpret the meaning of a fundamental part of the speaker’s testimony.²⁶ This misinterpretation thus travelled through the various languages. This is however, not to say that such overt mistakes occurred in the hearings pertaining to Simelane. Simelane’s life, as told through the simultaneous interpretation process, is, however, bound to be flawed, problematic and rife with contestations.

Additional analyses of the methods of interpretation reveal that often, under the pressure of live/simultaneous interpretation, the interpreters were required to make significant judgment calls on the ‘words, syntax, tone, emotional expressiveness, and narrative completeness’, knowing that their decisions would affect the eventual meaning and understanding of the testimony.²⁷ For instance, using words to justly convey the speaker’s emotions, or instead make the testimony more understandable and clear to the audience.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

The interpreters were thus important role-players in the production of Simelane's biographies.

The examples above serve to convey just how fundamentally flawed our ultimate perception, representation and remembrance of Simelane in post-apartheid South Africa could be, considering the constraints apparent in the rendering of her life through the commission's testimonies. The degree of problems apparent in the TRC's methods of attaining a widespread picture of atrocities throughout apartheid does not end with the telling of testimony. The very act of capturing the testimonies, and thus the events and atrocities, through transcription, and ultimately, the final report, bring forth further failings which will impact our understanding of Simelane.

Bearing in mind what we learnt about the language interpretation process adopted by the commission, it is therefore disconcerting to know that the transcripts of the testimonies are interpretations, not translations. We are thus fated to attain a flawed comprehension of any particular testimony we are reading. In other words, my analysis of Simelane cannot be based on the authentic testimony of those testifying. Cole states: 'the transcripts are yet another extension of the TRC's relay interpretation, promulgating whatever distortions, omissions, and transformations of testimony occurred on the spot during the hearing in the hot crowded translator's booth'.²⁸

The final report, produced by the commission as a means of depicting their findings serves as another example of inconsistencies. Mark Sanders argues that testimony is an imperative part of the commission, as it 'restores voice', but is not given its due importance in the making of the report. Sanders emphasises that 'the report of the TRC draws less on

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

testimony from hearing than on statements taken before hand'.²⁹ Similarly, Nicky Rousseau describes the amnesty applications as 'unusually negotiated and crafted documents'.³⁰

This issue of prior statement-taking is also criticised by Chakravarti. She details the evolution of the commission's method of statement-taking, emphasising its origins as an unrestricted interview wherein the telling could flourish. This however changed to a restrictive questionnaire which would dictate the direction of the interview instead of allowing the telling to unfold authentically.³¹ We are thus confronted with the reality that the knowledge we gain on Simelane from the transcripts and from the report is perhaps orientated toward factual truth although the mandate emphasises the importance of four facets of truth.

Deborah Posel, however, argues that at the essence of the report's search and favour of factual/forensic truth, was a deeply moral message. She states, 'the report reads less as a history, more as a moral narrative about the fact of wrong doing across the political spectrum'.³² This, one discerns, is once more an allusion to the commission's goal to 'promote reconciliation', as prompted by its mandate, as a means to successfully usher in the new regime that has traded in resentment for forgiveness. Heidi Grunebaum articulates this quite perfectly:

Framed as a moral, theological, and psychological project of healing, forgiveness and reconciliation, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) process has been a political conflict-managing mechanism installed as a project of nation building and reconciliation.³³

²⁹ Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing*, p 148.

³⁰ N. Rousseau, 'Counter-Revolutionary Warfare: the Soweto Intelligence Unit and Southern Itineraries', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 6, 2014, p. 1344.

³¹ Chakravarti, *Sing the Rage*, p. 62.

³² Posel and Simpson. *Commissioning the Past*, p. 148.

³³ H. Grunebaum, 'Talking to Ourselves "among the Innocent Dead": On Reconciliation, Forgiveness, and Mourning', *PMLA*, Vol. 117, No. 2, 2002, pp. 306.

The report, according to Posel, although perpetuating the nation-building narrative, does convey within it a notion not opposed to narrative truth. Considering the above-mentioned findings on the interpretation, translation, multiple biographers, narrations and mediations, it is perhaps fitting to analyse the TRC proceedings by focusing on how Simelane is perceived, remembered and represented in the hearings and thereafter evaluate the report, bearing in mind some of the issues in its production as discussed above. Comparing and contrasting the report and the transcripts could perhaps validate or contest the aforementioned criticisms of the TRC.

Production of Simelane in the HRVC hearing

Simelane's biography, as narrated by her father, Mathew Simelane, is a biography of uncertainties, and additionally contains the biographies of various role-players. With his wife seated beside him, Mathew Simelane proceeded in producing biographical details of, not only Nokuthula Simelane, but also, as prompted by the commission's questioning, that of himself and his wife. As questioned by a certain Mr Mathata, Mathew Simelane conveys to the commission that they – he and his wife – own a business. Thereafter, he is encouraged to 'tell us the story of [his] missing daughter, Nokuthula Simelane'.³⁴ The very fact of the commission asking about his 'missing daughter, Nokuthula Simelane' instead of merely framing it as 'your daughter, Nokuthula Simelane', conveys the commission's interest in Nokuthula Simelane, the political liberation rebel, as opposed to only Simelane, the daughter, sister, friend, the young woman. The commission perceives her as a political agent. Mathata's prompt to Mathew Simelane to 'tell us the story of... Nokuthula Simelane' is therefore deceptive, as it disguises itself as having interest in Simelane's life, but in

³⁴ Human Right Violation Submissions Questions and Answers of Mathew Simelane, Leandra, 3 June 1997, available at <http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/originals/hrvtrans/leandra/simelane.htm>, accessed on 15 April 2017.

actuality seeks to know only her political life. Prior to this the Chairperson stated, 'you are here to tell us the story of, particularly of your daughter, Nokuthula'.³⁵ The statement presents itself as being quite a broad invocation, as her story may – to her father – encompass a variety of events, complex events filled with affectivity, however, as we have already learned, Mathata provides more specificity to what it is they truly seek—'the story of [his] missing daughter, Nokuthula Simelane'. Additionally, Mathew Simelane is not able to tell a story that he was not able to witness. The commission's inquiry on 'the story' is quite vague.

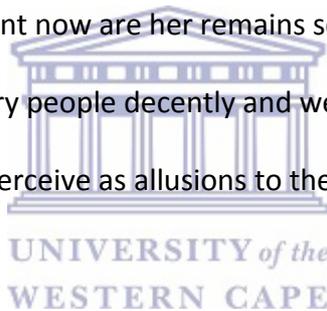
One can only assume that Mathew Simelane perceived the statement as an inquiry into Simelane's agency as a MK cadre, and thus proceeded to relay his own, and his family's pursuit to determine Simelane's whereabouts, after discovering that she had disappeared before her graduation. Therefore, the 'story about [his] missing daughter' instead seems to become the story about his search for her, and the impact of her absence in their lives – the actions her absence provoked them to take. They visited neighbouring countries, approached the police, the press, and the ANC. Rather than a clear 'story about... Simelane', Mathew Simelane's testimony conveys their search for her in relation to the various important role-players mentioned above. Mathew Simelane engages in an auto/biography as he narrates Simelane's life and his own experience. Evoking Laura Marcus, Rassool conveys that in writing one's own life, one inevitably engages in writing the lives of others in it too. And similarly, writing a biographical account of another often includes the author's self-narration into the account.³⁶ Therefore, in the telling of the 'story about... Nokuthula Simelane', the interconnectedness of auto/biography emerges increasingly prominently. In

³⁵ HRVC, Mathew Simelane, 3 June 1997.

³⁶ Rassool, 'The Individual, Auto/biography and History', p. 45.

producing a biography of Simelane before the commission, and a biography of his family in relation to Simelane, Mathew Simelane inevitably also produces an autobiographical account of himself.

Simelane's biography, as told by her father, is less a narrative about her life and experience – a 'story about' her – but a narrative of his own, and her family's pursuit of her. Thus, we learn more about his own life and feelings, than we do of Simelane. An imperative part of Mathew Simelane's testimony is his repetitive lament for further information regarding his daughter, as a means to not only distinguish the truth of her abduction, torture, and her fate thereafter, but importantly, to find her body, her remains, in order to respectfully bury her. He asserted: 'All what we want now are her remains so we could bury Nokuthula in a decent way. In our culture we bury people decently and we would like to do that'.³⁷ The words 'decent' and 'decently', I perceive as allusions to the issue of restoring of human and civil dignity.



Here, dignity transcends the mere methods of testimony. Dignity is also an issue, I believe, imperative to the victim's families request for information of the death of their relative, and the whereabouts of their remains. Mark Sanders describes this as the relatives requesting the commission to 'join materially and affectively in the work of mourning'.³⁸ Attaining the remains of the victim, I believe, not only allows for the family to participate in respectful and warranted burial rites for Simelane, but it would also thus, affirm the family's own dignity by allowing them to engage in the expression of their pain through the act of mourning. The commission thus, to an extent, had the power to deliver this dignity they wished to afford those who testified at the HRVC hearings. However, it remained out of their control when

³⁷ HRVC, Mathew Simelane, 1997.

³⁸ Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing*, p. 40.

perpetrators refrained from informing families on the whereabouts of the remains of victims. Simelane's dignity, therefore, is an issue of contention, for although she is spoken for to a degree in the commission, she remains missing, and as a result cannot be afforded her rightful burial rites and dignity in its fullness. The dignity of her family is also, thus negated, as mourning and closure is denied.

The enforced disappearance enacted on Simelane by the apartheid state maintains its power over the victim and her relatives in post-apartheid South Africa. Assumed deceased, yet missing materially, Simelane is in an intangible realm of liminality. In spite of the change of regime, according to Sylvia Karl, 'this power and domination over bodies is a cruel form of psychological violence'.³⁹ Simelane's biography therefore reveals the perpetrator's, the purveyor of state violence, continued power over her, the other. Karl relays four imperative categories that this violence results in: the denial of bodies, the denial of mourning, the denial of mortuary rites and the denial of memory sites.⁴⁰ These four categories ultimately validate the denial of dignity. From the autobiographical standpoint which comes across in Mathew Simelane's testimony on Nokuthula Simelane, his life and the lives of relatives of Simelane, is wrought in the prior mentioned denials. These denials bear upon his life and provoke him and his family into further action. A large part of his, and their lives will be spent in the pursuit of the body, mourning, mortuary rites and memory sites. Mathew Simelane's testimony is thus also an appeal to the Commission to help grant him this.

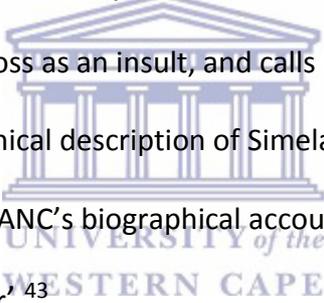
Mathew Simlane proceeded to emphasise his and his family's desire to learn more about what truly happened to their daughter, sister, friend. He asserted, 'I would like to know

³⁹ Karl. 'Rehumanizing the Disappeared: Spaces of Memory in Mexico and the Liminality of Transitional Justice', p. 729.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 729-730.

even more. What happened to my daughter and after the torture what was done to her'.⁴¹

This knowledge, one discerns, would go a long way in the process of mourning and healing – in the TRC's delivery of dignity. Dignity, we learn, that the ANC did not afford her, nor her family in their denial of, not only information on her, but in some cases denial of any knowledge of her as a member of MK. Mathew Simelane states at different stages of the testimony that '[they] went to the ANC people and they denied any knowledge of Nokuthula' and on another occasion Mathew Simelane conveyed his wife's efforts to acquire information. These efforts, according to Mathew Simelane, were met with remarks from ANC members, as follows: 'they will say [they] do not know, maybe her boyfriends know better'.⁴² The remark 'maybe her boyfriends know better', although we do not know the tone it was said in, comes across as an insult, and calls into question Nokuthula's moral character. In producing a biographical description of Simelane, Mathew Simelane also conveyed what he believes is the ANC's biographical account of her. Ultimately, he stated, 'the ANC members were using her'.⁴³



Considering that part of the TRC's goal was to restore the dignity of the victim by means of providing a platform for them to express and assert their 'voice', we can thus question whether or not this dignity is negated by the commission's preference for the forensic/factual and opposed to narrative/personal truth. Sanders, however, takes this notion of restoration further by implying that the very fact that the transcripts and the extensive report are written in English, contradicts this narrative of the restoration of dignity. Their experiences are not relayed and propagated in their own tongue. Their 'voice'

⁴¹ HRVC, Mathew Simelane, 1997.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

is therefore nullified.⁴⁴ Simelane's dignity, as portrayed by the transcripts and the report, is a contentious subject, as her father, and the various other witnesses do not testify in English. The dignity of Simelane is a continuous question in her biography.

However, Mathew Simelane stated that after a newspaper article emerged on Simelane, many of these ANC members changed their tune. They now affirmed her bravery. The auto/biographies of Nokuthula Simelane, as produced by Mathew Simelane, are not merely productions of Simelane, the person, but are also biographies of her family and their pursuit of the truth regarding her fate and whereabouts. They are biographies of contestations – contestations of dignity. Simelane, as Mathew Simelane conveyed, was not at all acknowledged by the ANC. Later, the ANC partially acknowledge her, and eventually, recognised her as a courageous martyr.

Simelane, as represented by her father, is fundamentally understood, remembered and represented as a liberation fighter. Excluding the question on her academic endeavours – she studied B. Admin – and his allusions to their desire to mourn her respectfully, the focus and the questions revolve around matters of her political life. In spite of this, however, one does get the sense that factual truth, although the emphasis, is not the only truth sought by the commission. This is conveyed as they ask Mathew Simelane to comment on a newspaper article's description of Nokuthula Simelane as the 'MK's Mata Hari'.⁴⁵ Mathew Simelane agreed with this portrayal of her. In this way Mathew Simelane engages with other representations of his daughter's life and other biographical productions are brought into the TRC. This description of Simelane likely fulfils and validates Mathew Simelane's own hopes for his daughter's legacy. Moreover, Mathew Simelane's notion that the ANC used his

⁴⁴ Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing*, p. 155.

⁴⁵ HRVC, Mathew Simelane, 1997.

daughter is also an instance of narrative truth, as the ANC would likely dispute this, and there is no substantial way to verify it. It is however true to Mathew Simelane. Furthermore, although Mathata conveys the hearing's position on the expression of emotion – 'you are welcome and should you at any stage find yourself choked by emotions, please take your time and take your time to relate this story'.⁴⁶ The line of questioning taken by the commission does not particularly encourage such emotion.

Perpetrators producing Simelane

Simelane's biographies, as we are to learn from the AC hearings are more comprehensive, legalistic, and wrought with contestations, omission, silencing, and to a larger extent rich in the auto/biography synthesis. Willem Helm Johannes Coetzee testimony is a clear example of this. The testimony begins with the commission establishing the mediators and meaning-makers in production of Simelane's biographies. Perpetrators, Coetzee, Anton Pretorius, Frederick Mong, John Frederick Williams and Jacobus Ross were represented before the commission by Mr Visser. Perpetrators and witnesses, Nimrod Veyi, Norman Mkhonza, and Mohapi Lazarus Selamolela were represented by Mr Lamey. The Simelane family were represented by Mr van den Berg, the TRC was represented by Ms Thabetha, evidence leader.⁴⁷ The chairperson also played a role in negotiating Simelane's biography.

Coetzee, who testified in Afrikaans, conveyed his role not only in relation to Simelane, but also in relation to his fellow perpetrators – thus engaging in auto/biographical production. Questioned about his duties, Coetzee stated as he read from his affidavit: 'since 1982, Superintendent Pretorius and I were tasked in the Intelligence Unit Soweto to collect covert

⁴⁶ HRVC, Mathew Simelane, 1997.

⁴⁷ Willem Coetzee, Amnesty Hearing, 17 May 1999, available at http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/originals/amntrans/1999/99050321_jhb_990517jh.htm, accessed on 16 April 2017.

information with regard to the revolutionary onslaught against South Africa'.⁴⁸ With regards to the abduction of Simelane, Coetzee indicated that he had the choice between arresting Simelane and prosecuting her, or abducting her for the purpose of conducting a 'brainwashing action in order to fulfil existing intelligence gaps'. It is perhaps significant to state that prior to the abduction, the Soweto Intelligence Unit (SIU) was not aware that Simelane was a female, and further in his testimony Coetzee referenced her womanhood as justification for what he perceived as leniency towards her. This could be to cast himself as a man capable of some sort of decency.⁴⁹

As will be demonstrated, Coetzee, like Pretorius, assertively denied various accusations.

Some of them include: using electrical shock as a method of torture, having her thrown into the dam just outside the room she was held, the extent of the torture which left her unable to walk on her own, and murdering/killing Simelane. Instead, Coetzee emphasised successfully turning her into an agent, and although she was stubborn, he received information from her. With regard to her death, Coetzee implicated MK by citing newspaper articles reporting the family's encounters with fellow MK members and their lack of information and at times contradictory and seemingly deceptive information. Coetzee stated, 'No MK person there was able to give the Simelanes a straight answer'.⁵⁰

From the outset of Anton Pretorius' amnesty hearing we see that his representative refers to an exhibit – evidence. This evidence derived from prior assembled statements. This is further validated once one progresses further into his testimony. He stated that his original

⁴⁸ Willem Coetzee, Amnesty Hearing, 1999.

⁴⁹ In denying accusations that Simelane was thrown into the dam to clean herself, he states: 'we provided her with hot water and something to wash herself in because she was a lady'. See Willem Coetzee, Amnesty Hearing, 1999.

⁵⁰ Willem Coetzee, Amnesty Hearing, 1999.

application was a 'very longwinded affidavit'.⁵¹ Chakravarti's and Sanders' assertions on the fact of testimony deriving from prior assembled statement are thus verified. Amnesty testimony is in this way not only dependent upon factual truth, it is also curtailed by this method.

