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Traumatic Memory, Death-wish and the Crisis of Healing in Post-apartheid Athol Fugard's *The Train Driver* and *Coming Home*

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Abstract

This paper examines traumatic memory in Athol Fugard's two dramatic texts, *The Train Driver* (2010) and *Coming Home* (2009). Although trauma has recently emerged as a significant concern for critics, its portrayals from the angle of death in Fugard's plays have been underexplored. For this reason, this study purposively selects these plays to examine how the playwright presents his characters' past experiences within the post-apartheid literary context and how their decisions regarding death reflect the nation's perspective on trauma and remembrance. This analysis primarily applies critical and theoretical insights from Cathy Caruth's trauma theory to bolster the arguments, and Herman and LaCapra's trauma ideas to demonstrate how post-apartheid wounds have become inexpressible for South Africans. The paper shows that trauma is ineffable for Fugard's protagonists. Roelf's fragmented memory of the identity of the nameless woman, his repeated use of ellipses, and his nightmare reinforce his difficulty in articulating his mental agony. Likewise, Veronica's silence and her uncontrolled anger towards Alfred suggest the overwhelming strain of her emotional breakdown. While Fugard powerfully foregrounds the characters' traumatic expressions, he does not portray a social

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system that can facilitate their healing. As a result, the article contends that Roelf and Veronica's adoptions of death as an escape mechanism raises a critical question about how trauma and healing are approached in South Africa.

Keywords: South Africa, trauma, memory, Cathy Caruth, post-apartheid, death

Introduction

Over the past decades, South African literature has been absorbed in reawakening the lingering repercussions of the horrible historical injustices of the apartheid system. As Walder contends, South African writers have recently begun going inward, exposing the aftermath of trauma occasioned by racial discrimination and marginalisation ("Remembering Trauma" 32). The inward-looking tone of most South African literary pieces was partly due to the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was intended to investigate the political crimes and human rights violations committed during the apartheid period. The establishment of this commission has also encouraged many writers in South Africa to channel their literary works towards highlighting the suffering resulting from apartheid experiences (Adebiyi 94).

Among these writers are J. M. Coetzee and Athol Fugard. J. M. Coetzee's works transport the readers back to the state-sanctioned violence and the dehumanisation of blacks during the infamous apartheid era. While his literary works are essentially narratives, they vividly expose the shame and guilt which emerged from the White supremacist system. Fugard, who is the focus in this essay, is another writer whose plays connect with post-traumatic stress disorder of the white and black populations. In Walder's opinion, Fugard's plays can be adequately characterised in what he labels as "Adonian terms" ("Remembering Trauma" 32). This concept symbolises Fugard's fascination with dramatising the disturbing experiences of South Africans. As Fugard himself claims in one of the interviews:

> Well, I'm a compulsive storyteller. Although I've been described as a political writer, I essentially think I am a storyteller and I tell the story that comes from my own life and about the lives of my people in South Africa. The exciting part of theatre is to see that the story comes to life on a stage. (YouTube 1:24–1:50)

Fugard highlights the theatre's capacity to capture the sociohistorical realities of his people. Most significantly, he utilises it to represent the memories of his characters, whom Eke et al. see as a "miniature of the entire South African society" (9). But

the point is, how does Fugard convey these experiences in his writing? What can we make of the way the characters process their past conditions? And what sociopolitical consequences do their modes of commemoration have for South Africa? In addressing these problems, this research investigates Fugard's portrayal of traumatic memory.

Scholars highlight the significant differences between ordinary memory and traumatic memory. Everyday memory, on the one hand, is a cohesive means of re-experiencing and digesting past events. On the other hand, Kennedy maintains that traumatic memory is a non-chronological or non-linear remembering of events (123). In other words, it defiles the linearity of time because it often arises after another similar horrific incident provokes the initial experience (Bessel et al. 13). Hypothetically, survivors of an accident may not actually sense the severe pain instantly, not until they observe identical events, which activate their memories of the accident. At the point where they begin to comprehend their own trauma, it becomes distressing, and the event comes in flashes for them. This fractured moment underscores the concept of "traumatic memory". One of the purposes in this study is to explore how it manifests in two of Fugard's play texts, *The Train Driver* and *Coming Home*.

