

Chapter 2

Turmoil and Unrest

Abstract This chapter begins with a discussion of works which depict the unrest prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s, specifically with regard to the student protests of the period. The events of 1976, in particular, were crucial in the intellectual and ideological development of young people, especially black adolescents. During the period from 1976 to 1990 writers sought to depict these events through narrative, interpreting and describing events through their predominantly white characters. Works by black writers written in the 2000s present a more direct experience of events through their black characters' experiences. The representation of memory is a major feature of all these books, which depict how the violence of the 1970s and 1980s is reconstructed and remembered in young adult narratives. More recent novels depict this violence and the events of those decades as part of a collective and institutional memory, thus demonstrating how history is shaped according to current ideological assumptions.

Political and social themes dominated the genre of young adult fiction in South Africa during the 1980s and early 1990s, as writers grappled with issues of race and identity politics (Inggs 2002, p. 22). Turmoil and unrest, characteristic of the lives of many young South Africans growing up prior to the 1990s, often featured in this writing, particularly in relation to the student and anti-apartheid protests of the 1970s and 80s. Prior to 1994 such works frequently served to disrupt the status quo and expose the many injustices of the apartheid system, while later works sought to explore the complex issues of memory and the legacy of the involvement of young people in the struggle. Early writers are mainly white, bringing to their stories their own attitudes, ideologies and upbringings while later works by black writers portray events from the writer's own perspective or through a black protagonist.

The narratives which feature the events of June 16, 1976 illustrate how that day has been incorporated into the national memory to symbolise the contribution of the youth to the success of the struggle. Gary Baines comments on the way the day has attained a symbolic significance in South African history, concluding that "[t]he annual commemoration of Youth Day and the heroicization of Hector Pieterse

exemplify the process” of creating a national identity, according “recognition to the Soweto uprising as a pivotal event in the grand narrative of the liberation struggle as well as to the role of youth in contributing to the end of apartheid” (Baines 2007, p. 301). Written narratives play a significant part in the construction and interpretation of memory, a fact highlighted by André Brink, who refers to the way in which fiction enables an “imaginative understanding” of the past, allowing different versions of that past to be drawn into the present (Brink 1996, p. 23). Versions of the past depicted in the novels discussed below show how the distance from events and the experience of the authors influence the understanding of history through narrative. An examination of novels written about this tumultuous period in South Africa’s history reveals an intertwining narrative of conflict and resolution, confrontation and reconciliation. Sarah Nuttall points to the non-linear nature of South African history and uses a metaphor of entanglement in literary texts featuring involvement in fighting for liberation and equality:

[E]ntanglement is frequently revealed to be a process of becoming someone you were not in the beginning. This process takes place through encounters with blackness, including involvement in the struggle for black liberation and through confronting complicity with an apartheid order and imaginary. (Nuttall 2009, p. 58)

Writers have frequently focused on white encounters with blackness and confrontations with the apartheid system, both in young adult and adult literature. In adult literature perhaps one of the best known works by a white writer is *A Dry White Season* by André Brink (1979) which explores the experiences of a white Afrikaans teacher, Ben du Toit, when his gardener’s son is arrested and killed in police custody during the 1976 riots. This event prompts Ben to reassess his values and assumptions and to decide whether to act—guaranteed to fail because his family, friends and colleagues all turn against him—or not to act, which he perceives as a moral death. Four key novels by black writers which tackle the events of the 1970s and 1980s are *The Children of Soweto* by Mbulelo Mzamane (1982), *Amandla* by Miriam Tlali (1980), *A Ride on the Whirlwind* by Sipho Sepamla (1981) and *To Every Birth Its Blood* by Mongane Serote (1981). The distinguishing feature of these novels is that they are presented as authentic accounts which “offer a socially realistic depiction of events” (Sheckels 1996, p. 82) and which identify characters, and readers, “in positive, optimistic and active terms” (Mokadi 2003, p. 19). All were written in the early eighties, and send a clear moral message, possibly because the authors did not write from the perspective of a temporal distance from events. This lack of distance means that the works have a strongly didactic tone, often acknowledged by the authors themselves. Mzamane, for example, writes that he “hardly bothered to disguise the didactic purpose of [his] tale” and saw “little need to delineate individual characters sharply because the community as a whole is the hero” (Mzamane 1984, p. 159), while Sheckels (1996, p. 138) views Tlali’s *Amandla* as “more of a Marxist economics lesson and less a human drama”.

There are marked differences in the young adult works written by black and white authors, reflecting different ways of being black and white, and the consequences of contact and interaction between individual characters and between characters and institutionalised norms and attitudes. As Clare Bradford comments

in the introduction to her ground-breaking work, *Reading Race*: “Children’s books do not merely mirror what exists; rather, they formulate and produce concepts and ideologies, always within the context of adult views about what children should know and value” (Bradford 2007, p. 5). Many of the writers, constrained themselves by the society in which they grew up and by their own experience of contact with the other, appear unaware of the ideological bias in their works. Read today, some twenty years after the first elections and against the backdrop of a very different social constellation, the works explored here trace the changing interpretation of events and of society from 1980 to the present day.