We discover details of Simelane's political life during abduction, torture and interrogation in relation to the perpetrators. We therefore learn a much about them – Anton Pretorius, Willem Coetzee, and the likes. For instance, in the hearing of Anton Pretorius, he is asked to describe the history of his working relationship with Willem Coetzee. We get a sense not only of Simelane, but also of Pretorius and how he wished to be perceived. Throughout his testimony he underscores that Simelane's abduction, torture and interrogation was not only to acquire underground information on the MK cross-border onslaught, but importantly, also to 'turn' her, to initiate her as an agent, which according to himself and Coetzee, they achieved successfully. He stated, 'I could see that she was the type of person who would give her cooperation; that we would be able to persuade her'.⁵² Pretorius thus portrayed Simelane as a MK operative, who gradually came to trust her perpetrators, and 'began to expose more and more MK activities'. She was, according to Pretorius, an askari.

In his narration of Simelane's biography, Pretorius also revealed himself in relation to her. He sought to portray himself as being 'humane'. This is seen in his response to the question whether or not they provided Simelane with toiletries. Affirming that they had, he asserted, 'we are not inhuman'.⁵³ Furthermore, he justified his part in the abduction, beating, torture and interrogation of Simelane. He explained that every action he committed was performed

⁵¹ Cross-examination of Anton Pretorius at Amnesty Hearing, Johannesburg, 10 May 1999, available at http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/originals/amntrans/1999/99050321_jhb_990518jh.htm, accessed on 16 April 2017.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

within the parameters of his authorised duty as a member of the SIU: ‘acts and omissions... I had done in the execution of my official duty... I had done in order to protect the government’.⁵⁴ It therefore appears that he is concerned for the public’s and the commission’s perception of his character.

He thus attempted to absolve himself, not only from abduction and torture, but also from murder. He is not ‘inhuman’, and therefore, when appropriate, he treated Simelane with humanity and dignity – as when he/they provided her with toiletries and clothing. Although he conveyed this, at certain instances in his testimony, the nuances of the words he chose, portrays his perception of Simelane in a less dignified manner. When confronted with opposing evidence implying that Simelane would not comply – would not ‘turn’ – Pretorius denied this and underscored, ‘that person gave her co-operation’. And on another occasion, in reference to the procurement of toiletries, he stated that ‘toiletries or things were provided for this lady’.⁵⁵ The ‘that person’ and ‘this lady’ conveys callousness and dismissiveness, a distancing himself from the events and a negation of her individuality, her dignity. Therefore, within Pretorius’ production of her life, we once more find a denial of dignity, not only during his encounters with her, but also during his amnesty hearing.

Nimrod Veyi was a member of the Security Branch and was in charge, together with other members, with guarding Simelane and also assisting in her assault and interrogation. In his testimony, he described the magnitude of the assault and torture Simelane was subjected to, and stated that this treatment was only meant for MK members. An MK member, Simelane, was considered to be a terrorist, and the most dangerous of criminals. Veyi, together with Selamolela, denied Coetzee’s and Pretorius’ claims to have provided her with

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

toiletries. Despite this, he continuously maintained that he knew that it was not right. Summarising his and other black officer's role, he said that: 'we would assault her, even though it was not our intention to assault her.'⁵⁶ We have to keep in mind that he and others were following the orders of their superiors. When questioned on the assault and torture enacted upon Simelane, and his role in it, he narrated that '[he] had the feeling this was not right, what was happening there was not right, so [he] decided to refrain'.⁵⁷ Although his testimony is a breakthrough for the fact that it opposes the testimony of Pretorius and Coetzee, and his duty was to follow their orders, one cannot help but get the sense of his desire for absolution from wrongdoing.

Whereas Coetzee and Pretorius underscored their success in turning Simelane into an informer, Veyi suggested otherwise: 'I don't remember her co-operating or agreeing to work with us'.⁵⁸ For this reason, he stressed, her refusal to co-operate, she was 'not given fair treatment'. Simelane, according to Veyi, was regarded as a terrorist by the Unit, worthy of the worst treatment, especially because she would not comply, and around her last weeks at the farm, she was so weak that she needed assistance to walk to the toilet. But she was beautiful, he added – before the gruesome assaults and torture. The last time he saw her was in the boot of a car, beaten, worn, and almost unrecognisable, but living. This car, he believed, transported her to her death.

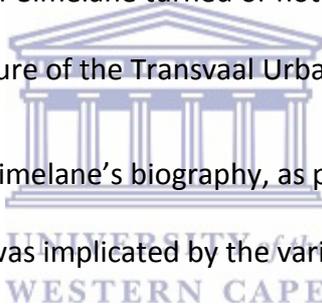
In addition to perpetrators such as Coetzee, Pretorius, Veyi and Selamolela, Gibert Thwala also appeared before the Amnesty Committee as the person who assigned Simelane to her mission. At the time Thwala was the Chief of Staff of the Transvaal Urban Machinery in

⁵⁶ Cross-examination of Nimrod Veyi at Amnesty Hearing, Johannesburg, 11 May 1999, available at http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/originals/amntrans/1999/99062830_pre_990630pt.htm, accessed on 16 April 2017.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Swaziland.⁵⁹ In addition to the initial autobiographical details he conveys to the commission – his birthdate and place of birth, for instance – he provided insights into Simelane’s responsibilities as a courier. He is furthermore asked whether he believes that Simelane had turned, to which he denied the plausibility of: ‘If Nokuthula turned, certain things would have happened. Nokuthula would have told them her tasks and operations inside the country... our Machinery in Swaziland, I think would have been destroyed if not weakened, because she would know, she knew certain houses that we were renting and after some time, we did use those houses.... I don't think some of us, including Siphwe Nyanda, would have lived if Nokuthula had co-operated’.⁶⁰ Thwala therefore contributes to the contestation surrounding whether Simelane turned or not. He, however, based his belief on the occurrences within the structure of the Transvaal Urban Machinery.



A testament to the omissions in Simelane’s biography, as produced in the TRC, is that accused Msebenzi Radebe, who was implicated by the various other perpetrators as being involved in Simelane’s abduction, did not appear before the commission in search of amnesty. Although today he stands trial together with Coetzee, Pretorius and Mong, his lack of accountability and involvement at the TRC leaves a hole in its already obfuscated and conflicting account of Simelane. His refusal to appear before the commission perhaps implicitly conveys his sentiments on Simelane, her family and himself. His absence appears dismissive of the victims and the gravity of what occurred. This tells us about his character.

⁵⁹ The Transvaal Urban Machinery is an umbrella term for the various MK units located in the Transvaal region.

⁶⁰ Cross-examination of Gilbert Thwala at Amnesty Hearing, Pretoria, 30 June 1999, available at http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/originals/amntrans/1999/99062830_pre_990630pt.htm, accessed on 16 April 2017.

His silence and absence speaks. In this way he, too, contributes in auto/biographical productions.⁶¹

In concluding the analysis of the perpetrator testimony, it is perhaps relevant to note a few issues which emerged in the transcripts. For instance, in Coetzee's testimony an error in transcription occurs. In an exchange between Lamey and Coetzee regarding Simelane's inability to walk on her own, Lamey makes a statement to which Coetzee responds, however, it is transcribed as Lamey responding to Lamey. This is however a small example of an issue in the TRC and its auto/biographical productions.

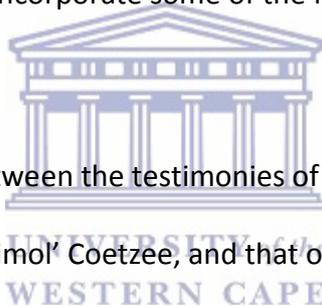
The Report and Simelane

The TRC report shines a spotlight on Simelane in two respective volumes. Volume 2, Chapter 3, Subsection 31: 'Abductions, interrogation and killing', subheading 'Nokuthula Simelane', and Volume 6, section 3, chapter 1, subsection 19. This Volume focuses on the 'Soweto Security Branch', also provides much information on Simelane. The respective volumes perform a similar role in the production of Simelane's life, with few and subtle distinctions in the biographies.

By analysing subsection 'Abductions, interrogation and killing', we get the sense from which perspective the section relating to Simelane is being conveyed, and thus, the notion of truth it favours. Paragraph 287, beneath the subheading 'Nokuthula Simelane', begins, 'According

⁶¹ There are however various other amnesty hearing testimonies which, due to constraints of space—this being a mini-thesis—could not be dealt with in. Some of these amnesty applicants include Frederick Mong, Mkhonza, Williams, Ross and Manual Olifant. These applicants do to various degrees contribute to the production of Simelane. Mkhonza, for instance, was the double agent who met Simelane at the Carlton Centre. Ross was a member of the Intelligence Unit of the Security Branch, whose involvement in the matter was limited to being a look-out during the abduction at the Carlton Centre. He implicates Coetzee, Pretorius and Radebe in the 'grab action' of the abduction. In its documenting of detail, the TRC provided brief biographical details of each perpetrator involved in the Simelane matter. These details included each perpetrator's role in the violation, the organisation they belonged to and the language they spoke – to name but a few. In the particular amnesty document I have access to, details regarding language are not specified. See John Daniel Archive, 'Swaziland 1974-1983', at UWC's Department of History.

to Lieutenant-Colonel Anton Pretorius [AM4389/96], the Soweto Intelligence Unit (SIU) had....⁶². The report, it seems, begins by describing the perpetrators' role in fighting and suppressing the cross-border resistance to apartheid. By means of further reading (paragraph 288), it becomes apparent that Simelane's life is being told from the perspective of the perpetrators, which at this point is understandable, considering that the report is providing a chronological narrative of her 'abduction, interrogation and killing'. While paragraph 287 and 288 adhere to the chronology of Simelane's abduction at the parking lot of the Carlton Hotel, her detainment, interrogation and assault at Custodian police flats, and her transportation to the farm near Thabazimbi, where she was held for a month, the subsequent paragraphs begin to incorporate some of the fundamental contestations in the amnesty hearings.⁶³



The report conveys a contrast between the testimonies of the prior mentioned Pretorius and Lieutenant Colonel Willem 'Timol' Coetzee, and that of some of the other members of the unit, more specifically, black members. As opposed to Pretorius and Coetzee, who asserted that they had succeeded in 'turning' Simelane into an agent, and thus had her sent back to Swaziland, applicant Nimrod Veyi, according to this section, challenged this, maintaining that she refused to co-operate and was kept on the farm, continued to be tortured, and ultimately transported to a location in Rustenburg, where she was killed. The subsection provides two conflicting perspective from perpetrators – two different biographies.

Volume 6, section 3. Chapter 1 subsection 19, contextualising the Soweto Security Branch's role in the narrative of apartheid South Africa, interestingly enough tells us more of

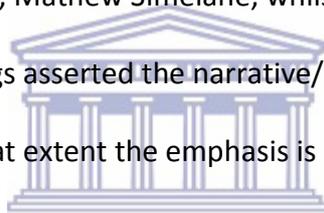
⁶² *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*. Volume. 2, Chapter 3, Subsection 31, p. 234.

⁶³ *TRC Report*. Vol. 2, Ch. 3, Sub 31, p. 234.

Simelane, not only on a public level but also on a private level, than the prior subsection, guised beneath a subheading called 'Nokuthula Simelane', does. This section, as opposed to the previous one, is not only marginally lengthier, but provides us with personal biographical details of Simelane. It not only gives us her age when abducted (23) but it also tells us she studied at the University of Swaziland, where she became involved in the resistance struggle as a member of the MK's Transvaal Urban Machinery. This subsection, however, not only writes more characters into the story of her political life but also discloses more detail about her time on the farm in relation to her perpetrators. Whereas the prior mentioned subsection merely makes allusions to Veyi contesting Coetzee and Pretorius' version of events, this subsection provides the names of Nimrod Veyi and Lazarus Selamolela as the key contesters. This section names her interrogators: Coetzee, Pretorius and Sergeant Frederick Barnard Mong. Veyi and Selamolela, the section recounts, underscored the regularity of Simelane's torture throughout her stay on the farm which ultimately left her unrecognisable. Further detail on her experience on the farm indicates that Simelane soiled herself as a consequence of the torture and was put in a dam because of it. This particular section in volume 6 conveys that Simelane was under persistent guard by the black members of the unit, and also mentions their sleeping arrangements – either outside or in the same room. Ultimately, this section concludes by not relaying the outcome of the amnesty applications of Coetzee, Pretorius and Mong, but cites a section in which the Amnesty Committee gives a brief summary of Simelane's experience on the farm – perhaps justifying their denial of amnesty to the three aforementioned perpetrators.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Volume 6, Section 3, Chapter 1, subsection 19, p. 224.

An analysis of the report in relation to Nokuthula Simelane's life quite clearly conveys a preference for the testimony of the perpetrator, and the quest for factual truth as a means to accomplish the aims sought by the mandate. One wonders, however, the extent at which reconciliation can be promoted when the victim, Simelane, still remains obscure. The voices of the relatives, who speak for the victim, are silenced. Excluding the limited references to Simelane's private/personal life made above, there is no other discernible use of testimony conveying the private life of Simelane. The report, it thus seems, omits the significance of narrative truth which the mandate required as a means to affirm the human and civil dignity of the victims, and those speaking on behalf of the victims. We can validate this by analysing the HRVC testimony of her father, Mathew Simelane, whilst also acquiring an idea of the extent at which the HRVC hearings asserted the narrative/personal truth as opposed to factual/forensic truth, and to what extent the emphasis is on Nokuthula Simelane.



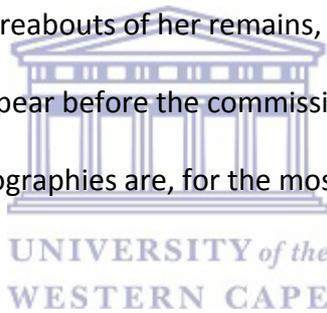
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When comparing the HRVC hearing transcripts by Mathew Simelane to the TRC's report's descriptions of Simelane, it becomes quite apparent that the report is based on information attained from the amnesty applicants. As seen by the report, Simelane's biographies are constructed by the perpetrators. This is contentious and disconcerting when one considers that the TRC, together with attaining a comprehensive picture of gross human rights violations during apartheid, sought to restore the civil and human dignity of the victims by affording them platform to assert and express their voice. By means of the report, the TRC to a large degree failed at this goal, and thus, once more silenced and suppressed the voice of the historically oppressed and silenced. The perpetrators are therefore handed the power, even after her death, to determine her fate, and determine the public's perception

and remembrance of her. Simelane's biographies, as produced by the TRC are biographies of perpetual silencing and omissions.

Conclusion

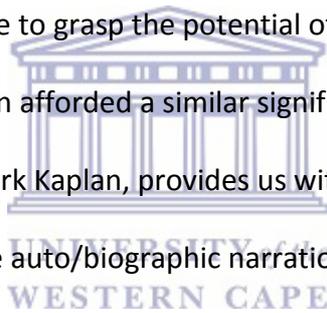
Thus far, Simelane's biographies, as produced by the TRC, are a biographies of denial – a denial of truths, and her dignity. Simelane's biographies, as produced by the TRC, are not only a biographies of herself, but a biography of her family and her perpetrators, and also a story of the TRC's failings. Simelane's biographies are thus fragmented, complex and rife with contestations, as its multiple narrations reveal, obscure and contend. In addition to this, her biographies are also wrought in silences, observed through the perpetrator unwillingness to disclose the whereabouts of her remains, and in another case, a perpetrator's unwillingness to appear before the commission and apply for amnesty. Equally problematic is that Simelane's biographies are, for the most part, produced by her perpetrators.



Simelane's biography cannot be told without scrutiny of the methods used, and the aims sought in its production – the TRC stands as a biographical genre, but it is the methods and agenda of this production that brings forth the contentious and unconventional end product. The problem of interpretation is particularly pertinent in the production of an obscured Simelane. Neither can Simelane's life be understood outside of her public, political life. With the exception of a few and brief allusions to the personal and emotive aspects of her life, as understood through the TRC, despite its allowance for narrative and personal truth, Simelane is perceived in relation to her political undertakings as a member of MK. Within the TRC, Simelane is many things to many people – her life is contested and fragmented – however, what remains constant is the binary created by conflicting

testimony from the perpetrators. On the one hand, she was a freedom fighter, who in the face of torture, stood firm against the security police and as a result was killed. On the other hand, she is represented as having conceded to her enemy and converted to becoming a double agent, and askari.

However, in spite of its transcendence of conventionality by a focus on the multiple narrations within the particular format of the TRC, one aspect remains overtly apparent: Simelane's biographies – bar the interpreters and evidence leader – are told, mediated and enacted by men. One discerns, through reading newspaper articles focusing on her mother and sister, a more balanced biography of Simelane – an interaction between the public and the private. We are therefore able to grasp the potential of the private aspect in the narration of a life, especially when afforded a similar significance to the public. *Betrayal*, a documentary film directed by Mark Kaplan, provides us with further biographic accounts of Simelane, and also engages in the auto/biographic narrations. It does produce more insights into the life of Simelane, her family and comrades – the lives of political agents and the lives of the person removed from the political.



CHAPTER TWO

BETRAYAL: LIVES ON FILM

Introduction

This chapter comprises of an analysis of *Betrayal*, a documentary film directed by Mark Kaplan and released in the year 2006. The film is an account of the Simelane family's pursuit for the whereabouts of Nokuthula Simelane's remains, the truth about her disappearance and fundamentally, a narrative of Nokuthula Simelane's life, particularly as it relates to her endeavours in the liberation struggle. I approach my analysis on the film by highlighting the interconnectedness of biography and autobiography in the production of Simelane through the documentary film. In addition to the auto/biographical connection, I underscore three other facets that are fundamental to the film's auto/biographic account of Simelane, her family, friends, comrades and other role players. These facets include: photographs and their ability to stir memory and their placement within the film; re-enactment; and sound/music. Together, these themes highlight not only the contested nature of Simelane's biography as produced by the film, its preference for perceiving her within the political realm, but also the silences it is wrought with. I therefore seek to determine, by means of this analysis, how Simelane has been represented within the auto/biographic genre of documentary film.