The investigation of trauma is not a new trend for critics in Fugard's plays. As a matter of fact, prior studies on Fugard's theatre have preponderantly concentrated on how the playwright addresses the past of South Africa. In his examination of Fugard's *Coming Home*, Walder investigates the performative of nostalgia and frenzy. While asserting that the return to the past is becoming an "exaggerated" phenomenon in the South African literary space, Walder contends that this technique is vital to account for the scars imprinted by apartheid experiences ("Hysterical Nostalgia" 14). His point on the representation of trauma in Fugard's work is further reinforced in his study of memory in *The Train Driver*. According to him, the white protagonist of the play, Roelf, embodies the "continuity of the historical wrongs in a country" where injustices once flourished ("Remembering Trauma" 32).

In addition to Roelf's representation, Baqer et al. and Kadhim apply distinct theoretical frameworks to interpret Fugard's protagonist. Using postcolonial trauma theory, Baqer et al. examine Roelf and Simon's portrayals as a re-enactment of the uneven relationship between the colonized and the colonizer (695). They perceive their encounter not only as a trauma but as a reflection of the long-lasting legacy of colonialism. On the contrary, Kadhim approaches trauma from the perpetrator's

lens. For him, its survivors are not simply the victims—the perpetrators too become an embodiment of "hidden scars left by their actions" (35). Hence, Kadhim perceives Roelf as an indirect victim, contrary to how Baqer et al. and other critics interpret him.

The previous studies imply that Fugard's dramatic writings have been a treasure mine for critical examination into the memory and suffering of the marginalised black races in South Africa. While this research is situated within this circle, it equally explores how death sheds light on the way trauma is experienced, portrayed, and treated in South Africa. Before engaging in the discussion, however, it is crucial to understand the fundamental assumptions that underlie Caruth's trauma and other contributions from Herman and LaCapra.

Praxis of Trauma

Trauma is conceptualised as a disruptive, shattering and distressing event. Its disruptiveness is primarily a result of its belatedness and the attempt to process it (Balaev 363). By belatedness, Caruth suggests that victims do not instantaneously suffer from a traumatising incident until they face another unpleasant moment, which unleashes the forgotten painful memories ("Trauma and the Possibility of History" 19). It is interesting to state that the experience of trauma does not just reside in the triggering of overwhelming emotions but in the survivor's endeavour to re-enact and comprehend it. That is to say, the more traumatised patients try to recollect the distressful past, the more it becomes intrusive for them. As such, Davis and Meretoja, citing Felman and Laub (1992), contend that literature has an "ethical" responsibility to reflect the presentation of its complexity and slipperiness (12).

In exploring how trauma alters memory, Caruth says that the intense pain of traumatic experience is "entangled" in its language ("A Double Wound" 11). To her, the reader or audience may experience it through fragmentation, repetition, paradox, or silence, when suffering is not acknowledged but suggested ("A Missed Experience" 74). These literary strategies enhance our understanding of the emotional or psychological fragility that arises from the desire to recall the past. Moreover, there are occasions where victims strategically desire to separate themselves from the damaging past. Caruth conceptualises this desire as repression and dissociation. Repression, according to her, represents the endeavour of the mind to forget a painful event, while dissociation implies a detachment between the suffering and the body (Balaev 363). Dissociation is more than just ignoring the experience—it is a defensive psychological slumber when the mind is entirely dead to the agony. These

two notions (repression and dissociation) are apposite to our understanding of South Africa's treatment of trauma.

It is worth noting that this study also makes a brief mention of other prominent trauma theorists such as LaCapra and Herman. On the one hand, LaCapra frames the study of trauma from a historical point of view, stating that its symptoms can be connected to the sociohistorical backgrounds of survivors. On the other hand, Herman's stance on trauma is around healing, highlighting the significance of delivering care for its casualties.

Memory and the Burden of Remembrance in Fugard's *The Train Driver* and *Coming Home*

The Train Driver is a theatrical tribute to Fugard's interest in the historical trauma of South African people. The play is an autobiographical tragic narrative of a woman who, on a Christmas day, stood in front of a train, allowing herself and her child to be crushed by a train driver. The train driver is left distraught by the incident and has, ever since, been obsessed with the depths of his own guilt. Blurring this history with his theatrical spectacles, Fugard invents a fictionalised white protagonist to convey the weight of the emotional ripples the experience leaves on the train driver's memory, and also seeks redemption for the apartheid system that compelled the woman to commit suicide. Similarly, *Coming Home* is set in the post-apartheid city of Port Elizabeth and the Karoo settlement. Events from the play develop with Veronica, who has just returned to her town with her son, Mannetjie. Subsequent actions after the introduction of Alfred, Veronica's childhood friend and lover, swing between the protagonist's travails in Port Elizabeth and her remembrance of childhood dreams in Karoo. Unlike other Fugard's prior plays, *Coming Home* highlights the frequency of HIV/AIDS cases which encroached on the South African landscape at a time the country was progressively emerging from the animosity of racial segregation between the black and white communities. Fugard blends both the lived realities of persons with the contagious disease and the nation's sentiments towards them to depict the longstanding impact of apartheid racial injustice on South Africa.