1976 and Its Aftermath

The Soweto uprising of 1976 was a turning point in South African history, triggering an entire black activist movement (‘Down with Afrikaans’, n.d.).¹ The immediate cause was a changed language policy in schools but the uprising was also indicative of deep-seated unrest. Government policy had already decreed that Afrikaans and English should be used equally in schools but this policy had not been strictly enforced. In 1976 the Department of Bantu Education and Development declared that tuition in mathematics and arithmetic should be in Afrikaans only, despite the fact that the majority of teachers and pupils did not have sufficient command of the language (Gilliomée and Mbenga 2007, pp. 362–364; Mokadi 2003, p. 62). As Afrikaans was widely considered the language of the oppressor, this development was the catalyst that led to massive demonstrations resulting in the death of approximately 176 young people on 16 June, although unofficial estimates put the number of deaths as high as 500 (Plaut 2006). During the following year more than 500 teachers resigned and “secondary education in Soweto [was] brought virtually to a standstill” (Gilliomée and Mbenga 2007, p. 363). Yet at the time the white population of South Africa was largely unaware of the extent of the unrest. In a climate of violence and suppression, censorship inevitably played an important role in controlling coverage in both literature and the press.² The first Board of Censors was set up in 1931, initially to monitor film and performance, and extended to imported books and periodicals in 1934 (McDonald 2009, p. 21). The Publications and Entertainment Act of 1963 made it a statutory offence to publish, print or distribute what was regarded as undesirable material, whether local or imported. The period from 1974 to 1980 was particularly repressive, with over 1000 works per year being banned on average (McDonald 2009, p. 61). Media coverage of the events of June 16 1976 and its aftermath were no exception, as the government sought to contain the significance and severity of the

¹See Hirson (1979), Brooks and Brickhill (1980) and Kane-Berman (1978) for histories of the event and Hyslop (1999) for a detailed account of the events leading up to the uprising.

²See *The Muzzled Muse* by de Lange (1997), *The Literature Police* by McDonald (2009) and Christopher Merrett’s *A Culture of Censorship* (1994).

riots (Merrett 1994, p. 79). On 18 June 1976 violent protests had spread to Alexandra, a township to the north-west of Johannesburg, “but this was almost completely concealed to protect white morale and the confidence of investors” (Merrett 1994, p. 84) and journalists were increasingly prohibited from entering “operational areas” (Merrett 1994, p. 86).

White Writers Narrating the 1976 Riots³

Early works featuring the 1976 riots were constrained in two ways: first, writers may not themselves have been aware of the full extent of the riots, and second, works highlighting justifications for the riots were likely to be prohibited. This was the fate of Tlali’s *Amandla*, banned almost immediately after publication in 1981, and largely unavailable even after it was unbanned in 1985 (De Lange 1997, p. 143). In the field of YA fiction, the earlier novels include *Go Well, Stay Well* by Toeckey Jones which was first published in New York in 1979 with distribution in South Africa “discouraged” by the authorities (Heale, n.d.), *The Sound of the Gora* by Harries (1980), originally published in London and banned in South Africa as “prejudicial to the safety of the state” (Tötemeyer 1988, p. 85), Sheila Gordon’s *Waiting for the Rain* (1987) and Barbara Ludman’s *The Day of the Kugel* (1989). All of these authors are white, and while three of them left South Africa during the 70s and 80s, the fourth, Barbara Ludman, was born in the United States and moved to South Africa as a journalist 1976, becoming a founder member of *The Weekly Mail*, probably the most vocal anti-apartheid English language newspaper.

As was typical of writing during this period all events are channelled through the narrator, irrespective of the focalising character. The earliest work, *Go Well, Stay Well*, focuses on an interracial friendship following an incident when Candy, a white girl, sprains her ankle in a park in Johannesburg and Becky, a black girl, comes to her assistance. The friendship is logistically difficult as the two girls occupy different social and geographical spaces—Becky lives in Soweto, a large township to the south-west of Johannesburg and Candy lives in the middle-class northern suburbs of the city. As Candy would need a permit to enter Soweto the two girls concoct a contrived story in which Becky will travel to Candy’s home to help her with her Zulu lessons. Previous works featuring such friendships, such as Carolyn Parker’s *Witch Woman on the Hogsback* (1987), were set on farms, where separation was less rigid and contact more plausible. Although the contrived nature of the story is evident in a contemporary post-apartheid reading, this is not reflected in reviews of the novel at the time. One reviewer does comment on the contrived ending when the two friends go on holiday together to Swaziland, where there are no restrictions on their relationship. However, the same reviewer regards Jones’s characters as “credible and natural”, an observation which is difficult

³An earlier version of this section on the novels featuring the 1976 riots was published in the journal *Detskie Chleniia* (Inggs 2014).