Betrayal begins, and instantly, viewers are confronted with the stoic countenance of Nokuthula Simelane. The photograph fades away, and thereafter emerges a close-up shot of her birth certificate which bears biographic specifics: full name, date and place of birth, and ethnic group. Simultaneously, a slow and somber melody surges into prominence; slightly measured, however, as it accompanies the visual imagery, rather than seeking to distract

the viewer from the visuals. Kaplan's narration commences, introducing the key and fringe figures in the film. Kaplan, however, does not embark alone, as Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela also emerges as a participant in the film. Kaplan introduces Gobodo-Madikizela to viewer as a psychologist and former member of the TRC. The introduction ceases and the story of Simelane's troubled infancy is told by her mother in an interview, accompanied by a dramatic re-enactment.

Film and Historical Representation

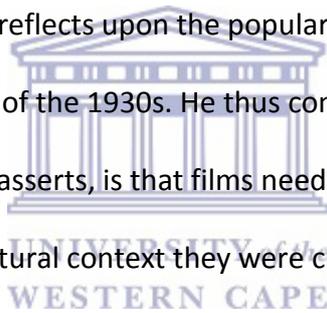
The study of historical representation in film, known as historiophoty, has garnered vast debate amongst scholars. Hayden White, for instance, reflects upon the numerous writers in this field, and considers whether written history is justly and successfully able to be 'translated' into a 'visual-auditory equivalent'.¹ Perhaps film falls short in certain respects in representing history, however, White does express that film is better equipped than written history in portraying particular types of historical occurrences, such as, 'landscape, scene, atmosphere, complex events such as wars, battles, crowds and emotions'.² Robert Rosenstone addresses some of the most pressing critiques against historiophoty. I. C. Jarvie, for instance, questions the film genre's approach to issues such as its inability to substantiate evidence by means of footnoting, and defending criticisms of the film – areas of significance in the written discipline of history. Rosenstone, it seems, concedes to this reality of a lack of information, detail and film's inability to deal with debate and different perspectives, however, to him the more significant area of historiography is 'whether that information can be absorbed from quickly moving images, is worth knowing, and can add up

¹ White, 'Historiography and Historiophoty', p. 1193.

² *Ibid.*, p. 1193.

to “history””.³ Here Rosenstone and White’s sentiments overlap on the subject of film allowing the viewer to see a different kind of historical event, a type of history written work cannot convey: ‘film can most directly render the look and feel of all sorts of historical particularities and situations’.⁴

There are different types of historical film. These include, the historical drama biopic, documentary film, and experimental film. Regarding film, and to a lesser extent documentary film, John E. O’Connor emphasises that film could be used as propaganda. O’Connor relays the use of films in promoting the rise of the Nazi party, and the preservation of its power. He states that ‘mass media served as part of the political decision-making’.⁵ Additionally, O’Connor reflects upon the popularity of musicals in a society blighted by the Great Depression of the 1930s. He thus considers film also for its escapist value. The moral here, O’Connor asserts, is that films need to be understood within the particular political, social, and cultural context they were created in.⁶



This bears great significance, specifically in the context of a post-apartheid South Africa, as television programming, and documentaries, historians such as Ciraj Rassool assert, have been utilised in assisting in nation-building and reconciliation. Rassool argues that ‘[t]elevision became a key medium for the proliferation of historical documentaries, which sought to recover histories of resistance and reconciliation in South Africa’.⁷ The thematic approach of these documentaries were similar. These were often narrations of the lives of prominent political leaders, often deceased. They would, in essence, give a voice and a

³ Rosenstone, ‘History in Images/History in Words’, p. 1177.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1179.

⁵ J. E. O’Connor, ‘History in Images/Images in History: Reflections on the Importance of Film and Television Study for Understanding of the Past’, *American Historical Review*, 93, 5 (1988), p. 1202.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1203.

⁷ Rassool, ‘The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa’, p. 193.

public platform to the formally oppressed and suppressed, and would most likely be the narratives of people associated to the ANC, such as prominent figures like, Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Albert Luthuli.⁸

Contrary to my expectations, scholarly inquiry in this area suggests that documentary film is no more true than the historical film. O'Connor emphasises that 'all are carefully structured creations that present a particular point of view'.⁹ Moreover, Rosenstone describes a common trend in both dramatic historical films and documentary films – that of Pierre Bourdeau's idea of the biographical illusion. Rosenstone states, 'the historical documentary, just like the dramatic feature, tends to focus on heroic individuals and, more importantly, to make sense of its material in terms of a story that moves from a beginning through a conflict to a dramatic resolution'.¹⁰ Historical documentaries therefore present a coherent, chronological narrative, in exultation of a 'great life' which overcame plight and adversity, to finally attain triumph. Furthermore, he argues that fiction is rife in documentary film, particularly in the 'use of generic, illustrative images from the past that are not specifically of the scenes they purport to depict'.¹¹

Although the focus of this chapter is on a documentary film rather than on dramatic historic films and experimental films, there are many pertinent themes and critiques which are also applicable to documentary films and relevant to *Betrayal*. One such dramatic historic film is Richard Attenborough's *Cry Freedom*, a biopic – intended to be on – Steve Biko. *Cry Freedom* is criticised for relegating Steve Biko to a seemingly supporting, or fringe character, to that of the white character, Donald Wood. The history, the black history, of a much

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 193-197.

⁹ O'Connor, 'History in Images/Images in History', p. 1206.

¹⁰ Rosenstone, 'History in Images/History in Words', p. 1179.

¹¹ Rosenstone, *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past*, p. 7.

revered political figure in the anti-apartheid movement, and Black Consciousness movement, is thus once more told through the perspective of a white man. Rob Nixon, one of those to write on the film, states that 'Attenborough concluded that the suffering, defiance, political ideas, and murder of a black South African leader stood no chance, on their own, of succeeding as a movie'.¹² Peter Davis, underscoring similar sentiments, stresses that it is in fact not a movie on Biko, but instead one on Donald Woods.

Additionally, Davis highlights in relation to Biko's political message, the director, Attenborough's desires for the film: '[w]hat is left of Biko's message is what the director wanted left, and that could well be not only inadequate, but a distortion'.¹³ This is fundamentally clear in the portrayal of the bond between Biko and Woods. Biko was not well and justly represented. Finally, Vivian Bickford-Smith also critiques the film. For instance, he observes that it falls short in providing the viewers with 'the human being behind the historical façade'.¹⁴ In spite of these criticisms, Bickford-Smith not only states it is 'very close to the historical record', but also asserts the importance to bear in mind that Attenborough's film was not only made for being a commercial success, but made in the 1980s, it also advocated an anti-apartheid message.¹⁵

Nigel Worden, writing on the experimental film, *Proteus* (2003), notes that the low-budget film, unlike most South African historical films that 'deal with the grand narrative', focusses on an era and location not well known. More fascinating, however, is Worden's assertions

¹² Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, p. 83.

¹³ Davis, *In Darkest Hollywood*, p. 103

¹⁴ V. Bickford-Smith, 'Picturing apartheid: with a Particular Focus on Hollywood' histories of the 1970s', in Vivian Bickford-Smith and Richard Mendelsohn (eds), *Black & White in Colour: African History on Screen* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), p. 270.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

that the film emphasises the ‘untrustworthiness of the written record’.¹⁶ This is particularly interesting, as in the previous chapter I sought to show the extent to which the archive – the TRC report and transcripts – are wrought with contestations, silences and obscurities. The ‘written record’, which are the reports and transcripts of the TRC, may have been imperative to the making of the film in the research of the case, and thus the auto/biographies the film produces.

A brief look into the study of historiophoty therefore provides us with the themes whereby to analyse Mark Kaplan’s *Betrayal* with. A thorough analysis of the film and its use of oral history and photographs, re-enactments, music and sound and a focus on its auto/biographical nature will reveal insights into many of the above-mentioned themes. These include: the political and cultural context the film was made in; film as promoting reconciliation; the public and private binary; intentions of the filmmaker; and how the auto/biographies are being told. The film’s approach and insight into these themes could reveal to us how Simelane has been remembered, represented and perceived in post-apartheid South Africa.

***Betrayal* and auto/biography**

The film introduces various biographers, and interestingly, auto/biographers as well. These auto/biographers include: the respective members of Simelane’s family, for instance, her father, mother, sister, brother, aunt, and her cousin and struggle hero Barney Molokoane; fellow MK comrades, such as, Gilbert Thwala and Totsi Memela, for instance; and Mark Kaplan and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela. *Betrayal* is not merely a film on the private and

¹⁶ Nigel Worden, “‘What are we?’: Proteus and the Problematizing of History”, pp. 83 & 86.

political life of Nokuthula Simelane. In fact, although wrought with biographical details on Simelane, *Betrayal* is, according to Gobodo-Madikizela:

a film about a mother's quest to find the truth about her disappeared daughter, and now it is taken up by her other daughter, Thembi, whose fear is she, too, may never find the truth. What complicates the matter for the family is the people who have come forward, there is a sense of doubt that they are speaking the truth. And then there are all the others who simply won't meet the family.¹⁷

Her words are useful, as it identifies not only the prominent auto/biographers, but also the fringe auto/biographers who also perform an important role in producing the film of multiple biographies. Who are, therefore, the prominent biographers, and whose biography are they producing? Kaplan and Gobodo-Madikizela, who narrate and conduct the interviews, perform the role of mediators, posing the questions and statements to which the interviewees respond. Also, by means of narration, they perform a role of linking interviewee testimony to the important themes, scenes and agendas of the film, guiding one scene transition to the other. For instance, as Simelane's mother painfully peruses through a photo album, Gobodo-Madikizela sits nearby, listening, while the voice of her omnipresent narration says, 'Where there is no grave they would be forced into the twilight of knowing and not knowing' and 'Their trauma around Nokuthula has frozen in time'. The theme of trauma is prevalent in the film, not only in relation to Simelane's experience of gross human rights abuse, but also in reference to her family, and in this case, her mother's trauma. Similarly, as the film begins, Kaplan's narration provides a concise biography of Simelane. Also, Kaplan narrates a scene accompanied by visuals of a birds-eye-view of the farm where Simelane was held and tortured, from a helicopter. Here he conveys the extent of the apartheid state's violence against the black body – transforming what is seemingly an everyday, inconspicuous place, a residence, into an extension of state violence. The two

¹⁷ Mark Kaplan, *Betrayal*, DVD, Johannesburg: SABC, Grey Matter Media, Film Resource Unit, 2006.

examples of narrations, once more, identify a few of the biographic subjects. In addition to Simelane, her mother, sister and family emerge as auto/biographical subjects.

Simelane's mother, Ernestine Simelane's auto/biography is created with an emphasis on her deep and lingering sadness about her missing daughter. She not only responds to questions about her daughter, but in response to the questions, her own experience is conveyed, overtly and subtly by means of observing her. Although largely expressing the personal, the mother does on rare occasions discuss Simelane in reference to her political undertakings. She says, regarding the last conversation she had with Simelane, 'Nokuthula told me, Mom, in Swaziland there are a lot of spies'. This conversation was related to her wanting to travel home from Swaziland. Her sister, Thembi's, auto/biography reveals itself in carrying the family burden of leading the search for her sister Nokuthula Simelane. Thembi tells of her mother who often mistakes Thembi for Nokuthula, and once realising her error, she weeps. Thembi, however, not only tell us of her mother's grief, but also conveys more personal information on Simelane. She divulges that although she does not remember much of her sister – being fairly young when she disappeared – she does remember the last time they ate a family meal together. In this story she conveys not only her sister's help with household duties and her capable nature, but also her kindheartedness toward her.

Thembi, it appears from the film, shoulders her family's pain and the search for her sister and the truth. She mentions that she has not and does not cry her own tears, but her mother's. Therefore getting to know Thembi through the film, we also learn about her mother. Visiting the farm where Simelane was held, and standing in the room of her torture, Thembi reflects on not only her sister, but also the broader search for her and for the truth. Talking to Gobodo-Madikizela, she wonders, 'What type of person was this?', to so

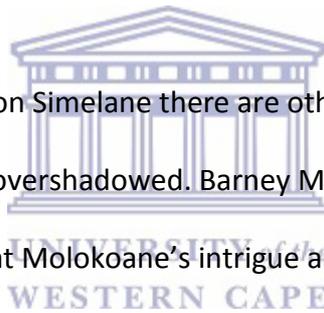
stubbornly endure weeks of physical and psychological torture, and still refuse to 'turn' and disclose the information her torturers sought. Thembi thus thinks about who her sister really was, her true nature, to be able to confront the greatest adversity, yet still remain unfailing in her loyalties. Further there is no ambivalence about whether she 'turned' or not – it is not contested here as in the testimonies of others before the TRC hearings.

Thembi's words at the farm also reveal to me the film's lack of allegiance to any particular political party, and therefore, not perpetuating what Rassool saw as a theme in post-apartheid programming – 'focused on leaders associated with the ANC', and thus an exultation of the ANC.¹⁸ Thembi expresses her disappointment with the TRC, the nation-building and reconciliation promoting effort by the new government, and the failure to delve deeper in its questioning of the perpetrators. Thembi alludes to the possible sexual assault of Simelane, a sole, vulnerable woman surrounded by men with bad intentions. A further allusion to a critique of the ANC is also expressed in Gilbert Thwala's narration of his interaction with Mathew Simelane. Thwala, the Chief of Staff of the Transvaal Urban Machinery and Nokuthula Simelane's commander, who sent her on the ill-fated mission, was told by Mathew Simelane, 'The ANC is not with us anymore'.¹⁹ Although a minor detail, the film does not attempt to obscure it. Thembi's words on the TRC furthermore reveals a larger and prevalent theme in the film. The auto/biographies revealed in the film tell of quite the opposite of what the TRC and other films of this era sought. Kaplan's film expresses unfulfilled healing and reconciliation, and in spite of the various revelations on Simelane's life, and others, truth still remains obfuscated and unachieved.

¹⁸ Rassool, 'The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa', p. 198.

¹⁹ Thwala's disclosures in the film is corroborated by Mathew Simelane's testimony at the Human Rights Violations Hearing wherein he states that '[he] suspected that the ANC was using her'. See *Truth Commission Special Report Human Rights Violation Hearing – 55530*, 3 June 1997, available at <http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/originals/hrvtrans/leandra/simelane.htm>

Simelane's father's voice is quite marginal as an auto/biographer throughout the film in comparison to the TRC where he was the main witness. The telling of his life by others is, however, not completely overlooked. Having since passed away, Mathew Simelane's role in the film is reduced to the initial interviews conducted by Kaplan in 1995. Of the footage used of him in the film what stands out is his pride in Simelane's academic achievements. He states that '[e]verything she touched turned into gold'. His wife, Ernestine Simelane, notes that he died not ever knowing the truth about and the whereabouts of his daughter. He, too, however, played a significant role in the anti-apartheid movement, as his son and others tell of his role in helping Barney Molokoane, his nephew, fulfill some of his anti-apartheid undertakings.



While this is a documentary film on Simelane there are other lives being narrated and the director has to ensure she is not overshadowed. Barney Molokoane presented Kaplan with this challenge, as he admitted that Molokoane's intrigue and appeal could have outshone Nokuthula Simelane.²⁰ Molokoane's life and actions are covered quite extensively in the film. The film gives the sense that Molokoane is highly revered among his comrades and the public, as a hero of the liberation struggle. This is not only expressed in Totsi Mamela's recital of the struggle-song about Molokoane, but also through the footage of his mother accepting the hero's medal of honour on his behalf from Thabo Mbeki. This scene is juxtaposed with the reality that Simelane has not received any such honour, and Thwala states, 'I think Nokuthula didn't sell out... she deserves recognition... in the medals'.

Molokoane's political insurgency endeavours are alluded to by various interviewees, one of which details Molokoane's ambition to destroy the Sasol refinery. Molokoane's life is not only told in relation to Simelane, and his assisting the family in the search for her in the 80s.

²⁰ Mark Kaplan, Personal Information, 21 June 2017.

Kaplan's view is that it was Simelane's connection to Molokoane that explains why they tortured her for so long.²¹

The film devotes footage to Molokoane's death and exhumation. The film does present contestation in the telling of events leading to his death. Historical drama, for instance, would perhaps not present two versions. One interviewee states that an ambush occurred, whereas another, immediately after, underscores that it was not an ambush. Molokoane's brother tells of the pair of boots which he bought his brother, and it was by these boots that they identified him upon exhumation. This, once more, is significant in the story of Simelane, as she still remains missing. Interestingly, Barney Molokoane was buried in an unmarked grave with the shoes his brother bought for him (as found upon exhumation), Simelane, in contrast, is unlikely to be wearing any distinguishable clothing, and if ever found her parents wish to bury her with the graduation dress they bought for her. Certainly the fullness of what we learn of Molokoane in such short a time makes the absences and obscurities in Simelane's biography all the more evident. The film, whether intentionally or not, certainly highlights this.

Gilbert Thwala, MK alias, Mpho, is also an integral auto/biographer in the film. His contribution is fundamental in building Simelane's biography and also the biography of Barney Molokoane, whose biography, as we have learnt, is strongly revealed with Simelane's – almost overshadowing hers. Thwala's part in the film – a very significant part – revolved around relaying Simelane's purpose, duties, and as far as he is able, the mission which led to her abduction and continued missingness. As an MK member, according to Thwala, Simelane 'was a courier... for communication purposes in a link between the

²¹ Mark Kaplan, Personal Information, 21 June 2017.

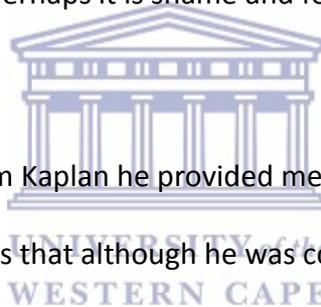
command structure in Swaziland and South Africa'. In reference to the mission Thwala describes Simelane's reluctance to bear arms, stating that she relied on her intelligence and guile to get her through dangerous and difficult situations. His contribution in producing her biography, although mostly on her political life, does traverse into a more private sphere of her life.