In *The Train Driver*, Fugard's striking choice of Shukuma graveyard is vital to his exploration of memory. Shukuma is a black area, predominantly dominated by black people, and a black gravedigger, Simon Hanabe, administers its graveyard. Fugard adroitly chooses the setting for several purposes. As a community reserved for black people, Shukuma allows the playwright to lead the audience down the memory lane of strict apartheid regulations that emphasise racial demarcation based

on colour line. More so, staging the play in a graveyard reveals Fugard's desire to seek remission from the dead that were horribly maltreated by the grim laws of apartheid. The spatial setting thus depicts a liminal region between the past and the present of South Africa. This area is exploited by Roelf, the white protagonist, to give witness to the country's tragic memory and seek emancipation from it. Fugard uses Simon to introduce us to the mission of Roelf Visagie at Shukuma:

> SIMON: He is looking for a black one without a name… And I ask him who he is looking for and he tells me it is umfazi . . . a woman . . . a young woman with a baby on her back. I ask him if the baby is also dead and he says yes the baby is also dead. (*The Train Driver* 14)

Roelf's ignorance of the woman and her child's real names suggest that he is suffering from memory loss or amnesia. According to Caruth, traumatic experiences are often repressed or forgotten in the initial stages because the individual is unable to comprehend or process the event as it happens ("The Story of an Accident" 13). This delayed symptom is evident in Roelf's limited knowledge of the woman's identity and burial place. His lack of vivid recollection of the incident is also reflected in his communication with Simon. During their conversation, Roelf struggles to explain what he wants. Simon, confused by Roelf's behaviour, wonders why a white man is in a Black-populated area, remarking that Roelf's "words are mixed up like he was drunk" (*The Train Driver* 14). This image of drunkenness captures Roelf's psychological disorientation about an event that has eluded his memory.

This traumatic memory has also become elusive in South Africa's collective memory. No matter whom Roelf asks about the woman, they offer no information. "And every time I asked them: 'Is anybody here missing a woman and a baby?' Sometimes they would ask: 'What did she look like?' And I would tell them" (*The Train Driver* 16). Roelf's complaint to Simon suggests that South Africans have let slip "the losses of a dire past" (LaCapra 16). That is, their inability to respond to his inquiries implies that they have either forgotten the tragedy of the woman or have chosen not to revisit the wounds of apartheid history, which might have orchestrated her suicide. This act of repression is further symbolised by the vague report of the woman's death in a South African newspaper. The report states that "an unidentified woman with a child on her back stood on the tracks in front of an oncoming train and she and the baby were pulverised under the train's wheels" (*The Train Driver* 23). While the word "pulverised" captures the horror of the incident, the refusal to mention the woman's name reflects a political choice to bury the trauma or distance

the nation from such a troubling event (*The Train Driver* 23). However, Roelf, as both a witness and an unintentional perpetrator, struggles to come to terms with the event. Since no one is willing to "claim" the deceased woman, he takes the responsibility to acknowledge her lived experiences (*The Train Driver* 42).

As Caruth explains, traumatised persons typically revisit the past to discover the basis of their pain (*A Missed Experience* 73). Roelf's decision to claim the woman symbolises his endeavour to process both her history and his own trauma (23). At the graveyard, he queries the ghost, "Can you hear me? I want to talk to you….but… it's sort of stupid… I don't really know where you are" (*The Train Driver* 40). His dramatic monologue with the dead woman reveals his openness to give witness to her harrowing story. Also, Roelf's persistent search suggests he is psychologically fixated on the woman's image. Revealing the reason for this, he says "When your final recollection of life is a white man staring at you from the cab of a diesel locomotive as you go down under its wheel?" (40). This statement implies that the history of Roelf's guilt does not actually emanate from the deadly incident; instead, it emerges from watching what Rib Nixon calls the "slow violence" that extinguishes the woman's life, and that indirectly resurfaces to unbalance the driver's emotional equilibrium (Arista 25). Hence, Roelf believes that the only option to release himself from this haunting cage is to imagine the deceased is 'listening' to his own side of the narrative.