to uphold thirty five years later ('Go well, stay well by Toeckey Jones' 1980). Moreover, many of the characters are clear stereotypes. Candy's parents are more liberal than their neighbours, but remain concerned should Becky be seen visiting their house; Candy is a stereotypical white teenager largely ignorant of the everyday lives of black people in the townships; and Tom, the "family's African servant", calls Candy "Miss Cand", and obligingly pretends he is unaware of Becky's visits, carefully planned to coincide with his day off (Jones 1987, p. 29). His role as a subservient and semi-visible servant is the norm in many of the novels set during this period, emphasising the inequalities between blacks and whites and drawing the attention of the implied white reader, whose contact with black South Africans was generally restricted to nannies, cooks and gardeners. Becky becomes the channel through which Candy gradually acquires an awareness of the injustices in South African society, a narrative device that would be unnecessary if the novel was intended for a contemporary, mixed readership.

Candy's experience of the events of June 1976 is at a distance, far removed from Becky's less sheltered reality: "For the most part, life in the white suburbs surrounding Johannesburg went on much the same as always. The violence was distant; the police were containing it within the black areas" (Jones 1987, p. 132). What could have been a traumatic account of Becky's rape on her way to visit Candy highlights the sharp contrast between the spaces inhabited by the two girls. Becky relates her story almost impassively, seemingly resigned to her status as a victim. Candy reacts with disbelief and genuine incomprehension but her intervention goes no further. Jones downplays the incident and Becky seems to accept the threat of rape as a fact of life. When Candy hears news of the riots she is prompted to express concern about her friend's well-being, but once she receives messages via domestic servants—who could travel freely between black and white areas—her main objective is a trip to Swaziland. Silindiwe Sibanda, in her study of white writers writing black characters in South African YA novels, notes that Becky is depicted as an "exceptional black character" who "contributes to the development of the white character and acquaints the implied white readers in a rather patronising manner with a black character that they can relate to and possibly even consider befriending" (Sibanda 2012, p. 108). Although inevitable in the context of society in the 1970s power relations are starkly unequal as Candy provides Becky with books and clothes, and her parents and uncle agree to fund Becky's education and the holiday in Swaziland. This undoubtedly genuine generosity is accepted by Becky, albeit with some humiliation, as she has no other resources available to her. The gap between whites and blacks is unequivocally apparent and largely unquestioned. Ultimately the author fails to provide readers with any credible black characters, or any sense of the significance of June 16 1976. It was, however, at the time of writing, a ground-breaking novel, and one of the first to highlight inequality and injustice for the education of white readers.

Ann Harries's *The Sound of the Gora* (1980) is superior in its plot and characterisation, and is regarded by Elwyn Jenkins as "one of the best books to emerge in the wave of emancipated writing that came out in the 1970s and 1980s" (Jenkins 2006, pp. 132–3). The student unrest in 1976 features more prominently than in *Go Well*,

Stay Well, while one of the central themes is the absurdity of racial classification. The narrative alternates between two parallel stories, one set in 1976 and the other in 1800. In the contemporary story, Caroline, the female white protagonist, discovers that she has a coloured sister, abandoned by her father on discovering that her mother was ‘play-White’.⁴ Caroline meets a young coloured boy, Andre, who provides the link to the earlier story featuring the Afrikaner settlers and the Bushmen of the Cape. In this story, the young male character, also called Andre, is the son of a Boer farmer and forms a relationship with a young San⁵ girl, Nama, who has been captured by his father’s commando. The author switches between the two historical periods, making use of multi-focalisation and diary entries, exposing the reader to different voices. Although binary narratives have been described as “capable of producing a dialogue that interrogates the givens of both cultures by showing them to be constructed, relative and contingent” if the “cultural and historical discourses are accorded alterity” (Bradford 2007, p. 114), in this novel the two discourses merge and the sense of otherness blurs when 1976 Andre learns that he is a descendant of Nama, whose playing of the gora provides the title of the novel. Nama passes down her ability to play the gora by “forcefully inhaling and exhaling over a feather connecting the string to one end of the bow” (Stone 1999, p. 313) to her descendants, one of whom is 1976 Andre’s father, Dixu, who plays the gora in response to the sound of Andre’s Jew’s harp, leading Caroline and Andre up Table Mountain, where they find Dixu.

During the novel Caroline requests to be reclassified and joins her sister in a coloured area, illustrating her growing sense of agency as she openly opposes the authority of both her father and the state. Initially, however, as a privileged white girl, she takes the lead in her relationship with Andre, and is the primary source of food and money. Just as in *Go Well*, *Stay Well*, one of the main purposes is to educate the implied white reader, but Harries’s characters experience the protests directly, although they themselves are observers rather than participants. Caroline’s diary provides a first-hand account of her and Andre’s experiences, including tear gas, batons, and bullets. The police are represented as an impassive body and referred to as “ape-like” (Harries 1980, p. 133) “marching in a strange, compulsive sort of way upon a huge crowd of men, women and children” (Harries 1980, p. 130). The author’s attitude is reflected in a paragraph in parentheses:

(Another busy day for the riot police, the railway police, the traffic police, the entire might-is-right of the South African police: six foot rugby forwards, bulging necks, revolvers in leather, they fall upon these children with a loathing bred by history.) (Harries 1980, p. 123)

The story ends in 1977, when Yusuf, a young Muslim involved in the unrest, flees the country for Botswana. The inhabitants of District Six, where Andre and his

⁴‘Play-White’ is a term that was used to refer to coloured people who could be accepted as White based on their appearance. During apartheid siblings were occasionally classified differently, which meant that, under the Group Areas Act of 1950, they could not live in the same community (Gilliomme and Mbenga 2007, p. 318).