Thwala provides us with a brief but impactful revelation of the nature of his relationship with Simelane. Although he does not convey this in categorical terms, he acknowledges the likelihood that she may have been pregnant with his child. 'There [is] a possibility that she was pregnant', he admits, 'I was involved with her'. An interesting moment occurs in the film as Thwala makes this admission. The shot switches to a fellow MK comrade and friend, Totsie Mamela, who expresses an exclamation of shock and sadness, infused with a certain extent of awkward speechlessness, before she finally and concisely musters words. Perhaps Kaplan, by means of this juxtaposition, was trying to emphasise the senselessness of sending Simelane on the doomed mission, especially since Thwala was aware of her possible pregnancy. Kaplan was motivated to probe the pregnancy on film to hold Thwala accountable.²² The film certainly does convey Thwala's culpability, as Simelane's mother, too, questions why he would send her on the mission.

While Simelane's biographies are produced by various people in this film, what is also significant in the film is from whom the viewer does not hear, as a means to enhance the fullness of the auto/biography as a whole. Throughout the film, footage from the TRC amnesty hearings is shown of some of the perpetrators – Coetzee, Norman Mkhonza (Scotch), Nimrod Veyi and Lazarus Selamolela. Although the footage of these perpetrators is

²² Mark Kaplan, 'Personal Information', 21 June 2017.

used sparingly, one cannot help but wonder how not only footage but interviews with the perpetrators could have improved our understanding of Simelane, and the perpetrators, themselves. In an instance relating to the amnesty footage of Coetzee, Gobodo-Madikizela narrates in a sympathetic tone on the shame Coetzee possibly feels being exposed nationally as a perpetrator of torture. Here, however, occurs some contestation between herself and Kaplan. In my conversation with Kaplan he stated that he would not completely agree with the apparent sympathy she may seem to have conveyed. The film does, however, document Kaplan's and Gobodo-Madikizela's pursuit to attain interviews with the above mentioned individuals. Their elusiveness, on the other hand, may give us some insight into their character and psyche. Perhaps it is shame and fear, or perhaps even indifference and guilt.



In a personal communication from Kaplan he provided me with an insight into his own perceptions of Coetzee. He admits that although he was cognizant of the unlikelihood of Coetzee agreeing to be interviewed, he was still hopeful of getting a reaction out of him, to reveal and expose his nature – for perhaps he would rudely chase them from his property.²³ With regards to Mkhonza, it is evident from the film that they, but Thembi in particular, wished to allow him to tell his side of events. Through their pursuit of Mkhonza we do learn interesting information about him, like his transformation into a pastor. They visit his church in an attempt to converse with him. However, on that particular day he did not attend. They also phone his landline. The person on the other end of the line, however, denies knowing him and denies further that he could be Mkhonza.

²³ Mark Kaplan, Personal Information, 21 June 2017.

The marginal presence of Nimrod Veyi in the film is also significant. Although he was interviewed and met the family in 1995 – still under the alias of Mr X and wearing a balaclava – and his TRC amnesty footage is used in the film, Kaplan stated that Veyi was afraid to come forward for additional interviews because his life was in danger. After his testimony as an applicant for amnesty at the TRC, his car was vandalised. Kaplan states that Veyi's absence was something he had to accept, for suppose something were to happen to him who would provide for his family.²⁴

Although footage from the TRC amnesty hearings was used throughout the film, footage of the testimony of Anton Pretorius was not used due to the inaccessibility of that footage, as Kaplan states that the SABC, for whatever reason, did not have the footage.²⁵ Pretorius, who worked in the SIU, was one of the officers, and according to Veyi's testimony at the amnesty hearings, was responsible, together with Coetzee, for the killing of Simelane. An integral piece of perpetrator input is therefore not available. The biography of Simelane is therefore quite thin on perpetrator input, however, this is not due to the director's disinterest in their voices being heard, but instead due to their own unwillingness, fear and inaccessibility of the archive. In some cases the perpetrator had already died.²⁶ Thus, if compared to the TRC, the film contains various omissions in auto/biographic voice. However, it does include various other voices which the TRC, by the nature of its purpose, did not have and in fact did not need to have.

Further voices – not necessarily perpetrators – are also not covered. For example, that of Wendy Mbama, who the film shows was thoroughly sought by Kaplan and others.

²⁴ Mark Kaplan, Personal Information, 21 June 2017.

²⁵ Mark Kaplan, Personal Information, 21 June 2017.

²⁶ It is noted in the AC hearing of Willem Coetzee that Peter Lengene, a member of the SUI responsible for the abduction and torture of Simelane, had died before his hearing.

Simelane's mother states that Nokuthula told her that she trusted Wendy. Thwala, however, questions, 'Who is Wendy?', and considers whether her closeness to and knowledge of Simelane could/may have put Simelane's life in danger and sabotaged the mission. Kaplan explains in the film that Wendy avoided an interview, and reflects upon the possible reasons for this: did Wendy have something to do with Simelane's abduction, or was it genuinely a matter of psychological issues?

Therefore, within a film wrought around narratives of truth, trauma, mourning and closure, the void left by the perpetrator voice, hints at the film's conclusion – the lack of closure and truth, and the ongoing search for them. The void in the auto/biographies – the perpetrators' – is a testament to the void of truth and closure, and the perpetuity of mourning and trauma in the story of Simelane and her family. We are thus only left to wonder how our perception and understanding of Simelane could have been enhanced had the voices and input of various other individuals been available. In an interview with a French filmmaker, Jihan El-Tahri, conducted by Skye Arundhati Thomas, El-Tahri recounts an incident wherein she had to opt out of an interview as the potential interviewee wanted to be paid for it. Upon reflection of the outcome of the film, El-Tahri says that 'nobody even *realizes* he is not in it. Because... he [does not] have to be in the story'.²⁷ Certainly, like in El-Tahri's film, the perpetrators and other significant role-players missing in Kaplan's do not have to be there, however, their absence does leave gaps of insights in Simelane's biography, as produced by the film.

²⁷ S. A. Thomas, 'Reforming the Narrative of History: Interview with Egyptian Jihan El-Tahri', accessed at <https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/reforming-the-narrative-of-history-interview-with-egyptian-filmmaker-jihan-el-tahri/7762> on 29 March 2018.

As conveyed in the beginning of this section, *Betrayal* is not a conventional biographical film on Simelane, but a film on a mother and family's search for the remains and the truth about Nokuthula Simelane, and the pain and trauma they endure as a result. *Betrayal* is nonetheless auto/biographic on various levels, as various persons are involved in auto/biographic production. Although we learn a lot about Simelane's life as a MK cadre, we are also given a window into the more personal details of her life, and likewise, the lives of the various other auto/biographers. At various stages in to film, Simelane, an interesting subject, becomes overshadowed by a particularly intriguing character, Barney Molokoane. The auto/biography of Simelane is, however, limited as various integral and relevant persons in her life story are either marginally, or not covered at all. Importantly, though, is the knowledge that these limitations often occurred for reasons outside Kaplan's control.

The Visual, Oral History and Biographical Production

As alluded to in the introduction to this chapter, photographs, particularly family photographs, are an important aspect in the film's fashioning of its narrative. Various occasions occur within the film wherein family photographs of Nokuthula Simelane are used. Gillian Rose describes family photographs as quite narrow in subject matter. These photographs usually capture family and individuals as 'happy... and at leisure'.²⁸ More than what these photographs represent, however, my reading of Gillian Rose motivates me to consider photographs as objects too – objects require its owner(s) to act upon them, to do something with them.²⁹ Rose's approach to photographs includes an analysis into their ability to transform a domestic space, and the effects of their entrance into the public

²⁸ Rose, *Doing Family Photography*, p. 11.

²⁹ Rose, 'Family Photographs and Domestic Spacings', pp. 5-16.

sphere. My own analysis of the film will apply Rose's approach so as to learn how the photographs of Simelane contribute to the construction of Simelane's biographies.

Importantly, in most instances, these photographs do not speak for themselves, nor does a sole individual speak for them. Instead, the photographs are used in the process of interviewing as a means to evoke dialogue, memory and emotion. According to Elizabeth Edwards, photographs have social biographies, and fundamental to their social biography is 'the way in which the meaning of photographs, generated by viewers, depend of the context of their viewing'.³⁰ Lorena Rizzo, reflecting on her work with the indigenous people living in Kaoko, Namibia, argues that the photographs captured by Heinz Roth are taken out of their initial context.³¹ This is, according to Rizzo, 'a re-conceptualization, a re-framing of the visual material in new and alternative interpretations, a further chapter in the social lives of these photographs'.³² The use of photographs in the process of conducting interviews produces a social biography of the photographs. Additionally, the photographs are used to substantiate the words of the various speakers, as Rizzo finds that they are 'a visual enforcement of their oral representation of the past'.³³

Rose's study of family photographs as 'less as texts and more as objects, precisely because objects are things to which things are done', bears special significance here and relevance to Edwards' earlier assertion, as they are being used in this film as a supplement to the interviews.³⁴ Simelane's mother is filmed flipping through a family photo album, and in this way comments on the particular photographs, expressing fond memories, now mixed with

³⁰ E. Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums*. London: Polity Press, 2001, p. 14.

³¹ Heinz Roth was a businessman and an amateur photographer who, together with 14 others, embarked on an expedition to the region of Kaoko, Namibia. In L. Rizzo, *Gender and Colonialism: A History of Kaoko in north-western Namibia, 1870s-1950s* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2012), p. 256.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 294.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

³⁴ Rose, 'Family Photographs and Domestic Spacings', p. 7.

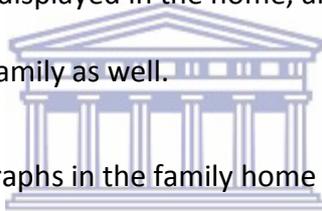
pain. In a similar way old school friends and fellow MK comrades are shown photographs of themselves and Simelane, they peruse them and express any memory they may have of their respective time and experience with her. What, however, do we learn about Simelane from the various insights the respective interviewees reveal in response to the photographs? And does the subject matter of the photographs in any way limit our knowledge of who they describe Simelane as being?

Various interviewees, Ernestine Simelane, a childhood friend and a fellow MK comrade, for instance, are shown observing photographs of Simelane. Upon viewing the photographs, the friend recounts Simelane's and her own love for and success in tennis. She thereon goes to tell of Simelane's usefulness around the house, which Simelane's aunt goes on to validate. The aunt, thereafter, says that Simelane had a lot of friends. The camera shot displays her staring at photographs of a happy-faced Simelane and friends bathing in a river. Another friend, an MK cadre, responds to these photographs. She observes that Simelane 'enjoyed and loved a good party'. Furthermore, photographs are also used to substantiate assertions. For instance, photographs are displayed of Simelane, at different stages of life, in school attire. Her father, in a 1995 interview says, 'everything she touched turned into gold'. This suggests not only her love for learning, but also her intelligence and success in it. The photographs, as conveyed in this paragraph, provide us with a view of Simelane outside of her political undertakings as a MK cadre, and also coincides with Rizzo's finding that photographs exposed 'further alternative readings'.³⁵

Betrayal also provides us, the viewers, with a glimpse of the home(s) of the Simelane family, or rather, a glimpse into the manner in which photographs of Nokuthula Simelane impact

³⁵ Rizzo, *Gender and Colonialism*, p. 296.

the domestic space, and affect the lives of the family, who lived among them. Thus, by means of the photographs of Simelane, the life of her family is revealed. Whereas Simelane's family and friends convey to the viewer their experience and perception of her through the photographs, the photographs, as seen in the domestic space, conveys to the viewer an unspoken aspect of the lives of her family as influenced/produced by the photographs. Significant here is the placing of the photographs – this could reveal the importance of them to the family. Rose states that 'domestic spacing of both absence and presence is evident in the mode of display of family photos adopted... They are very, very rarely shown on their own'.³⁶ It is thus important to determine by means of the film, how the photographs of Simelane are displayed in the home, and what this tells us about, not only her life, but the lives of her family as well.



The display of Simelane's photographs in the family home is visualised at various occasions. This is conveyed in two different instances in 1995 – Kaplan's initial interview with the father, mother and sister, and secondly, when filming Nimrod Veyi's (Mr X) meeting with the family. On the first occasion, a large portrait of Simelane hangs low on the cobble-stone wall. In the interviews, the close-ups of the respective three family members have the portrait of Simelane visible in the background, though it is out of focus. In the meeting with Veyi, however, the photograph is displayed much higher on the wall. The photograph hangs among certificates a distance away to the side. This is most likely the photograph's original position, as its placing in the first meeting in 1995 seems to be deliberately positioned for the camera shot – to not only fill an empty space in the close-ups, but also to ensure Nokuthula Simelane's presence in the shot. This would implicitly coincide with Rosenstone's thoughts on documentary film: 'Documentary is never a direct reflection of an outside

³⁶ Rose, 'Family photographs and domestic spacing', p. 12

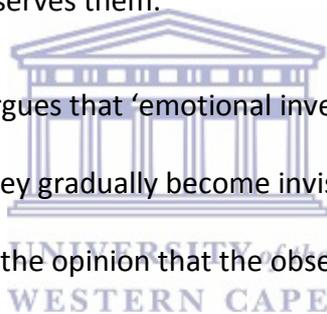
reality but a work consciously shaped into a narrative that... creates meaning of the material being conveyed.³⁷

The placing of the portrait is designed to convey meaning and significance, but also enhance the visual. The domestic space portrayed in the film is thus created to an extent to enhance the film, and not a reflection of the actual reality. What I discern to be the original place of the portrait – higher on the cobble-stone wall – emphasises Simelane’s continued importance in the lives of the family. The photograph is in an elevated position, and Simelane is thus of elevated importance in the lives of her family. The movement of the photograph for the enhancement of the film is therefore also part of the social biography of the photograph, as the director attempts to create a biographic representation of Simelane’s importance through its placement.

The scene of the family’s meeting with Veyi also reveals, right in the center of the room, a large black and white portrait of a side-on photograph of a woman holding an infant to her chest. Whether it portrays Simelane and her mother is unclear, however, it does underscore the significance the family holds towards the parent and child bond. A bond that, within their family, has been severed in relation to Simelane and her own mother. Gobodo-Madikizela’s words at the beginning of the film is thus of added relevance here: ‘This is a film about a mother’s quest to find the truth about her disappeared daughter’. It is therefore all the more likely that the portrait is of Simelane and her mother, and this too may have been purposely positioned at the center for filmic effect and to implicitly portray the severance of Simelane from her family.

³⁷ Rosenstone, ‘History in Images/History in Words’, p. 1179.

Interviews with the family, however, do not solely occur in that room. Whether in the same house, one is unable to discern, but in another scene, the camera focuses on another portrait of Simelane which also hangs high, beside a window – the photograph mentioned in the introduction.³⁸ This photograph also hangs on its own, contrary to Rose’s assertions that they are usually placed among others. The shot of this photograph by the sunlight from window is quite ironic, as the truth about her abduction and continued missingness is not transparent. The photographs in the home of the Simelanes thus conveys the importance Nokuthula Simelane holds in their lives – photographs in different places and corners of the house, never to leave their sight nor their memory and thus, are agents in the shaping of the biographies of the family who observes them.



Don Slater, in contrast to Rose, argues that ‘emotional investment in these images maybe intense but is generally short – they gradually become invisible’ and looking at them is ‘marginal’.³⁹ Rose, however, is of the opinion that the observance of family photographs does become an activity often performed, particularly among the women of the house.⁴⁰ To what extent does the film hold Slater’s or Rose’s assertions, respectively, to be true in relation to Simelane’s family? It appears, through an analysis of the film, that Simelane’s family, particularly her mother, view the photographs regularly, due to their prominent placement in the home and also due to the deep pain which lingers as Simelane remains

³⁸ Were this photograph an instance wherein Simelane, turning the lens towards herself, captured the photograph – which is not unlikely, considering the closeness of the shot – we would enter into Rassool’s third insight into the interconnectedness of autobiography and biography. Rassool asserts that while creating a work of biography, the biographer would engage in autobiographical texts created by the subject. The photograph would thus be considered an autobiographical work on the part of Simelane. It is, however, not verified that Simelane had taken this photograph of herself, and I merely mention it to emphasize the potential photographs bear in auto/biographical production. Were it taken by Simelane, her agency would manifest itself beyond the grave, through the medium of photography.

³⁹ D. Slater, ‘Domestic Photography and Digital Culture’ in M Lister (ed.), *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture*. Routledge: London, 1995, pp. 139, 146.

⁴⁰ Rose, ‘Family Photographs and Domestic Spacings’, p. 10.

missing and the circumstances surrounding her missingness remains unclear. Despite the exceptional circumstances of being filmed, the reality is that they are filmed viewing the photographs, rendering family photographs very relevant to their lives, and not obsolete.

Integral to the analysis of family photographs is the notion, emphasised by Roland Barthes, and agreed upon by Rose, that 'the actual effect of seeing "what has been" depends on, and is unique to, a particular person'.⁴¹ Rose continues to emphasise that '[i]t is this understanding of a photograph... as needing its particular effects to become mobilised in certain ways by specific moments of viewing'.⁴² This is particularly pertinent in the context of the film, as the family and friends of Simelane examine the photographs within the process of the interviews.⁴³ This, then, is a 'specific moment of viewing'. The context the interviewees are viewing the photographs thus influences what each individual interviewee conveys about the photograph, and the person(s) of whom it portrays. Therefore, the biographic particularities expressed within the film, not only varies from interviewee to interviewee, but it is also the very context wherein the expressing occurs which impacts the biographies of Simelane – in this case, the context of interviews complemented by the photographs at varying locations and different occasions.

For instance, the interview with the mother would perhaps evoke stronger emotions and memories, as the interview occurs in Simelane's childhood home. Whereas, the interview with a particular friend may or may not have occurred in a location unrelated to the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴³ It is also relevant to add that as the family and friends are observing the photographs, we, the viewers, are watching this process occur, and responding in our various and respective ways. I, for one, am responding by means of this section in a chapter of my mini-thesis. The photographs' entrance into the public through the film is thus also part of its social biography. Thus, in one case, the subjects in the film physically view the photographs. On the other hand, the viewer views the film and therefore, also the photographs, from the screen, unable to interact with it on a material level. It may be interesting to look into how the respective modes of viewing impact on meaning-making.

photograph. This thought also evokes Kaplan's sentiments when he emphasised putting people in different locations relevant to the story in order to evoke conversation and emotion.⁴⁴ Although he said this in reference to Simelane's sister's visit to the farm Simelane was held, Kaplan's words are applicable to use within the context of the viewing of photographs.

Maintaining this thread, as observed in the film, Simelane's family and friends have very emotive reactions and responses to the photographs. Rose argues that '[t]he more distant people are, the more important photographing becomes. Absence inflects the viewing of photographs, with photos looked at more when people are far away'.⁴⁵ This bears particular significance in the case of Simelane and the film, because, not only is she absent, but her physical presence may never be felt again by her family and friends. It is thus observed in the film that her family, specifically her mother, hold her photographs immensely dear. In this way photographs and the context wherein they are viewed provide a biographic account of the impact of Simelane's absence on the emotional state of the interviewees.

Rose and Edwards, in their respective works, suggest that photographs have agency.

Edwards states that 'active agency of the object... is embodied in the object in a way that shapes responses to it'.⁴⁶ This is very much emphasised above. Christopher Pinney asserts that photography is both 'iconic' and 'indexical'. This means, according to Pinney, that the photograph bears a 'physical trace of the material world'.⁴⁷ Thus, the photographs of Simelane bear a trace of her. She is therefore an active agent in the biographies narrated by the various interviewees viewing the photographs. Simelane is an auto/biographer and a

⁴⁴ Personal Information, 21 June 2017.

⁴⁵ Gillian Rose, 'Family Photographs and Domestic Spacings', p. 11.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 2001, p. 17.

⁴⁷ Christopher Pinney, 'The Parallel Histories of Anthropology and Photography', in Elizabeth Edwards (eds) *Anthropology and Photography* (New York: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 77.

biographer as her photographs provoke others to narrate their own lives and her life in relation to the photographs.

Family photographs as they enter the public sphere, are significant on two levels, as it relates to the film. Firstly, it is important because the film recounts the occurrence in the family's search for Simelane wherein they approached the press, specifically, the *Sowetan*. The article of 27 January 1995 in the *Sowetan* was an attempt to reach out to anybody with information about the possible whereabouts of Simelane, and included a photograph of her. Nicky Rousseau, commenting on the photograph, suggests that it would 'contradict the subject positions she would come to occupy in the public eye following the publication of the article'.⁴⁸ The photograph depicted an ordinary young lady, yet her undertakings and the perception of her among fellow cadres and security forces were far from being ordinary and agreed upon. The film describes the consequences of photographs entering the public. Through the release and public broadcasting of the film in 2006, the photographs, once again entered the public sphere on a somewhat larger scale. *The Star*, in an article dated 11 April 2006 on the film (to be broadcast that week) described the potential fruits of the film. It could help 'a bereaved family... finally hear what their missing daughter endured at the hands of agents of apartheid system, and... will take the nation along their journey'.⁴⁹ This broadcast repositioned Simelane back into to the public consciousness, serving as a reminder that she, and many others still remain missing, and in another way reigniting the search for her. The broadcast of the film was therefore also an invitation to the public to join in on the pursuit of truth and the mourning of the family. Perhaps, in this way,

⁴⁸ Rousseau, 'Counter-Revolutionary Warfare: the Soweto Intelligence Unit and Southern Itineraries', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 6, 2014, p. 1344.

⁴⁹ Farber, Tanya. "'Where there is no grave they would be forced into the twilight of knowing but not knowing'", *The Star*, 11 April 2006.

extending the 'nation- building project'. On the subject of a public's encounter with photographs of violence and suffering, Rose argues that the public may realise that they too are suffering and also express empathy towards the victims.⁵⁰

Photographs, although a seemingly minor aspect of the film, reveal various insights about Simelane – predominately personal/private insights, an alternative to the political account of her life. These are details which help the viewer to better identify with Simelane, the person. This is particularly significant as, being a film about a family's search for their missing MK daughter, the film risks being overtly and solely political. The photographs convey biographic details of a person similar to you and I. The photographs, as they relate to the article in the *Sowetan*, do however give us a view into her political life. The private/personal does, however, re-emerge in the film. Like various other aspects of the film already mentioned, and yet to be mentioned, the technique of oral history and photographs also explores the reality of multiple biographers, auto/biography, as various persons in this process play a part – her mother, father, friends, Veyi, and importantly Kaplan and Gobodo-Madikizela, the interviewers. Therefore, through photographs, we not only get to know Simelane, but also her family and friends, and their mental state.

Betrayal and Re-enactments

According to Joram ten Brink, 'the use of traditional observational or evidence-based documentary methods (interviews, photographs, maps, archival material) offers an incomplete and limited view of history'.⁵¹ The methods of re-enactment provide a more nuanced and complex understanding and representation of history. How do re-enactments

⁵⁰ Rose, *Doing Family Photography*, p. 84.

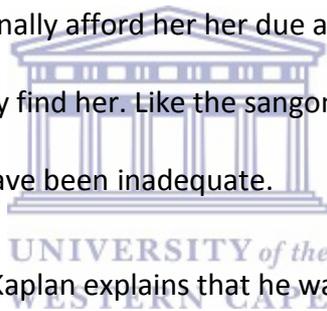
⁵¹ J. ten Brink, 'Re-enactments, the History of Violence and Documentary Film' in ed Joshua Openheimer, *Killer Images: Documentary Film and the Performance of Violence*, London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2012.

enhance our perception of history as told by *Betrayal*? The most significant occasion of re-enactment in the film occurs, in the beginning, as Simelane's mother tells of her troubled infancy, and as the film develops and expounds on the incident of Simelane's abduction.

Her mother relays Simelane's continuous crying as an infant. So serious and unceasing were her cries that they approached a sangoma, who performed a ritual, as a means to bring the crying to an end. Although the ritual was performed, the crying, however, did not cease.

This scene serves as a motif which is ever-present throughout the film. Simelane's crying as an infant lingers in the lives of her family in the present. Simelane, her remains,

metaphorically, still cry out to her family today, and they sought the means and methods to find her, to gain closure, and to finally afford her her due and rightful rest. Neither of the parties can find this rest until they find her. Like the sangoma, the methods they sought to find her and to achieve closure have been inadequate.



Reflecting on the re-enactment, Kaplan explains that he was attempting to find 'seeds' from her childhood that are still prevalent in her adult life. Kaplan thus finds something from Simelane's childhood – her continuous crying as a baby – which is significant in her adult life, and in the present. Kaplan also identifies this scene of the re-enactment as 'making the character human'.⁵² This is perhaps an example of ten Brink's sentiments of re-enactments 'as a vehicle for exploring how the present understands the past'.⁵³ The re-enactment presents her troublesome infancy as a foreshadowing of hers and her family's future – a future of trauma and mourning.

The re-enactment of the mission which led to her abduction conveys more in the mood it gives out than is disclosed in the acting. The female portraying Simelane is indistinguishable.

⁵² Mark Kaplan, Personal Information, 21 June 2017.

⁵³ Ten Brink, *Killer Images*, p. 185.

The camera shot is dark and hazy, and the sound creates a tense atmosphere. This expresses the urgency, mystery, fear and danger which one would expect had occurred in the real life. This method of showing, once more, conjures Rosenstone's thoughts on historiophoty and its ability to convey sound, emotion, landscapes, the scene of significant events, and atmosphere, in general. However, although film and re-enactment has the capacity to portray these, particularly the place events occurred, Kaplan admits that the scene of abduction could not be filmed at the Carlton Centre, the real life place of abduction. This, and the prior re-enactment, validates Rosenstone's assertion that documentary film, like dramatic film, is mixed with fiction, as 'images from the past... are not specifically of the scenes they purport to depict'.⁵⁴ The auto/biographies, as conveyed through the re-enactment, are therefore also compromised.

The film also ends with a re-enactment – someone covering a grave with sand. This scene is accompanied by Gobodo-Madikizela's narration. She refers to Simelane's story as 'a metaphor for the painful legacy of unfinished business of the past in South Africa'. This is an interesting ending as the act of burial of Simelane cannot, and has not yet, been fulfilled.

The film thus gives her the farewell she is yet to receive. Like the aforementioned re-enactments, the scene is hazy and the movement of the camera is deliberately shaky. This, too, is perhaps a metaphor for the obfuscated truth and uncertainty surrounding Nokuthula Simelane. As this scene develops, music starts to play.

Music, sound and Simelane's biography

The music evokes Rosenstone's assertions that '[f]ilm may be history as vision, but it is not vision alone, for it provides a layered experience of moving images enhanced by language

⁵⁴ Rosenstone, *Revisioning History*, p. 7.

and sound'.⁵⁵ The subject of sound is not only relevant to the re-enactments, but is also relevant to the broader narration of the film. As Simelane's aunt speaks about her niece's helpful nature, the sound transitions into a more intense and frantic mood as a childhood friend tells of her reaction when she saw the article of Simelane in the *Sowetan*. Similarly, the sound also intensifies as a particular scene transitioned into Kaplan's narration on Simelane's ill-fated mission. In the same way, the sound throughout the reenactment of the mission reflects the emotions of the real life moment.

Song is immensely important in the film and emerges as another form of biography.

'Sikulindile' was performed and written by Aron Turest-Swartz and Zolani Mahola. Kaplan underscores that it was made 'at arm's length'. He paid for the song to be made, and had provided the creators of the song with some footage of the film for them to get a sense of themes within the film, and thus produce a suitable song.⁵⁶ The makers of the song therefore also arise as biographers of Nokuthula Simelane. The lyrics seem as though the writer/singer is talking to two parties. It firstly addresses the listener, introducing Simelane, her nature and her plight: 'There are some who did not see her/she that shone like the sun/who went to sleep hungry'.⁵⁷ As the song develops, the writer/singer begins to address Simelane, as though s/he knows her personally, making statements about her, and asking her to affirm: 'She who loves to run/Are you still running, girl? I remember you loved to dance/Are you still dancing, girl?'⁵⁸ The lyrics referred to above all relate to aspects of Simelane's public and personal/private life – her torture at the farm, and her sportiness and love for parties and social gatherings.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵⁶ Mark Kaplan, Personal Information, 21 June 2017

⁵⁷ Aron Turest-Swartz and Zolani Mahola, 'Sikulindile' in *Betrayal* by Mark Kaplan, 2006.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Her public life is further emphasised as the writer/singer asks, 'Where, Nokuthula?/How, Nokuthula?/Why, Nokuthula?/And who?'⁵⁹ This conjures notions of the search for Simelane and the truth about her disappearance. The writer/singer furthermore goes on to say, 'I remember you/We were fighting for freedom'. S/he therefore deliberately identifies Simelane as a liberation fighter, whereas earlier s/he only made allusions to it. One gets the sense that the opening line 'There are some who did not see her' may refer to those of us oblivious to her, her sacrifice, and the part she played in the liberation effort. Yes, '[t]here are some who did not see her', but the void she left is felt by her loved ones – this is what the song seems to be saying. Kaplan states that he wanted the song to evoke 'Nokuthula [Simelane]'s undying spirit and also her mom's mental state'.⁶⁰ Therefore, perhaps the statements made and the questions asked by the writer/singer also represent the mother – the singer, here, could represent the mother. And perhaps another viewer would interpret this differently, as song and music across varying contexts are often understood and interpreted differently, and also evoke different feelings and thoughts.

Conclusion

Although *Betrayal* is a post-apartheid account of lives affected by the gross human rights violations of apartheid recounted at the TRC, the documentary film shows no overt indication of being part of the nation-building project. Instead, it highlights a lack of reconciliation and a pressing desire for truth and closure. Perhaps in highlighting the TRC's shortcomings, Kaplan sought to assist in bringing reconciliation, truth and closure about. As we have come to learn, *Betrayal* is not only about Nokuthula Simelane. It is instead a film about her family's search for her and the truth. There are thus various auto/biographical

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Mark Kaplan, Personal Information, 21 June 2017.

insights into various lives, perhaps to the extent that Simelane becomes overshadowed, particularly in the case of Barney Molokoane. The auto/biographical nature of the film, however, as seen in the ongoing pain of participants in the film, highlights an absence of reconciliation. This film could be seen as transcending the nation-building effort of its time. However, I would argue it is instead an invitation to post-apartheid South Africa to right the injustices of the past by means of placing a spotlight on such injustices.

The various auto/biographical voices in the film provide the viewer with a slightly more balanced view of Simelane. We learn about her enjoyment of tennis and of socialising, her academic achievements, and her helpful and capable nature in the home. We also learn about her childhood and her relationship with others – family and friends. Fundamentally, we get to know the ‘human’, and we learn this through not only oral history, but also photographs. The photographs also aid the auto/biographical productions within the film. Simelane, herself, also emerges as an auto/biographer. As they evoke memory and emotion, they give us insights into the life of Simelane and the lives of the family, as transformed by Simelane’s disappearance. Photographs, by means of their placement and appearances in the film, portray the family’s implicit perceptions of Simelane, and the director’s methods of conveying Simelane to the audience.

We also, importantly, learn about Simelane, the MK cadre, someone of intelligence, bravery and strength in adversity. Simelane is perceived by her family and fellow-comrades as unfailingly loyal and committed to the anti-apartheid cause, and thus worthy of recognition. It is perhaps relevant to bear in mind that although in the film our perception of Simelane is informed through oral history, the archive – TRC’s report and transcripts – was also surely used. The archive, however, as conveyed in the previous chapter is tainted with

contestations, silences, flaws and obscurities. This, as a result, seeps into and impacts Kaplan's production of auto/biographies through *Betrayal*.

Re-enactments, music, sound, and the general atmosphere of the film further assist in the auto/biographical productions of the film and emphasises the hidden details and truth about her disappearance. Re-enactment, together with sound, recreates the emotions which may have occurred in the real-life event of Simelane's abduction. Re-enactment, as seen in the portrayal of the ritual performed by the sangoma to calm her crying as an infant, also serves to link personal details of Simelane's past to the present reality of her missingness. In this way the director conveys a consistent theme in the biographical account of Simelane – the theme of mourning. Music and sound is also used more overtly in the film, as the song *Sikulindle*. The song also arises as a biographic production of Simelane, as the singing/writer narrates her nature, plight and purpose. Simelane's story is not, however, told in isolation, but serves to awake public consciousness to others like herself and her family. The auto/biographies are thus understood in the context of the broader trauma, mourning, injustice, and lack of reconciliation still prevalent in post-apartheid South Africa.

Betrayal is therefore a biographical account of Nokuthula Simelane, however, within this account emerges other biographies and autobiographies. These auto/biographies are told and enhanced by the use of interviews, photographs, re-enactments and song. With the help of these elements the documentary film produces various accounts of Simelane, as told by her various biographers in the film. The biographers do at times narrate different aspects of her life, for instance, the public versus the private. In addition to this, the auto/biographies in this film are also rife with contestation, obscurities and uncertainties. This is interesting when juxtaposed to the birth certificate in the beginning the film, which

portrays the undeniable facts about her life. *Betrayal* goes on to produce a life rife with uncertainties. And these uncertainties and contestations have continued throughout the 21st century when the statue of her was erected in Bethal, Mpumalanga.



CHAPTER 3

THE STATUES: THEIR LIVES AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVENESS

Introduction

This chapter approaches the biographies of Nokuthula Simelane differently to that described in the previous two chapters. Whereas they sought to understand the mediums and genres of production and how they represent and remember Simelane, this chapter conceptualises Simelane as the statue erected in Bethal, Mpumalanga, and therefore endeavours to recount its biography. In pursuit of this, I explore the various auto/biographers and their roles in the making of the statue and their influence over the life of the statue. I seek to determine the statue's biography not only by what it portrays but also by societal influences over its living experience. In addition to this, I show how the societal interaction with the statue affects its physical form, and thus further signifies an auto/biographic experience. In recounting the biographies of Simelane in the form of a statue, I also intend to show that she is representative of other vulnerable and targeted statues in post-apartheid South Africa. Simelane's statue is not merely a biographical genre with a biography of its own, but also prompts the production of additional biographical genres, such as a poem positioned on the plaque and the unveiling of the statue, which comprises of political and cultural formalities. These additional genres contribute towards an on-going production and reproduction of Simelane's biographies.

The statue of Nokuthula Simelane, commissioned by the municipality of Govan Mbeki, was created by Ruhan Janse van Vuuren, and officially unveiled on 28 November 2009 at the place of her birth, Bethal, Mpumalanga. The bronze statue portrays the barefooted MK cadre with a pair of heels in her right hand and a tambourine in the left. Wearing a

graduation gown above a dress, she is adorned with three beaded necklaces varying in size, and beaded bracelets around her wrists. Beside her feet lies an almost indistinguishable bunch of keys. The life-sized statue stands on a pedestal which bears a plaque inscribed with a poem created by her family. Behind her and below the pedestal stand a pair of rubber boots.

Apart from the statue, there has been another artistic rendering of Simelane. Simelane is also portrayed through a painting by Christa Myburgh. The painting, called 'Ode to Nokuthula', portrays a seated Simelane in what seems to be a ballerina dress, and her hands cupping the shoes. At her feet stands a candlestick. Simelane's person and the candlestick are painted in detail. The background, however, portraying Bethal Precinct, the location of the statue, is only outlined, giving the painting an unfinished appearance. Although not the focus of the chapter, allusions will be made to the painting throughout.

Since the unveiling of the statue in 2009 it has become an object of on-going opposition, particularly in the political sphere. Prior to its theft in 2011, the statue was defaced with white paint. This event, however, is not covered in media reports. Its theft in 2011 and the vandalism incurred by spray paint in April 2015 has, however, garnered media attention and testifies to the statue's contested social and political life. Simelane's biographies will therefore be looked at in the context of monuments and memorial-making in post-apartheid South Africa.