⁵The term ‘San’ is controversial and there is no unanimously accepted term for referring to descendants of the first inhabitants of Southern Africa. I use ‘San’ as the most neutral term (Hitchcock et al., n.d.).

sisters live with their grandmother, are being moved to the Cape Flats, in order for the area to be “declared White” (Harries 1980, p. 142). Although Harries presents an ultimately brave and optimistic narrative, pioneering at the time of writing, there is no sense that the riots were a positive contribution to the struggle for freedom. The young activists are shown as divided in their opinions and attitudes, infiltrated by young thugs engaged in criminal activity (Harries 1980, pp. 100–101). Adults are equally negative, with Yusuf’s mother, Mrs Ebrahim, commenting that “this politics business just means trouble”, and Andre’s grandmother expressing her disapproval when she says that Yusuf is “jus’ throwing his chance away. They say he’s got the most brains in the school, now all he care about is making trouble” (Harries 1980, p. 97). Nevertheless, the novel sends a strong message about identity, roots, and family loyalty as Harries reflects the divisive nature of apartheid while at the same time emphasising the common roots and ancestors shared by all South Africans.

One of the most successful novels to come out of the 1980s focusing on the riots is *Waiting for the Rain* by Gordon (1987). Although the author’s attitude to the characters and events is ambiguous, the writing style and structure of the narrative lend the story a plausibility and conviction that is relatively uncommon in these early novels. Frikkie and Tengo are childhood friends, having spent many days together as children on Frikkie’s uncle’s farm. The main focalising character is Tengo, with the third person narration occasionally shifting to Frikkie. Gordon does not avoid stereotypes, but this work is more sensitive and nuanced than the other novels discussed. Frikkie’s uncle and aunt vocalise the existing status quo, emphasising the inferiority of the black characters through their words and actions, firm in their belief that black children do not need books or an education. As Frikkie’s uncle tells his wife: “So long as a native knows his place he’ll be all right.” He continues:

“But once he starts getting ideas, he no longer knows his place – and then you get trouble. That’s the reason for all the unrest they’re having in the townships. I tell you, Sannie, when I was a boy growing up here on the farm, you would never have heard of a kaffir wanting to read and write.” (Gordon 1987, p. 80)

Tengo’s parents are unquestioning and accepting of their circumstances. When Tengo asks his mother indignantly why she has to serve supper at the farmhouse instead of eating with her own family, she replies: “Don’t ask questions that have no answer, my child” (Gordon 1987, p. 72). Tengo’s anger and his hunger for books grow until he goes to the city to attend school and is drawn into the simmering student unrest. Gordon’s ambiguity towards events finds expression in Tengo’s struggle to choose between joining his friends in the fight against apartheid or focusing on his studies, a common dilemma for young people at the time. As Tihelo will do in a later novel, *Dancing in the Dust* (Molope 2004), he finds his answer when inadvertently confronted by a clash between students and the police and “the anger that was lying coiled and waiting in him quickened” (Gordon 1987, p. 181). He picks up pieces of rubble and broken bricks and begins to hurl them at the police:

With each rock he hurled, something that had lain mute and ugly and dangerous at the root of his being rose up and flew out, released, bitterly gratifying... Tengo flung the rocks one after another, experiencing as each one soared its arc through the air a sense of freedom he had never known. (Gordon 1987, pp. 181–182).

Running for safety after this incident he hides in a shed, pursued by a soldier. Implausibly, the soldier who follows him is revealed to be Frikkie, now doing his national service. There follows a poignant conversation in which Tengo blames Frikkie for “not *knowing*. For not *wanting* to know” and for not questioning his attitudes or way of life (Gordon 1987, p. 195). Frikkie is not the faceless soldier or impassive policeman of *The Sound of the Gora* (Harries 1980) or the other novels discussed below, but is portrayed as a young man terrified of what might happen to him:

They don't know how scared we are, he thought, having to jump off the Casspirs into the softness of a crowd of civilians [...] Don't they realize how frightening it is to have to plunge into that soft sea of hate and violence – so many of them and so few of us even though we have the sticks and guns? (Gordon 1987, p. 192)

After this incident Tengo is empowered as he resolves to join the ANC and leave the country to study rather than fight, demonstrating his belief that education is the long-term solution for him and his peers. The ending of the novel highlights the seemingly unbridgeable chasm between Frikkie's and Tengo's worlds but also points towards the possibility of future reconciliation, indicating a more positive outcome than in the other early novels.