Monuments, memorials and post-apartheid South Africa

Throughout the transition from the apartheid to the post-apartheid regime debates around monuments commemorating the apartheid era and its leaders and their legacy were rife and impassioned. Were the new government to follow the example of the Soviet Union and

other parts of Europe, iconoclastic conflict would inevitably ensue. However, the government of the new, post-apartheid South Africa took a different stance, opting to preserve the public display of monuments honouring the legacy of apartheid and colonialism. Although monuments representing figures such as Hendrick Verwoerd were removed and destroyed, most monuments and memorials were maintained, none garnering as much attention as that of the Voortrekker Monument.¹ The new South Africa thus endeavoured to represent the history of all South Africans, in pursuit of nation-building. This meant preserving those depicting apartheid and colonial history, and erecting new monuments celebrating the endurance and sacrifice of those who fought against apartheid and the formerly suppressed and oppressed under apartheid laws. Sabine Marschall considers historic monuments and memorials through the perspective of the Human Needs Theory. In particular, she emphasises the need for ‘recognition and acknowledgement’ in post-apartheid South Africa. Monuments therefore serve as a means to represent the formally oppressed and marginalised, to fulfil their need for ‘recognition and acknowledgement’ of their sacrifice and loss.² Throughout the brief years of post-apartheid South Africa, however, neither monuments of the prior regime, nor that of today’s era have been exempt from the violence of vandalism and opposition.

The removal and construction of monuments and statues have been an integral part of bringing an end to one regime and ushering in another. Katherine Verdery, in reference to statues, emphasises not only their *being* the body of the person being honoured, but that the statue, in its depiction of the person, endows him/her with a timelessness and sacredness – a quality bestowed upon it by a higher, otherworldly authority. Removing

¹ Coombes, *History after Apartheid*, p. 22.

² Marschall, ‘Gestures of Compensation’, p. 80.

them from their pedestals, thus, not only strips them of this sacredness but also signals a society's disassociation with the persons portrayed in public monuments. Erecting new statues, conversely, grants that statue, and the figure portrayed, with this sacred quality.³ According to this understanding of monuments, erecting a statue of Simelane, as with various other struggle martyrs and heroes, elevates her to a revered and sacred status in history and the future, for as long as the regime and monuments reign uncontested.

Antagonism towards statues and monuments throughout the transition period and post-apartheid South Africa has been rife, however, the motives are not exclusively political in nature. Some of the most obvious occasions of politically motivated violence towards statues and monuments have been that enacted towards the statue of Hendrick Verwoerd in Bloemfontein and the recent violence and opposition towards the statue of Cecil John Rhodes and other statues subsequent to the Rhodes Must Fall movement, a protest movement directed towards the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes, which was considered a symbol of racism and oppression. Despite Verwoerd being an integral proponent in the advancement of apartheid and his legacy being contrary to the values envisioned for the post-apartheid South Africa, the statue's experience of violence, and the spectacle thereof, was met with criticism, from not only whites, who feared the erasure of their identity, history and purpose in the new South Africa, but also from President Nelson Mandela.⁴ In a country attempting to reconcile with its past and striving to promote nation building, the attack on these markers of heritage was detrimental to this pursuit. Until the recent attacks on monuments connected to the Rhodes Must Fall Movement, politically motivated iconoclastic violence towards monuments commemorating white heritage, and

³ Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, p. 5.

⁴ Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, p. 138.

also black heritage, was sporadic in post-apartheid South Africa. Whereas the defacement of the Rhodes statue is a political matter, as was the paint-throwing on the statue of Gandhi in Johannesburg, Marschall asserts that monument theft, in particular, was mainly an economic undertaking.⁵ The theft of a bronze statue at Beyers Naudé Square in Johannesburg is a good example of this.

There are various examples of monument theft throughout both the transition period and the subsequent post-apartheid era. An examination of monument theft in the 1980s, by means of newspaper reports, reveals a common motive to that which occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s. Bronze plaques of historical monuments, busts and regalia seem to have been the main objects of theft. This was the trend in the 1980s in relation to the plaques of Standard Bank headquarters and the JCI building⁶ and the bust of Sir Ernest Oppenheimer.⁷ Plaque theft persisted into the post-apartheid era. The year 1998 saw the theft of the plaques from the war memorial at Tatham Art Gallery garden; in 2003 the Moorddrift monument in Limpopo was also subject to theft; 2004 marked a year in which the plaques at the national toposcope in Bathurst was stolen and defaced; and in 2009 the historic Table Mountain plaque identifying it as a natural monument was stolen.⁸ The common denominator regarding the above-mentioned thefts was not merely the fact that they were plaques, but more importantly, that they were plaques of bronze or brass, with monetary value. The evidence, as suggested by reports on the aforementioned monuments, tell us that the thefts were not politically motivated.

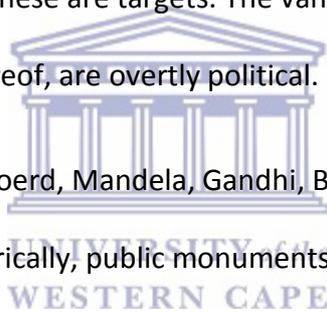
⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁶ Staff Reporter, 'Building Owners are Brassed Off'. *Beeld*. 14 July 1987.

⁷ 'Borsbeeld uit Park Gesteel'. *Die Volksblad*. 29 December 1988.

⁸ See Brett Adkins, 'Thieves Deface Famous Monument'. *Weekend Post*, 24 January 2004; Staff Reporter, 'Hunt for stolen historic Table Mountain plaques'. *Cape Argus*, 24 July 2009; Bob Aldrige, 'Mystery of Missing plaques solved', *The Natal Witness*, 10 January 1998.

The Rhodes Must Fall movement, which saw the vandalism of various colonial and apartheid-era monuments, and which sparked off a retaliatory reaction against struggle heroes, are not the only instances of politically motivated attacks on statues. Earlier vandalism of statues of black struggle heroes occurred in 1997, when the statue of Steve Biko was spray painted in East London by a member of the AWB.⁹ An interesting paradox occurred in the defacement of the Burgersdorp Boer War monument in the Eastern Cape in 2015 as, in the context of colonial times, the Boers were themselves, and in the words of DA councillor Marina van Zyl, freedom fighters.¹⁰ In the setting of post-apartheid South Africa and the Rhodes Must Fall movement, however, the monument is a relic of an oppressive system and monuments such as these are targets. The vandalism of statues and monuments, unlike the theft thereof, are overtly political.



Nevertheless, be it Rhodes, Verwoerd, Mandela, Gandhi, Biko or Naudé, what is evident, even in South Africa, is that historically, public monuments of commemoration have been dominated by men. When women are represented in the form of monuments and memorials they sought to signify the collective sacrifice, hardships and endurance of women in a historical era.¹¹ Sabine Marschall, who has written extensively on the monuments and memorials of South Africa, reflects on some of the ways artists undertook to memorialising significant female figures in post-apartheid South Africa. Some of these female figures include, Gugu Dlamini, Bessie Head, Cissie Gool and Brenda Fassie. Barring that of Fassie, a statue that provokes light-hearted interaction from the public, the memorials of the three women mentioned prior have all, to varying degrees, been negated by the landscape which surrounds them.

⁹ Sapa, 'AWB deface the Biko monument'. *Sunday Tribune*. 14 September 1997.

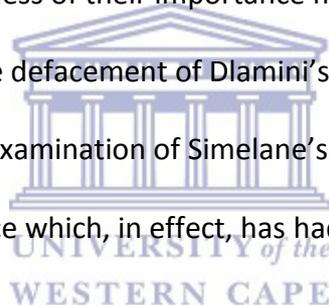
¹⁰ Genevieve Quintal, 'Burgersdorp Boer War monument defaced'. *News 24*. 2 June 2015.

¹¹ Marschall, 'How to Honour a Woman: Gendered Memorialisation in Post-Apartheid South Africa', p. 263.

Gool's bollards, located in Cape Town, have deteriorated by public usage; Dlamini's Wall of Hope in Durban has been vandalised; and Head's mosaic art, located on the premises of a school in Durban, is spoiled and obscured by dirt, dust, bird-droppings and shrubbery.¹²

Although these examples of the honouring of women do transcend the historical tendency to portray women in public monuments as representing the collective sacrifice and plight of women in respective periods,¹³ the above mentioned monuments, in their neglect, vandalism and deterioration, still represent these women and the public's perception of them. In spite of the artists' intentions and the cultural and historical significance of the women, just as their monuments are negated and become diminished and obsolete, the public perception and consciousness of their importance may also have diminished.

Marschall, for instance, likens the defacement of Dlamini's wall to her violent death. These examples bear relevance to the examination of Simelane's statue as it has also experienced changes to its physical appearance which, in effect, has had an impact on its significance.



Simelane, the statue, the object

Simelane's statue or statues (as further reading will reveal) are biographical productions, and as has been argued by scholars, objects have biographies of their own. Objects are imbued with meaning by means of their interactions with people – their social interactions. These meanings, however, are mutable as relations with the people who act upon and react to it continuously change.¹⁴ According to Igor Kopytoff, although people and things are conceptually distinct, in a complex society, things, just as people, imbue various and conflicting identities and classifications. These identities and classifications change as the

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

¹⁴ C. Grosden and Y. Marschall, 'The Cultural Biography of Objects', *World Archeology*, Vol. 31, No.2, 1999, pp. 169, 170.

society around it changes. Things are thus classified and reclassified as the context varies.¹⁵ Simelane's statues may indeed have undergone these processes as people around it may either honour the statue and defend it, or dishonour it and deface it. John Randolph's work on the Bakunin Family Archive describes the life of the archive as conveyed in its 'production, exchange and use'.¹⁶ This requires a look at its physical condition and what it testifies to, what it is made up of and how it came into being, and who used it and for what purposes. Kopytoff and Randolph's work on the biography of objects are pertinent as I engage with the biographies of Simelane's statues.

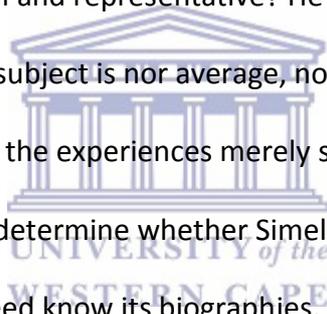
The literature on the biography of an object is more overtly connected to statues when read alongside Katherine Verdery's work on the political lives of dead bodies. Her conception of dead bodies transcends bones, corpses and other remains, to include statues – monuments and memorials. According to Verdery, statues not only symbolise the person, but they also *are* the body of the person. The body/corpse, however, is not significant merely for its representation of the person but more so 'for how people think about them'.¹⁷ This is especially applicable in the case of Simelane's statue, as it has it has undergone violence and opposition since its production. The meaning-makers, or biographers, include various people spanning across South African society, and spanning across the spectrum of relation to Simelane, the person who lived. The perceptions of Simelane in statue form, provokes action, either for or against her, and by means of their actions and interactions, they create further meaning and biographies.

¹⁵ Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process', pp. 87-90.

¹⁶ Randolph, 'On the Biography of the Bakunin Family Archive', p. 211.

¹⁷ Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, pp. 3, 4, 28.

Simelane's statues, as with the various statues and monuments mentioned previously, has been subject to violence and antagonism. Perhaps, then, in recounting the biographies of the objects in question, Simelane's statues, we are able to identify whether Simelane in statue form is representative of the various vulnerable and targeted statues and monuments of South Africa's post-apartheid period. Stephan Clingman has pondered issues about exceptionality, typicality and representiveness of biographical subjects. He argues that 'characters in a work never represent only themselves and nothing more' – they represent the broader social realities and possibilities.¹⁸ However, Clingman concedes that biographical subjects, which in this chapter are also objects, are usually exceptional. How, then, can one be both exceptional and representative? He responds to this question with the idea of typicality. The typical subject is not average, nor stereotypical, but rather one who undergoes in excessive form the experiences merely spread across various lives in a given society.¹⁹ Thus, in order to determine whether Simelane in the form of objects – statues – is representative, we need know its biographies.



The biography of the statue (and the auto/biographers thereof)

Statues represent the particular values of a particular regime. Therefore, when political transitions occur, statues representing the old, oppressive regime are dismantled, and replaced with new statues, as to endow the landscape with the new values of the new regime. Verdery says 'bronze human beings both stabilize the landscape and temporally freeze particular values in it'.²⁰ Simelane's statue thus represents the envisioned values of the post-apartheid nation. Not only does it give a voice and represent the life of the formerly oppressed and silenced, but in conjunction with the monument of Gert Sibande

¹⁸ Clingman, 'Biography and Representation: Some Analogies from Fiction', p. 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, p. 6.

and the Nomoya Masilela Museum located at Bethal Precinct, it represents the anti-apartheid struggle across genders and generations.²¹ Sibande, also a Mpumalanga-born political activist, was an endorser of the ANC and exposed the appalling conditions farmworkers had to endure on Bethal farms. The Nomoya Masilela Museum acknowledges the inception of Bethal, commemorates the liberation heroes of the ANC throughout the apartheid era and the 1950s and also honours the 1950s Potato Boycott.²²

This is all the more interesting as Simelane's statue is bronze and stands on a pedestal, elements which are characteristic of the colonial monuments, elements which have historically been an indicator of legitimacy and authenticity.²³ One may understand this as undermining the significance of Simelane's sacrifice by fashioning her within the constructs of conventional colonial statues. Her biography, in this case, is moulded using the oppressor's framework and symbols. Or perhaps Simelane, the statue, is significant for this very reason. In producing her within this western construct, the artist is portraying Simelane as, consciously or not, opposing the oppressor's system – traversing and trespassing into a domain she, formerly, would not be granted access. Marschall also provides an interesting idea here, referencing the Heroes Memorial in Port Elizabeth. Marschall states that 'the dead are accorded the luxury denied to the living'.²⁴ The grandness of the memorial is contrasted to the meagre and deprived life within the specific era. When thought of in relation to Simelane, she, too, is honoured in death in a manner she was not granted in life, in a manner, which in her life, was only afforded to her oppressors.

²¹ 'The Unveiling of the Nokuthula Simelane Statue' <http://houseofmemory.co.za/Nokuthula%20Simelane.pdf> accessed on 8 September 2017.

²² 'The Regeneration of Nomoya Masilela' www.houseofmemory.co.za accessed on 8 September 2017.

²³ Marschall, 'Gestures of Compensation', p. 84.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Simelane, in statue form, therefore imbues the same defiance as in life. In its bronze appearance, the sculptor has implicitly created meaning.

The sculptor, Ruhan Janse van Vuuren, was commissioned for the Nokuthula Simelane Monument Project by the Municipality of Govan Mbeki.²⁵ Van Vuuren worked on various monuments, political and non-political prior to and after his work on the Simelane statue in 2009. The artist and his credentials are important in the production of new commemorative monuments, as is evident in the government's plan – which was abandoned – to erect an enormous monument of Nelson Mandela's hand breaking through prison bars. The monument would have been situated, in juxtaposition, opposite the Voortrekker Monument. Besides the dictatorial impressions the monument would evoke, the artist chosen for job was a controversial figure with links to apartheid's legacy, having sculptured statues of Hendrick Verwoerd and J. G. Strijdom.²⁶ Rassool, considering the contestation surrounding the planned monument, communicates the various voices opposing it as not being a monument synonymous with a nation-building project.²⁷

Just as van Vuuren embarked on sculpting and therefore engaging in a biographical production of Simelane, his own auto/biography emerges in various ways: by means of producing Simelane, his own style of sculpting may be discernible; his own aims for the statue may be prevalent in its construction; and in reporting on the statue, its construction, unveiling and violence subjected upon it throughout its public life, journalists invariably narrate van Vuuren's biography too. One article, for instance, reported that van Vuuren

²⁵ Ruhan Janse van Vuuren Curriculum Vitae https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/e49fd9_9e229e21a5ab4cc0a504f1c01f970df2.pdf, accessed on 5 September 2017.

²⁶ Coombes, *History after Apartheid*, p. 22.

²⁷ Rassool, 'The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa', pp. 215/216.

started working as a sculptor ten years prior to his work on Simelane, and also stated that he won the award for PPC Cement Young Sculptors in 2008.²⁸

Prior to his work on Simelane in 2009, van Vuuren had assisted with the monuments of Brenda Fassie, Chief Tshwane and Solomon Mhlangu (2003). Subsequent to these assisted commissions on political and cultural figures, but preceding his work on Simelane, the majority of van Vuuren's work appears to have been for art exhibitions.²⁹ Van Vuuren's work on the monument of Simelane seems to be his first major solo work on a politically significant figure. Therefore, through his assistantship to established sculptors and gaining prominence in the art world, those who commissioned him had no reason to believe that Van Vuuren would project any divisive sentiments onto the statue of Simelane. Since sculpting the statue of Simelane, van Vuuren has gone on to collaborate on various valued works, such as Archbishop Denis Hurley and Chief Sekhukhane (2012) and the monument of Nelson Mandela at the Union Buildings, Cissie Gool and Griffith Mxenge (2013), to name but a few. Today, van Vuuren's work, spanning over a decade, includes various commissions and collaborations, political and non-political in nature.

Although van Vuuren sculptured the bronze statue, his knowledge of Simelane was informed by research, which included interviews with the family – in fact, he states that he worked closely with Simelane's sister, Thembi Nkadimeng, throughout. He was also granted access to photographs of her.³⁰ Van Vuuren's biographical production of Simelane was therefore produced, to various degrees, with the help of co-biographers. Much of what is

²⁸ Johan Myburg. 'Beeld vir Vegter 'n Baken vir Brede'. *Beeld*, 22 September 2009.

²⁹ Ruhan Janse van Vuuren Curriculum Vitae

https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/e49fd9_9e229e21a5ab4cc0a504f1c01f970df2.pdf, accessed on 5 September 2017.

³⁰ Johan Myburg. 'Beeld vir Vegter 'n Baken vir Vrede'. *Beeld*, 22 September 2009.

known of Simelane's life is derived from family, friend, perpetrator and comrade testimony. Van Vuuren created his production by means of her prior produced biographies.

Van Vuuren's intentions for the Simelane statue are stated in various newspaper articles. It was thus important to establish that he was commissioned by the municipality, and worked closely with the family. They may therefore share a common goal. An article published on 22 September 2009 by *Beeld*, describes the statue of Simelane as a 'beacon for peace' / '*n baken vir vrede*'. The statue, as relayed by the article, captures the features of a young woman, and as characteristic of her life, the statue attempts to portray her determination, youth, and her love for dance. Van Vuuren's website, which displays his work, states that Simelane's family remembered her as 'an individual that loved life and dancing'.³¹ Christa Myburgh's portrayal of Simelane in a ballerina dress also emphasises her love for dance. The purpose of the statue, the *Beeld* article reported, is to keep Simelane's legacy alive.³² The statue attempts to represent Simelane's nature in life and the symbolic significance of her death. She died for freedom, which the tambourine attempts to convey: 'The tambourine in her hand represents the beating of the drum for freedom'.³³ By her violent death she is immortalised as a symbol of peace.

Van Vuuren's vision for the statue is also a personal one, as he stated that he does not envision it being exactly what the public wishes it to be, and he himself hopes for it to contribute towards his growth as an artist.³⁴ Perhaps van Vuuren's remarks on the public's hopes for the statue is a reference to the fact that it bears no overt markers of someone who represented the ANC and MK. The statue instead presents Simelane's private life, with

³¹ <http://www.art.co.za/ruhanjansevanvuuren/commissions04.php>, accessed 22 January 2018.

³² Johan Myburg. 'Beeld vir Vegter 'n Baken vir Vrede'. *Beeld*, 22 September 2009: 1.

³³ <http://www.art.co.za/ruhanjansevanvuuren/commissions04.php>, accessed 22 January 2018.

³⁴ Johan Myburg. 'Beeld vir Vegter 'n Baken vir Vrede'. *Beeld*, 22 September 2009: 1.

her public persona as a freedom fighter represented in the rubber boots, which her back is turned towards and therefore could be interpreted as a disassociation with what the boots represented. The statue was made to maintain and continue representing her life into the future. In particular, the statue produces Simelane as a symbol of peace. Whereas the intention was towards portraying her as a 'beacon for peace', the actual experience and biography of the statue contradicts it. The iconoclasm subjected upon the statue is in fact contrary to peace, and introduces additional auto/biographers in the biographies of Simelane and the statue. These auto/biographers include: those who disrespected the statue, the thief and vandals; and those who defended the existence and preservation of the statue.



An analysis of the statue of Nokuthula Simelane conjures the earlier discussion on memorials and monuments in the context of South Africa, and the treatment thereof in post-apartheid society. Within the period of political transition and post-apartheid South Africa, debates centred on the destruction and preservation of certain offensive/insensitive monuments. While these monuments and memorials were insensitive to certain sections of society, on the opposite side of the political and cultural spectrum, these monuments were markers of heritage and belonging. In the context of Nokuthula Simelane, statue objectors and defenders also represent much of the public's perception of the statue in post-apartheid South Africa. In other words, by perception and interaction with the statue, they have interpreted and created their own biographies of Simelane, which provokes them to act out against or for it in public life. This enriches the biographies. Simelane's biographies, through the statue, is therefore ever-changing, as the era and political life around it.

The first attack on the statue and hence the biography it represented was when a bucket of white paint was cast onto it. This was not widely reported in the media. The statue, according to van Vuuren, was restored relatively easily.³⁵ The same, however, cannot be said about one of the most significant events in the biography of Nokuthula Simelane's statue: its theft on 25 January 2011. The 25-year-old Corné van Tonder was the culprit in the theft.³⁶ He is also thus an auto/biographer in the statue's life. According to reports, van Tonder 'tied a rope around the statue's neck, attached it to his bakkie and drove off, breaking it'.³⁷ The manner of the theft is somewhat a re-enactment of the violence subjected upon Simelane's real-life body, which underwent abduction, torture, and murder. As the statue was driven off in the vehicle, the statue's foot remained planted to the pedestal. Perhaps a metaphor of defiance – putting her foot down. This time she would leave a trace or remains of herself behind. Van Tonder, however, was apprehended at 2am and the statue retrieved from the back of the bakkie, which 'had a punctured tyre'.³⁸ The bakkie was seized to cover the costs of restoring the statue. Released on bail of R5 000, van Tonder was later sentenced to either serve five years in prison or pay a fine of R15 000. In addition to this he was ordered to pay for the repair of the statue, the cost of which was R214 000.³⁹

The vandalism and theft of the statue of Simelane is interesting when contrasted to the vandalism and attempted destruction of the MK monument in Mamelodi by the right-winged white agitators, wherein a hole was made in its centre and explosives placed within it. The explosives failed to detonate. The monument still stands and the hole still remains.

³⁵ Aletta Otto, 'MK-standbeeld: Een Verdagte nie Aangekla', *Beeld*. 27 January 2011.

³⁶ Another person, an unnamed 18-year-old man, was also arrested in relation to the theft of the statue. He was, however, cleared of wrongdoing.

³⁷ 'Mpumalanga "Statue Thief" Gets Bail'. *News 24*, 26 January 2011.

³⁸ McKeed Kotlolo, '2 Bust for Theft of Statue of 'Heroine'', *Sowetan*, 26 January 2011.

³⁹ Buks Viljoen, 'Boer Gesraf or Standbeeld', *Beeld*. 26 October 2009.

Today the hole speaks as testament to the struggle against oppression and yet, the liberation fighters' endurance in the face of it.⁴⁰ The statue of Simelane, however, does not overtly tell of its life and experiences of violence.

It appears relevant to apply Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman's use of *osteobiography*, the biography of the bones, a phrase coined by Clyde Snow.⁴¹ In their work on Josef Mengele, Keenan and Weizman state that 'investigators needed to reconstruct the events of a life as it had been recorded or fossilized into the bones'.⁴² The bones bear an imprint of one's life and the rigours thereof. I believe this is especially applicable in the context of Verdery's assertion that 'statues are dead people cast in bronze or carved in stone'.⁴³ Just as the bones bear traces of the life of the person, Simelane's statue should/could also bear traces of its life, traces of the vandalism it has experienced, its theft, and the restoration of the damages incurred. Perhaps an indentation at the neck, from which it was pulled, scratches and lacerations from being dragged along the ground, or scars at the point the leg was severed from the foot – damages that, although restored, would or could leave slight, barely discernible traces.

However, today these traces are indiscernible. This, as a result, to an extent negates the occurrence of the defacement and theft in the biography of the statue – because there are no traces. Arguably, were it not for the reports on the incidents, the ignorant eye would not be aware of the occurrences. The statue bears no trace of the violence towards it. The biography of *this* Simelane is therefore subject to erasure. Were the traces made visible, the biography would also be visible, discernible. A mere look, or even scrutiny of the statue

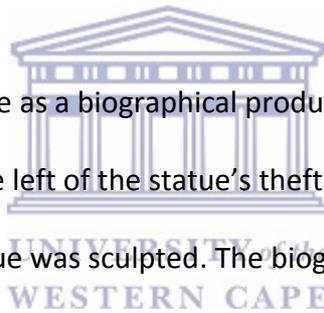
⁴⁰ Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, p. 49.

⁴¹ Keenan and Weizman, *Mengele's Skull*, p. 18.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴³ Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, p. 5.

does not give us any insight about its social and political life – its history of experience of iconoclasm. The vandalism of the statue, which van Vuuren speaks of, prior to the theft is a testament to an erasure of biography. Were it not for him mentioning it, many would not be aware of it, as it does not seem to have made headlines. In the efforts to restore the statue, and afford it its due respect, the artist and the commissioners have unconsciously obscured the statue's contested existence and experience. I am by no means arguing for vandalism to be left unrestored or partially restored, but traces do testify to the statue's tumultuous life by providing a visual indication and mapping of the violence enacted upon it. Where perceivable, traces do offer a window into the life of the object and a society's relationship with the object.



This, however, is where the statue as a biographical production of Simelane's life becomes even more intriguing, as the trace left of the statue's theft in 2011 is the statue, itself. It is evident that an entirely new statue was sculpted. The biographies of *an* object becomes the biographies of *the objects*. In the absence of the first statue, the second statue speaks for it, subtly bearing witness to its life. Although portrayed similarly – tambourine in the one hand and a pair of heels in the other, wearing graduation attire, beaded necklaces and bracelets – an examination of the statue presented at its unveiling in 2009 versus the statue as it stands today, reveals that these are different statues. A study of van Vuuren's CV also substantiates this. His CV shows that he was commissioned for the Nokuthula Simelane Monument Project in 2009, and once again commissioned to the Monument of Nokuthula Simelane by the municipality in 2012.⁴⁴ The theft occurred in January 2011. The damage the statue incurred due to its theft cannot be distinguished because the statue was replaced by

⁴⁴ Ruhan Janse van Vuuren Curriculum Vitae https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/e49fd9_9e229e21a5ab4cc0a504f1c01f970df2.pdf, accessed on 5 September 2017.

another. Simelane, the statue, was replaced by another, with a perceivable difference in posture and appearance. The Simelane spoken of in the introduction is the replacement, the one that stands today. Instead of an erasure of a part of the biography through the erasure of the damages, by repair, an erasure of the entire biographical production of the initial statue occurred as consequence of the theft. A new biography was produced by the same biographers; the municipality, who commissioned it, and the artist, van Vuuren, and the family.

This is quite interesting in Simelane's biography, as in life her remains were never discovered. In death, however, though eternalised in bronze, she was also 'abducted', or rather stolen. And similar to her abduction and murder, from which her remains remain missing, the initial statue is missing from public display. Although found, what was found, the damaged statue, was no longer sufficient to be a representation of her. She was therefore replaced with another, and her biography re-produced. This, it seems, delegitimises statuary productions of heroes, and Verdery's assertion of statues as *being* the person portrayed. Despite the grandness of statues and monuments, the biographies of Simelane's first statue shows us just how expendable and insignificant they are. Is the dismantled statue not Simelane anymore? The void of Simelane's actual remains cannot be replaced and substituted with something, or anything of its likeness.

This also invites us to question Verdery's notion of the sacred quality which statues and monuments are perceived to have, which is negated when subject to iconoclasm.⁴⁵ Perhaps the iconoclasm does depose it of its sacredness, but so does reproducing it in a manner as to make it appear the same but just not accomplishing it. The sacredness is diminished as

⁴⁵ Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, p. 5.

the second statue attempts to be what the former was, yet falls short. By replacing the original, they may be trying to reinstate its importance. However, if at all sacred and important, it is not the original it attempts to be, thus making it less sacred. Furthermore, replacing it with a lookalike is fundamentally opposed to the notion of being sacred. For can what is valuable be substituted with a replacement or an imitation? Simelane's remains can certainly not be substituted with a statue either. Even at the unveiling of the statue, her sister lamented the ongoing search for her remains.⁴⁶ In addition to this, the lookalike statue may cover-up the incident of theft, giving one the sense that if no one were to notice the change, no one would ask about the reason for the change. The objector and thief of the statue thus accomplished a small victory in his actions. The overthrown statue was recreated, however, its sacredness reduced. The thief's impact in the biographical production is therefore one which shall survive through generations to come. The trace he left on the statue is seen by the production of a new one, a diminished one, an imitation. Just as the thief's actions diminish the statue of Simelane, some testimonies expressed at the TRC diminished her dignity.

What, however, provoked van Tonder to steal the statue? Journalist, Tiisetso Makube believes the answer to be simple. A newspaper article headlined as, 'The rainbow nation that never was', alluded to this incident as political and deeply rooted with racial motivations. Calling into question the validity of the 'rainbow nation' the article proceeded to draw on the writer's experience in Bethal – these experiences seek to further the narrative of racism.⁴⁷ The article raised the problem of the continued racism and injustices

⁴⁶ "The Unveiling of the Nokuthula Simelane Statue" <http://houseofmemory.co.za/Nokuthula%20Simelane.pdf> accessed on 8 September 2017.

⁴⁷ Tiisetso Makube, 'The Rainbow Nation that Never Was', *Sunday Times*, 13 March 2011.

towards blacks. According Makube, 'time is frozen' in Bethal, Mpumalanga.⁴⁸ Understood in the context of the iconoclasm of the statue, one may deduct from the writer that the systemic violence and oppression of blacks which led to the abduction and alleged murder of Simelane still lingers in South Africa and allowed for the carrying-out of the statue's theft and vandalism. And understanding the statue as Verdery does – the statue *being* the person produced in bronze – the theft of the statue was in fact the theft or re-abduction of Simelane. Thus, even in death, Simelane's body is subjected to a similar violence and injustice. The article, it appears, alludes to the representativeness of Simelane as a statue of the country's progress, or lack thereof, since apartheid.

Racial motivations do appear all the more likely, as the *Sowetan* reported that the police were reluctant to disclose the race of the two men arrested – one of whom was cleared.⁴⁹ Although disclosure of race does not immediately prove racial intent, it may be perceived in that manner. Furthermore, the indiscreet and violent manner the statue was dismantled heaps further doubt on any argument that the motivation may have been monetary. The bronze statue at Beyers Naudé Square in Johannesburg, stolen in broad daylight, within two minutes, is a prime example.⁵⁰

Simelane's statue's experience in 2011 bears an interesting relation to Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marschall's assertion that '[c]hanges in meaning need not be driven by physical modification'.⁵¹ However, in their own work on a Fijian necklace/bracelet, they do find that when bodily secretion begins to give the necklace a darker hue, it becomes more valuable because a respected chief's DNA is imprinted into it – the necklace/bracelet preserves a part

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ McKeed Kotlolo, "2 Bust for Theft of Statue of 'Heroine'", *Sowetan*, 26 January 2011.

⁵⁰ Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, p. 134.

⁵¹ C. Gosden and Y. Marschall, 'The Cultural Biography of Object', *World Archeology*, Vol. 31, No.2, 1999, p.170.

of his life and being. The theft of Simelane's statue, and the replacement thereof has brought about changes in meaning, as conveyed above. Similarly, the vandalism the replacement statue has experienced has endowed it with new meanings, as objectors spray painted it and the defenders reacted to its defacement.

The replacement statue

On the night of 14 April 2015, Nokuthula Simelane's statue was spray painted on its chin and torso. In the case of Simelane's statues, various people have spoken out against its theft and subsequent vandalism. The production of a new statue, in fact, may be seen as their efforts to combat the actions of the vandals and objectors. Besides the artist, Janse van Vuuren, defenders of the statues include family and other loved ones of Simelane, the provincial and national government officials, journalists who authored articles on the occurrences, and members of the general public who may have taken issue with the treatment of the statue.

Violence towards monuments and memorials, however, reaches beyond the experience of Nokuthula Simelane, particularly in 2015, wherein the Rhodes Must Fall movement oversaw the campaigning and vandalism against colonial and apartheid monuments. The vandalism against Simelane's statue in April of 2015 appears to have been committed in reaction to the violence towards colonial and apartheid monuments and memorials. Provincial government representative of Mpumalanga articulated the sentiment that 'with the current situation in the country we believe that the statue is being targeted...'.⁵² The response to the defacement of Simelane's statue was in fact also a broad response in favour of respecting all monuments and memorials of struggle heroes or colonial and apartheid relics. Afri Forum attributed the violence against statues to remarks President Jacob Zuma made

⁵² *SABC Digital News*, 'Statue of Nokuthula Simelane Defaced' at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpQH3DdDqfi> accessed 19 September 2017.

preceding the vandalism, and implored him to recant his statements and denounce the vandalism of monuments and memorials. Zuma's remarks, according to Afri Forum, ascribed the injustices in South Africa to Jan van Riebeeck's arrival in the 17th century.⁵³ Also, in reference to the theft of Simelane's statue in 2011, chief executive officer Kallie Kriel was quoted in the *Sowetan* as saying, 'AfriForum supports the concept of mutual recognition and respect among communities'.⁵⁴ The vandalism of Simelane's replacement statue is therefore overtly a political matter and is intertwined in a nation-wide political movement. In the binary of the Rhodes Must Fall Movement verses the defenders of the Rhodes monument – those defacing colonial and apartheid monuments versus those defacing struggle hero monuments in response.

The biography of Simelane the statue is in fact the biographies of two distinct statues. One defaced with white paint and dismantled and stolen, and the other defaced with the use of yellow spray paint. Although the statues have their own respective biographies, when Simelane is conceived in monument form, collectively, she is indeed representative of other vulnerable and targeted monuments in South Africa. In statue form, she endows and is subject to the varied experiences which are, otherwise spread out across other statues and monuments. Simelane's statue, like those of the Soviet Union, had a rope tied around its neck, was torn from its pedestal, and dragged behind a vehicle. She was then replaced with another version of herself, an imitation, and thereafter defaced again. Simelane is representative as she is bestowed with the violence and antagonism in intense form, which statues and monuments have experienced throughout post-apartheid South Africa.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ McKeed Kotlolo, "2 Bust for Theft", *Sowetan*, 26 January 2011.

Additional auto/biographic productions

The existence of Simelane's statue prompts the production of additional auto/biographies which supplement it, namely the poem and the unveiling. The family's part in the production of the statue is particularly significant in that the plaque bestowed upon the pedestal is inscribed with a poem produced by the family.⁵⁵ The poem appeals to the missing cadre, whose bones buried in an unknown place call out from beyond the grave. The poem invokes imagery associated with decay, which relates to her death and the unknown whereabouts of her remains. The poem also evokes imagery of song and dance, as it relates to her remains calling out to be found. The poem goes as follows:

The earth
Wraps around your
Soiled flesh
Unsung
Unheard
Unseen
Your fragile form fills
The aching ground
With song
Unmarked
Unopened
Evergreen

Your tongue you held
Mute against their
Ignorant devices
Embalmed



⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

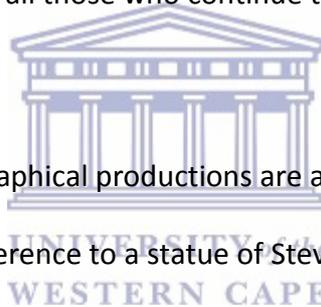
Embattled
Embouchure
Our blue skies burn with
These secrets
Of silence
Emitted
Embedded
Emblazoned

Nokuthula,
Your voice rings deep
Into the hearts
Of all
Who dance through
The streets
Of our
land



The poem captures the reality of Simelane's missingness. The writer's use of words and imagery such as 'earth wraps', 'soiled flesh', 'fragile form fills the arching ground', 'Unmarked' and 'Unopened' testifies to the notion that Simelane was killed and buried in an unmarked and unknown grave. The ground 'aches' as even nature mourns the injustice subjected upon Simelane, and thus seeks relief from the pain – seeks for the bones to be found and exhumed. Her remains are described as 'Unsung', 'Unheard' and 'Unseen' as to convey the mystery and lack of transparency surrounding her death and the diminished significance her sacrifice was given. The second stanza narrates Simelane's endurance and her loyalty to the struggle, as she '[held her tongue]' in the face of assault and torture. The

poem, having already established the covert nature of Simelane's disappearance and death, describes the sky as being a witness to her experience and thus holding the mysteries and truth surrounding her death: 'Our blue skies burn with these secrets of silence'. This stanza also appears to venerate Simelane with the use of words such as 'Embalmed' and 'Emblazoned'. Furthermore, the poem uses imagery and words relating to song and music, which coincides with the statue and the tambourine and Simelane's love for dance as conveyed by her family. 'Embouchure' relates to the playing of a wind instrument. The poem conveys Simelane's missingness, the unknowns surrounding it, her endurance amid danger and her ultimate positioning as a martyr of the struggle who continues to inspire 'all who dance through the streets' – all those who continue the struggle for liberation and equality today.