The last novel by a white writer focusing on June 1976 is Barbara Ludman's *The Day of the Kugel* (1989), written from the point of view of a young American girl sent to stay with her relatives in Johannesburg, a scenario that provides the author with the opportunity to impart information about life in South Africa to the implied, uninformed white reader. As Michelle learns about the peculiarities of a rigidly separated society, the reader is pushed to resist previously unquestioned assumptions and attitudes. Contemporary readers, while not necessarily sharing such assumptions, are made conscious of the history of their country, as the narrative provides material for discussing issues such as tolerance, difference and reconciliation. For example, when Michelle meets Joe, a banned black playwright who works in a small restaurant where she has found a job, she holds out her hand:

Joe smiled and took Michelle's hand for a moment, then let it drop.

“Miss Michelle is the niece of Professor Marcus,” said Mrs Malan, sharply.

“From America. She's not used to our ways yet.” (Ludman 1989, p. 25)

On Wednesday, June 16, 1976, Michelle arrives at the restaurant where she learns from Joe that “[t]he police are shooting children in Soweto” (Ludman 1989, p. 64). Michelle and the other white characters invariably learn about these events from third parties, in newspaper articles or from black domestic workers. Joe, as the only black character featuring prominently in the narrative, is the only authentic witness. “There were bodies stacked like firewood behind the police station”, he tells Michelle (Ludman 1989, p. 71). Michelle deliberately joins the white students' protest and witnesses a friend being attacked by a policeman:

Tracey stood there open-mouthed until the blood began to flow from her forehead. Then she tried to run again; and the policeman – young, blonde, impassive – hit her again, on the back this time, and dragged her up the slope. (Ludman 1989, p. 78)

Ultimately, however, this novel is not about the riots or the reasons behind the unrest but about Michelle. The day after the riots, despite what she has witnessed, Michelle goes shopping for clothes with her aunt and when she returns, shortly after hearing that the riots are continuing, she looks at her shopping bags and says: “It was a wonderful day” (Ludman 1989, p. 90). As Sibanda comments: “Joe ... educates Michelle about apartheid, which in turns enables her to overcome her personal and familial challenges” (Sibanda 2012, p. 107). Once again the black character is a conduit for the education of both the protagonist and the reader. The novel fails to depict the significance of events despite the fact that one of Michelle’s white friends flees to Botswana in exile, and Joe is arrested and jailed for his involvement, as Michelle remains fundamentally unaffected.

Black Writers Narrating the Unrest of the 70s and 80s

Only a few works have been published by black writers that centre on student unrest. Two in particular give a view of events from an alternative perspective: *Dancing in the Dust* by Kagiso Lesego Molepe, first published in 2002, and *Bua, Comrade!* by Thiathu Nemutanzhela, which was published in 2007. The chief protagonist of *Bua Comrade!* is a young black man, Kanakana, who has recently moved to Alexandra, a township to the north of Johannesburg. The author grew up in the same area as his character and also moved to Alexandra as a young man in the 1980s indicating an autobiographical influence. Like Tengo in *Waiting for the Rain*, Kanakana experiences a battle of conscience, uncertain whether he should continue his education or join the struggle against oppression. He feels like an outsider, terrified of becoming embroiled in the conflict and yet unable to justify his position on the periphery. The white characters in the novel are stereotyped as unthinking and deeply prejudiced benefactors, such as the white lawyer who offers Kanakana an apprenticeship but assigns him menial tasks and lends him a book entitled *The Educability of the South African Native*. Humiliated and insulted, Kanakana’s dilemma is resolved when he is offered a place to stay in the suburbs in return for looking after the pool and garden. Kanakana finds his own agency and identity by rejecting the subject position imposed upon him. This agency is reinforced through language as the novel incorporates Zulu dialogue (although Kanakana is from Venda), and does not include a glossary, thus constructing an implied black reader likely to identify with Kanakana.⁶ The use of a local language within an English text may be regarded as a form of *interpolation*, a term used by Bill Ashcroft to “describe the process by which colonized subjects may resist the forces which serve to construct them as other” (Ashcroft 2001) and offers a means by which black or indigenous writers may assert agency in texts (Bradford 2007, p. 54). Bradford provides a number of examples of similar usage

⁶The book does include a glossary of English words, together with notes and activities to be used by teachers in the classroom.

in Australian texts demonstrating how words and expressions in an indigenous language “stand metonymically for the language and culture from which they derive, and thus *install* cultural difference” (Bradford 2007, p. 55). The fact that Nemutanzhela does not gloss these words strengthens difference as non-Zulu readers are obliged to look for the meaning through contextual clues.