The family's and comrades' biographical productions are also noteworthy in the context of the unveiling of the statue. In reference to a statue of Steve Biko in East London, Rassool contemplates the manner in which Biko has been memorialised and the 'cultural and political rituals associated with a statue's unveiling as a genre of "biography"'.⁵⁶ Therefore, not only is the statue a genre of Simelane's biographies, and has a biography of its own, but it also provokes the production of further auto/biographies through rituals undertaken by the people surrounding it at its unveiling. How, in the context of Nokuthula Simelane, have these rituals and the manner she has been memorialised contributed to the production of her biography? The unveiling of the statue on 28 November 2009 was indeed a political and cultural spectacle. The procession, beginning with performances of drum majorettes, was attended by family, comrades and government officials. A march ensued. Being a political event, various speakers took to the podium, reflecting on Simelane, creating Simelane.

⁵⁶ Rassool, 'The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa', p. 217.

Speakers honoured Simelane, asserting her endurance and defiance amid her plight of abduction, assault and torture. The spectacle also served to reemphasise the cause for finding her still missing remains.⁵⁷ Perhaps, in this case, the object has agency, as its being and presence allows for people to gather around and create meaning.⁵⁸

Conclusion

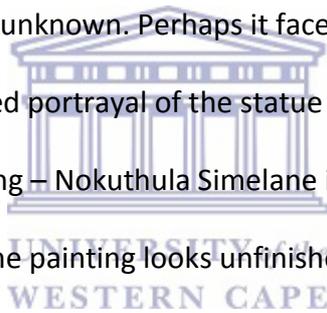
Nokuthula Simelane, produced in statue form, elevated in importance and given a voice, through the artist and family, was intended to be a symbol of peace. Just as the artist produces the biographies, the events and rituals rendered around the statue, such as its unveiling and its subsequent violent experiences, also invites biographical production. In addition to this, biographical production also occurs in the poem inscribed on the plaque. The statues' experiences as an object, however, belie the artist's intentions, and instead bear similarities to the subject's human life. In the process of being stolen the statue suffered immense damage. The motives appear politically and race-related. As a consequence, the statue was replaced by another. Simelane, in statue form is therefore produced twice. The second, it seems, is an imitation of the first. As the biography of the first statue ends, as its public display ends, the second statue's biography begins. The second statue, the spokesperson of the first's experience of defacement, theft and ruin, becomes a recipient of further instances of violence, as the opponents to the Rhodes Must Fall Movement take their own radical action in 2015, spray-painting its face and torso. Across every occasion of violence towards Simelane as a monument, people have denounced these actions – encouraging the respect for monuments and memorials, as they

⁵⁷ 'The Unveiling of the Nokuthula Simelane Statue', at <http://houseofmemory.co.za/Nokuthula%20Simelane.pdf>, accessed on 6 September 2017.

⁵⁸ J. Hoskins, 'Agency, Biography and Objects', in C. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Küchler, M. Rowlands and P. Spyer (eds), *Handbook of Material Culture* (London: Sage Publishers, 2006).

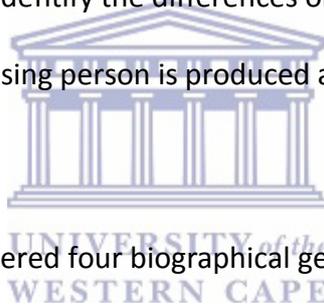
represent the history of South Africa and the country's various heroes. Simelane's monument, like many others since the end of apartheid, has been subject to violence and vandalism.

This chapter has also shown the prevalence of monument theft and vandalism throughout both the transition period and the subsequent post-apartheid era of South Africa. It is therefore my argument that Simelane is interesting as it becomes representative of these many vulnerable statues. Simelane, as the two respective statues, is a symbol of the lives of vulnerable and targeted monuments in South Africa, whether stolen, retrieved, restored, replaced, defaced – Simelane has experienced it and testifies to it. The future in the biography of Simelane's statue is unknown. Perhaps it faces more violence in years to come, making Christa Myburgh's outlined portrayal of the statue and its surroundings behind the more detailed focus of the painting – Nokuthula Simelane in the ballerina dress – all the more appropriate. Thus, just as the painting looks unfinished, the biography of the statue is unfinished.



CONCLUSION

Nokuthula Simelane, the first-born of Mathew and Ernestina Simelane, was born in 1960 near Bethal, Mpumalanga. She attained her Bachelors in Administration at the University of Swaziland, where she also became a member of MK. In 1983 Simelane commenced on a mission to South Africa on the pretext of obtaining attire for her upcoming graduation. However, scheduled to meet her contact at the Carlton Center, Johannesburg, she was instead abducted by the Soweto Security Police. Her whereabouts and remains, to this day, still remain a mystery. While these are well established conventional biographical facts about her life, in this thesis I sought to explore how Simelane's biographies manifest across different genres and in so doing, identify the differences or similarities between them. I am therefore interested in how a missing person is produced across multiple genres of biography.



In pursuit of these aims I encountered four biographical genres related to Simelane. These genres include: The TRC, as it relates to Simelane; the documentary film *Betrayal*, directed by Mark Kaplan; the statue at Bethal sculpted by Ruhan Janse van Vuuren; and a painting by Christa Myburgh (which I do not focus on in detail in this thesis). Each of these genres and mediums of biography prompt the production of additional biographies. The TRC produces the HRVC transcripts, the AC transcripts and the final report on the findings. *Betrayal* makes use of interviews, photographs, re-enactments and the medium of music and song. And finally, the statue's unveiling and the poem on the statue's plaque are also biographic productions.

The TRC's construction of Simelane's biography is dictated by what the TRC sought to discover and attain (as seen in its mandate), and the methods it used to accomplish its goals

(through the dynamics of testimony, statement-taking and language interpretation). Various role-players are involved in a single HRVC hearing and AC hearing, and they all contribute towards constructing Simelane at the TRC. In an AC hearing perpetrators abide by a pre-made affidavit. Testimony on their and Simelane's life therefore is not granted a free flow. The telling of Simelane's life is strictly contained within the parameters of quasi-legal protocol. Testimony procedures are thereafter filtered through the simultaneous language interpretation, which is vulnerable to unintentional mistakes, erasure and reduction. Additionally, each language has its own nuances, and thus, interpreters in the same hearing could produce subtly different biographies. The flawed findings on Simelane's life is consequently chronicled in transcripts and the Final Report, which are then proliferated into public mediums. Significantly, however, the Simelane produced in the TRC is a Simelane produced mostly by her perpetrators. Although Simelane is represented by her father in the HRVC hearing, most of the power to produce the biography of the missing Simelane is handed to her perpetrators, putting into question of validity of TRC's pursuit to reinstate the victim's dignity. In addition to this, there are no prominent female voices in the TRC's production of Simelane. Simelane, a female, is therefore mostly produced through the perspective of men.

Simelane's biographies, as produced through the genre of the TRC, are biographies of contestation, fragmentation, silences, obscurities and incompleteness. Not only do silences manifest in the TRC's focus on Simelane's public life – as seen in the various AC hearings and even perceived in the HRVC hearing (representing her as a one dimensional public agent) – and the reality that through the simultaneous language interpretation information could have been lost. But the silences are also particularly prominent in the obstruction of truth

and clarity by Simelane's perpetrators regarding her fate and whereabouts. Furthermore, because the whereabouts are not disclosed, Simelane's remains cannot be retrieved and analysed, and through this forensic analysis, speak for itself. Simelane, herself, is therefore silenced and the truth about her obscured.

Contestation occurs in the TRC's production of Simelane as perpetrators Coetzee and Pretorius are unyielding in their assertions that they successfully attained Simelane's co-operation, turned her into a double agent, treated her with relative leniency – providing her with clothing and toiletries – and also released her. However, according to Veyi and Selamolela, Simelane refused to co-operate, she never disclosed any information regarding MK and the Security Police failed to recruit her. They assert that Simelane was not provided clothing, nor toiletries, and treated extremely harshly, to the extent that she was unable to walk on her own. Veyi and Selamolela maintain that Coetzee and Pretorius killed Simelane. Thus, as contestation is rife, there is no one consistent narrative of Simelane's life. Instead there are multiple opposing narratives, bringing forth the notion of fragmentation.

Opposing representations of Simelane are produced at the TRC.

Whereas the TRC is limited by its mandate interested in only certain issues, film is freed from such limits and allows creativity as a visual medium. The genre of film, as opposed to the TRC, allowed for the use of images, re-enactments, sound, interviews in domestic spaces and significant sites, such as the farm. Just as the TRC's construction of Simelane's is made with the input of multiple auto/biographers, Mark Kaplan's documentary film, *Betrayal*, is also a biographic production of many auto/biographers. *Betrayal* is similar to the TRC as through the various narrations of Simelane, the speakers narrate their own lives in relation to hers. However, unlike the TRC's productions, Simelane's biography in *Betrayal* contends

with that of a similarly, if not more intriguing character in Barney Molokoane. Thus, for a few minutes in the documentary film, Simelane is overshadowed and her story is silenced beneath the intrigue of Molokoane's.

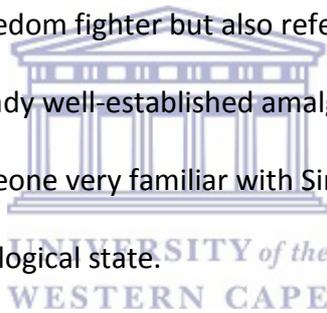
Betrayal is therefore not simply a film on Simelane, but recounts a family's trauma and relentless search for the truth regarding her abduction, torture, death and the whereabouts of her remains. The documentary film depicts their desire to afford Simelane a burial befitting of not only a freedom fighter, but a daughter, sister and friend they love dearly.

Betrayal is therefore not merely a filmic depiction of the public aspects of Simelane's life as a MK combatant. Unlike the narrations in the TRC which amplified the voice of the perpetrators in the production of Simelane, *Betrayal* provides a space for relatives and friends to give an account of Simelane, and in so doing, reveal aspects of Simelane outside of the political and public realm. The film is full of references to Simelane's private life, in its interviews with family and friends, and in its use of re-enactment and photographs. The interviews tell us of her hobbies and her strengths in sport and academia. One particular interview admits that Simelane may have been pregnant. Although the re-enactments in the film portray both political and personal aspects of her life, the re-enactment at the film's opening depicts Simelane's crying as an infant. The private and the public intersect as this crying is linked to her family's mourning in present-day and the 'crying-out' of Simelane's remains from its unknown grave.

In representing Simelane's life and her family's trauma and undertakings in pursuit of the truth, the film uses the mediums of photographs and song to tell. Photographs are not only important for what they show and how they validate the narration, but they are also important for what is done with them, particularly in the context of the home. In the home,

Simelane's photographs are placed in dominant spaces, emphasising her importance in the lives of her family. Photographs and visual representation is also significant as the documentary film was broadcast on national television, allowing the public to confront the reality of Simelane's continued absence and her family's perpetual angst and sadness. The public is invited to join in their mourning, the pursuit for justice and perhaps identify with their plight.

Song is not only used to intensify moments in the film and further evoke the viewer's emotion, but it is also pertinent for the fact that a song was composed about Simelane for the film. The song 'Sikulindle' not only represents the traumatic reality of Simelane's missingness and absence as a freedom fighter but also references her love for dance. The song underscores *Betrayal's* already well-established amalgamation of the private and public, as the singer sings as someone very familiar with Simelane. Kaplan stated that the song evokes the mother's psychological state.



Just as Simelane's private life is represented in *Betrayal*, her public endeavours as a liberation fighter are also well represented. Kaplan and Gobodo-Madikizela thus embark on conducting interviews with various role-players, and where interviews could not be attained, footage from the TRC was used. However, as perpetrators either did not want to be involved in the film and in other cases footage of their hearing at the AC is not available, Simelane's biography as created through the documentary film is not what it could be and wrought with silences. *Betrayal* does, however, reflect on the inadequacies of the TRC to shed light on the possible sexual assault of Simelane by her perpetrators. And as opposed to the narratives in the TRC, *Betrayal* does not represent ambiguity and contestation regarding the recruitment of Simelane by the Security Police. Simelane's loyalty to MK in the face of

torture and death is asserted by her sister. The vast differences between the documentary film and the TRC is further highlighted in the issue of reconciliation. Whereas the TRC vigorously sought this, *Betrayal* underscores the overt lack of reconciliation and closure in the lives of families similar to Simelane's, who still seek the truth and mourn the loss of their missing loved ones.

Nokuthula Simelane's statue, located in Bethal, Mpumalanga, and sculpted by Ruhan Janse van Vuuren, is the final biographic genre this thesis focuses on. My focus on the statue differs from that of the TRC and the documentary film, as I embarked on recounting the biography of the statue. Simelane's statue's biography is not only developed by its physical appearance and what it signifies, but it is also developed by how people and society think of it and interact with it. The physical appearance of the statue portrays more overt references to Simelane's private life than it does to her life as a freedom fighter. Simelane's allegiance to MK is not obviously depicted in the statue. Where her political undertakings are portrayed – the rubber boots – an individual may interpret its placing as a disassociation from it. The graduation attire, an allusion to her mission (coming to South Africa under the pretext of attaining graduation attire), could be seen as a symbol of her academic endeavours. Similarly, the tambourine, which van Vuuren links with the beating of the drum of freedom, may be interpreted as merely a reference to Simelane's enjoyment of dance.

By virtue of its public display, interaction occurs and biography is produced in the statue's vandalism and theft. The theft is not only violent and somewhat of a re-enactment of Simelane's real life abduction, but as a consequence, a new statue was created by the van Vuuren. Thus, being dismantled, the statue's physical appearance was no longer adequate to retake its place on its pedestal, even were it to be repaired. The replacement statue, an

imitation, similar in appearance, testifies to the first's experience. However, in replacing the statue, an erasure of biography occurs. The replacement statue incurs defacement of its own when, in 2015, it is sprayed with yellow paint. Here, Simelane's statue became entangled in the Rhodes Must Fall Movement. Therefore, Simelane's statue, which was intended to be a symbol of peace, has been subjected to violence and dissension.

Although, like *Betrayal*, the statue is an artistic endeavour which portrays both the private and the public, its experience of theft and vandalism could be likened to occurrences in the AC of the TRC. Just as the perpetrators had the most prominent role in producing the narrative of Simelane, the statue thief and the vandals play a crucial role in the creation of Simelane's biographies. The thief's action led to the toppling, damage and replacement of the statue, calling into question the sacredness and significance of it. This sacredness and significance is not only diminished in its toppling but also in its replacement with a lookalike. Similarly, at the AC perpetrators called into question Simelane's loyalty to MK and by the nuances in their speech represent her in a less dignified manner.

Similarly to the genres prior, the statue also provokes the production of additional biographic genres of Simelane, in the poem and the statue's unveiling. The poem evokes imagery of her decayed remains lamenting in song from its unknown grave, and the unveiling which invited the oration of various speakers, celebrated her life and sacrifice, and emphasised the continued efforts to find Simelane's remains. Whereas, the TRC – a lengthy process – and the film, limited to under an hour, attempt to disclose details and represent Simelane's missingness, the poem's imagery vividly and concisely encapsulates the reality, emotion and significance of her life, death and missingness. While in the song 'Sikulindle', the singer's plaintive voice and the slow and somber instrumentation does an important job

in evoking a sense of sadness, the poem achieves this in its imagery. One may even say that the poem's use of song-associated imagery gives it a triumphant ending in spite of its formerly-established serious and mournful tone.

The biographies of a missing person, as demonstrated by my focus on Nokuthula Simelane, is rich in information, yet leaves much room for new information and also interpretation of the genres and narratives. The very condition of being missing implies an absence, an incompleteness, unknowns and unfinished aspects in the biography. The missing person is not afforded an exhumation, an analysis of the remains, a handover, and a respectful burial. In addition to this, as he or she cannot speak of him or herself, others do and create contestations, erasures and silences of truth. While a conventional biographical work on a missing person would be limited to the known empirical facts chronologically and coherently ordered to construct a life, an unconventional approach – a focus on multiple genres and narrations of biography – as I have shown, could expand the sphere of knowledge regarding the missing person. While contestations, unknowns and silences are rife, one is not doomed to a scant biographical production. Instead, the issues of unknowns, silences and contestations highlight the complexities of producing a biography. As Christa Myburgh's minimalist depiction of Bethal Precinct in her painting 'Ode to Nokuthula' shows us – the unfinished and unknown quality does not diminish the beauty and intrigue of a biographic production.

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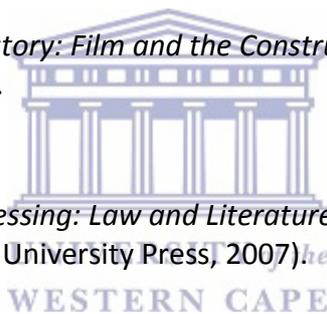
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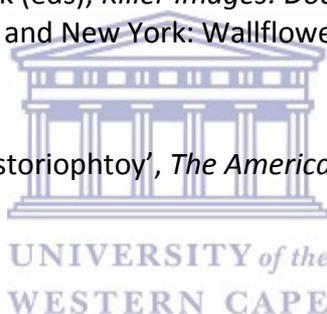
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