At a meeting to discuss events on the occasion of the anniversary of June 16, Kanakana’s friend, Fana, is advocating for the students to return to school when the meeting is stormed by soldiers and Fana is shot dead. The inclusion of such a scene distinguishes this work strongly from the previous novels by white writers. Kanakana’s presence at the meeting both highlights his involvement in the conflict experienced by young people at the time and also draws him directly into a personal experience of the violence perpetrated by the soldiers:

The door was flung open violently. Soldiers appeared as if out of nowhere. The door behind Kanakana was also covered. There was a moment of absolute, frozen, silence, and then the sound of shots, and somebody began to scream... Fana’s shirt front was covered with bright blood and he was deathly pale. (Nemutanzhela 2007, p. 66)

After Fana is killed Kanakana persuades his friends and comrades to end the boycott. The final chapter of the novel takes place twelve years later, after the first elections, when Kanakana is married to Thuli, with a young child. The characters’ express the optimism that they feel, at a time when young people “could go places and achieve things in the new South Africa, things that had not been possible ten years ago” (Nemutanzhela 2007, p. 77), highlighting the positive outcome and ultimate significance of the unrest.

Bua, Comrade! is presented as a text written for primarily educational purposes. A short section at the end explains that Nemutanzhela’s main interest is the relationship between literature and history, as well as a “personal reflection of Thiathu’s experiences” when he moved to Alexandra in the mid-1980s. A writer with a different purpose is Kagiso Lesego Molohe whose *Dancing in the Dust* is one of the most significant and accomplished young adult novels to appear in South Africa to date. Robin Malan likens the work to Zimbabwean Tsitsi Dangarembga’s highly acclaimed *Nervous Conditions* (Dangarembga 1988) and describes it as an “absolutely authentic teenage experience” (Molohe 2004, p. Back cover). It was written originally for adults and contains some disturbing scenes when Tihelo, the female protagonist, is held in detention for six months. However it has become widely accepted as a crossover text for both an adult and young adult audience and is used in schools with extensive study notes available (Hoy 2008). The author, who grew up in a township west of Pretoria in the 1980s, has stated that she wanted to write books that reflected the reality in which she lived and that she would have wanted to read as a young girl (*Canadian Global Campaign for Education* 2011). She also uses her books to highlight the role of women in the struggle in the context of a strongly patriarchal society, such as when Tihelo reflects on the lack of documentation about women’s efforts and wonders “if some day some history book would acknowledge that there were many women working and risking their lives” (Molohe 2004, p. 122). The author

uses first person narration which further strengthens the authenticity of the writing, creating a stronger sense of the identity of the protagonist and giving the reader a more intimate view of the character's thoughts and perceptions (Inggis 2007, p. 39). Tihelo's experiences are portrayed in a compelling and vivid style that gives the impression of reading an autobiographical account. This impression is strengthened through sections of the narrative written in italics, as if notes made by an adult reflecting on past events. For example, one of these refers back to the events of 1976: "*My earliest memory is of feet in black shoes and black socks running, bodies in black and white diving, school bags dropping on the ground in the middle of the streets*" (Molope 2004, p. 105).

Like Tengo and Kanakana, Tihelo begins her story feeling removed from the protests and violence around her, hearing about events from others and fearing for their safety, wishing that they would watch events "from a distance, the way I preferred to" (2004, p. 30). Once she becomes more directly involved in protest activities, her sense of distance remains: "At this point I felt no strong connection with the comrades, even if I was working with them daily. Instead, I resented their zeal" (2004, p. 67). As violence affects her more closely after her mother is assaulted by the police and jailed for a night, the sense of alienation turns into a feeling of horror and disbelief: "So we just grew into hopelessness because we were constantly running and hiding from danger. I watched in horror as students vandalised people's property, making it look as though we were in control when in fact we were terrified" (2004, p. 78). Just like Tengo in *Waiting for the Rain* Tihelo's confidence and sense of empowerment grows as she becomes more involved in the protests, throwing stones at the hippos:⁷ "I felt like all the power in the world lay in the palm of my hand... I saw in that stone my ticket to freedom" (2004, p. 131).

The climax of the novel comes when Tihelo and her sister are taken by police in a night time raid on their house. This episode echoes descriptions in adult novels such as Miriam Tlali's *Amandla* which includes a passage describing the arrest and detention of teenage girls (Tlali 1980, pp. 185–6). Tihelo is a strong identifying character, and the description of humiliation, degradation and violence is particularly disturbing for the reader, especially when her interrogators attempt to rape her, highlighting Tihelo's loss of control and agency (Williams 2008, p. 41). However, Tihelo also demonstrates her strength when she quickly realises that rape of prisoners must surely be forbidden—and shouts out: "I'm so excited. I know it's illegal for me to sleep with a White man in this country, but if this is my lucky day, I may just consider breaking the law!" (2004, p. 166). Her growth and empowerment are reflected at the end of the novel when she discovers the truth about her biological mother, a young white girl who fell in love with her parents' gardener, and who was obliged to give up her child. As Williams points out: "The resolution of the mystery surrounding her physical differences does not destabilize her sense of identity; rather, her decision to embrace her upbringing serves to solidify it" (Williams 2008, p. 43). The letter she writes, but may never

⁷'Hippo' is a colloquial term for an armoured police vehicle.

post, to her biological mother in Canada, does not signify a rejection of her family or her community, but rather a cementing of her sense of identity, signing herself “Tihelo Masimo, revolutionary” (2004, p. 187).

White Resistance

There are three recent novels depicting the experience of white young adults during resistance to apartheid: *Lucky Fish* by Schermbrucker (2003), *Ruby Red* by Glass (2007) and *Blue Sky Freedom* by Halberstam (2008). All of them reflect the decisions and sacrifices made by individual parents and families.

Lucky Fish narrates the experience of thirteen year old Steven in Johannesburg during the 1960s when his parents were both jailed for political anti-apartheid activities. Narrated in the first person, the book is based on real life events and on letters made available by close family friends (Stone and Lehman 2014, p. 220). Unlike the adult anti-apartheid activists in the other two novels, Steven’s parents refuse to leave the country on the basis that most black people did not have that choice, and the family pays a high price for their decision. The use of the letters and other forms of communication, and the direct and honest narrative style, make this work read more like an autobiography than a work of fiction. This authenticity is accentuated by the inclusion of incidents that are implausible and yet believable because of their very improbability. Steven’s narration highlights not only his parents’ bravery and steadfastness but his resentment and anger as a teenager deprived of the presence of his parents.

Steven and his sister Jane are familiar with the early morning police raids on their home, accepting them as a normal part of life. Steven resignedly recalls the momentary panic but comments that “[o]nce I knew that it was only another raid, the menace was gone” and remembers his father’s dismissive observation that “[t]he only thing the bloody SAP have ever forced me to do is wear pyjamas” (Schermbrucker 2003, p. 22). The narrative begins with Steven’s father’s arrest under the 90 day detention without trial rule. When the trial does take place, he is sentenced to five years imprisonment, a period of time that is almost impossible for Steven to imagine. His story documents his initial inertia and numbness, the subsequent anger and resentment, and the immense psychological and behavioural difficulties he experiences when his mother is arrested just one year later, and jailed for two and a half years when she refuses to testify against her fellow activists in return for her freedom. Steven shuts out thoughts of his father and avoids visits to the prison and any glimpses of his father in photographs in the house. Beset by adolescent selfishness Steven is angry at being left alone, an anger that is exacerbated by the hostility and incomprehension of his peers and even his own relatives, although at the same time aware of the responsibility he has to live up to his parents’ expectations. By the end of the novel he has matured and grown, and understood to some degree the enormity of the sacrifice that his parents made. This realisation is brought to the fore in a confrontation Steven has with a black member

of the commune in which he lives with his sister. Triggered by the mention of witchdoctors, or *sangomas*, Steven is surprised that Josiah approves of them, as the latter had attended an Anglican school in Lesotho and “had been drilled in a syllabus designed for the British upper and middle classes: Shakespeare, cricket and cod-liver oil; Latin, hockey and prayers in the chapel” (Schermbucker 2003, p. 194). When he asks Josiah what exactly the witchdoctors do, he is silenced by Josiah’s incredulity that after growing up in South Africa, he remains so ignorant of the customs and ways of the majority of the population. Josiah accuses him: “You know the little bit you know about us from servants, don’t you?” and “You’re not used to speaking to blacks who are your equals. In your heart of hearts you’re not even sure we are your equals, are you?” (Schermbucker 2003, p. 195). Steven eventually articulates his understanding of his parents’ imprisonment, telling Josiah that his family was wealthy and privileged, but that his parents “didn’t have to do it”, that “they could have chosen to go along bitching and moaning about the Nationalists while playing more tennis and eating out some more, living the good life. But they didn’t and it’s what makes them extraordinary, simply that” (Schermbucker 2003, p. 197). Steven’s journey through adolescence, interspersed with the normal events of school life and first love, is at the centre of this novel, in which Steven is kept generally ignorant of his parents’ political activities, for his own safety. *Blue Sky Freedom* and *Ruby Red* differ in that in both novels the young female protagonists are directly involved in the struggle.

Each of these novels reflects the authors’ memories of life in South Africa. Linzi Glass was born in Johannesburg and Gaby Halberstam in Port Elizabeth. Both left the country as young adults and currently live in California and London respectively. In each work the events of June 1976 play out in parallel with a romantic sub-narrative, while *Ruby Red* is overtly dedicated to “Hector Pieterse, the first child to be killed on 16 June 1976, and to all the children who lost their lives during the Soweto riots” (Glass 2007). Victoria, in *Blue Sky Freedom*, falls in love with a young black activist who is the son of the family’s domestic servant, while Ruby falls in love with a young Afrikaans boy, as she becomes embroiled in the life of a young black artist, Julian, who enjoys her parents’ protection. In a pattern similar to that established by novels written in the 1980s, the black characters again serve as educational tools for the two young white girls. Just as in the earlier novels, the focus is on the development and maturation of the white protagonists rather than on the significance of the protests or the experience of the black characters. Victoria hides Maswe from the police, and consequently learns about life in the township and the very real threat of police brutality when he is killed in police custody, following which Victoria’s father flees the country with his daughter when, as the police surgeon, he refuses to sign a false death certificate. Victoria, unable to refuse to join him, vows to return and join the struggle. At the end of the narrative she throws a grenade into the police station where Maswe was killed, giving her a sense of both freedom and exhilaration, reminiscent of that experienced by Tengo, Kanakana and Tihelo: “I remember how my arm swung around in an exhilarating arc as I bowled the grenade into the darkness. And the wide-open, blue sky feeling of freedom as it left my hand” (Halberstam 2008, p. 253).

Despite having been written more than a decade after the end of apartheid, *Blue Sky Freedom* includes a number of stereotyped characters, and the black characters are generally vaguely delineated and amorphous. Georgie Horrell explores this aspect of the two novels in more detail in her essay (Horrell 2012), but white characters are equally stereotyped. Dr. Conway is the evil, leering, right-wing nationalist who colludes with the police; Victoria's school friends and their parents are portrayed as uncaring and callous racists; Victoria's mother is the liberal white woman who takes food to the soup kitchen in the township; and Detective Kloete is the sinister, repulsive, unfeeling and brutal policeman. The black nanny and domestic worker, Seraphina, is portrayed in nostalgic terms as "all the nannies we ever loved bundled into one" (Halberstam 2008, p. 261).

Linzi Glass, although there is no domestic worker in *Ruby Red*, reminisces about being carried on her nanny's back, lulled to sleep by her singing and movements (Glass 2010b). Glass, however, avoids the portrayal of stereotypical characters found in other novels. Ruby experiences the protests of 1976 through her friendship with Julian, her mother's protégé. As the Soweto riots erupt he leaves for Mozambique to fight for the ANC, only to be arrested. Glass writes, focalising through Ruby: "We continued to learn while other students died" (Glass 2007, p. 186). Glass recalls:

My first reaction was fear for myself. We learned about the riots while we were at school and had no idea that black children had been killed. Our teachers kept us in doors [sic] and made us fear that an angry black mob might descend on us and harm us. They did not let us know that it was the white police who were doing the killings. (Glass 2010a)

When Ruby's father's freedom is threatened towards the end of the novel, he and Ruby leave the country in secret, although Ruby's mother decides to stay, unable to "abandon [her] artists when they need [her] the most" (Glass 2007, p. 206). Her father, in contrast to Steven's father, expresses remorse at the consequences of his beliefs and principles—"I would have stuck to corporate law and left politics alone ... had I known it would do this to us. To you, Ruby" (Glass 2007, p. 211). The novel closes with Ruby symbolically clutching one of Julian's paintings as she stands in Times Square on the fourth of July: "'Look, Julian,' I whispered, 'I have brought you with me to freedom.'" (Glass 2007, p. 215).

Conclusion

There are marked differences between the novels written by white and black writers. In the earlier novels by white writers a clear power division is discernible between the white and black characters. The more recent works by Halberstam and Glass also emphasise the power differentials between the white and black characters. Maswe is dependent on Victoria for help in hiding from the police, and for food, shelter, and dressings for his injuries. Similarly, Julian depends on Ruby and her family for medical help, shelter, and protection from the law. In the

two novels by black writers the characters have their own voices, and are directly involved in the protests, which are therefore more central to the narrative than in the other works. One interpretation is that a writer's background has a strong influence on the way in which characters and events are depicted, especially when the events involve personal experience. Another interpretation is that the works reflect the realities of a particular historical period, and this kind of power differential would have been inevitable in contact between blacks and whites in the 1970s. In addition, in the novels with an implied white reader, or an international reader, the authors may have deliberately made other issues more prominent in order to retain their readers' attention rather than focusing on the riots, which may be perceived as alien and unfamiliar. Linzi Glass comments that she wanted both to educate and to entertain. *Ruby Red* tells the story of a teenage girl's adolescence, her first romance and the difficulties she encounters as an outsider at her school. Glass goes on: "These are the normal issues that face any teenage girl and I wanted those to be familiar to the reader against the backdrop of the unfamiliar political climate" (Glass 2010a). In an educational environment all students could be encouraged to contrast the experiences of the different characters in relation to the same events, as they are prompted to explore their own history and the attitudes prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s compared with post-apartheid South Africa.

As writers continue to interpret and mediate the events affecting young people during the struggle new memories and new interpretations are still being created and reflected in young adult literature. Helena Pohlandt-McCormick suggests that "[i]n some sense what happened in Soweto happened to everyone in South Africa." Memories of those events and of the South African past are "constituted by individual and collective memory, ... narrator and historian" (Pohlandt-McCormick 2000, p. 44). This discussion has sought to show how those memories are constituted in young adult novels at different times and by different authors, both black and white.

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