Herman contends that traumatised individuals need somebody to attest to their story of torment (173). In the case of Roelf, neither his relatives nor his friends are willing to acknowledge his emotional rupture. While he perceives himself as the culprit of the woman's death, "the other drivers, the system manager sitting at his desk, [his] wife" believe that he is not guilty for the suicide because the woman was "drunk", according to his wife (*The Train Driver* 22). The comment illustrates their planned strategy of dissuading Roelf from nursing the memory of the event or embracing his own tragic involvement. Also, it points to how the white community in South Africa reacts to the horrible actions performed during the apartheid time. Their reluctance to develop empathetic ears to Roelf's concerns reveals that they are indifferent to the plight of black South Africans. Roelf, on the other hand, exudes empathy towards them, as evinced by his perpetual remembrance of the woman. Despite not being responsible for her demise, he holds himself accountable for her tragedy. Through his accountability, Fugard accentuates Roelf's profound anxiety of being a perpetrator. While nobody holds him responsible for crushing the woman and her child, and the newspaper never names him as a "murderer" other than "a

traumatised train driver", he wrestles with detaching himself from the fatal incident because of his humane consciousness, which keeps reminding him of being the cause of the woman's death (*The Train Driver* 23). It must be emphasised that his moral consciousness, according to Kennedy, will risk being unassimilated into a coherent life narrative. That is to say, his repetitive recall of the tragedy can ruin him psychologically and induce him with intrusive flashbacks and nightmares (122).

In *The Train Driver*, Roelf endures frequent nightmares. Whenever he sleeps, the picture of the deceased always floods his vision. Recounting this event to Simon, Roelf says that he cannot help but think about the woman. "To tell you the truth, I was thinking about her every stinking night…you know how it is when you switch off the light and you lie there in the dark and your brain just won't stop thinking" (*The Train Driver* 21). Roelf's restlessness is an outgrowth of the overwhelmingness of trauma, as painful events flood the memory when the victim is unable to effectively or appropriately integrate them. As aptly described by him, "I was talking to myself about all that happened and how it happened and about Red Doek, because it just doesn't make sense, you see" (*The Train Driver* 22). The confession of Roelf demonstrates that he is restive because of his inability to come to terms with his own guilt. It can also suggest that his problem stems from his lack of comprehension of the reason behind the woman's terrible suicide. Hence, his repeated allusion to the past wounds him, thereby making the ghost of the woman resurface in his mind. For this reason, the white community strives to anesthetise Roelf from constant hallucination. For instance, they purchase a tranquiliser in the shape of a pill to minimise his nightmare feelings. The pharmaceutical medication given to him can be well explained through Caruth's repression. Repression, as scholars have suggested, is a form of survival technique utilised by traumatised patients to disassociate themselves from the occurrence (Balaev 365). This method is symbolised by the medicine Roelf's family bought for him. They want him to utilise it to stabilise Roelf's disrupted memories. Although the tranquiliser is meant to treat him, it is still unable to erase the thought from his head. In his words, "even with the pills that the doctor gave me, I would still wake up with the fear of hell in my heart, man, because I was in the cab and she was there on the railway line waiting for me" (*The Train Driver* 24). The impotence of the medicines to restore Roelf to his peaceful state underscores Fugard's condemnation of South African care of the affected folks, still tormented by the shame of apartheid. Through his subtle criticism, Fugard is hinting that what these individuals need to overcome their mental breakdown is not medical attention but collective assistance to understand the history of their anguish.

Roelf's healing, therefore, can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in "isolation" (Herman 43). Herman's argument effectively stresses the transformative power of community over the medical aid supplied to Roelf. That is to say, it is only through camaraderie that Roelf may be aided in walking through his occasional agony.

In *The Train Driver*, Fugard indicates that the consequence of isolating trauma victims is fragmentation. In *The Train Driver*, Roelf endures emotional ruin. Narrating his ordeals to Simon, a gravedigger, the protagonist claims that he is "fucked-up" (*The Train Driver* 21). Being "fucked-up" mentally depicts the cognitive dissonance the rail incident produced to him, and it also conveys the "overwhelmingness" of anguish which is beyond his control (Caruth's "Trauma and the Possibility of History" 18). Apart from his mental disintegration, Roelf's psychological divide also finds a concrete expression in Fugard's dramatic portrayal of his interaction with Simon. In his dialogues, we often witness an omission of sentences filled with ellipses: "Give me her name… or show me her grave…and I will do it" (*The Train Driver* 19). The frequent incidence of elliptical dots in Roelf's utterances shows how trauma not only fractures human well-being but also hinders an individual's capacity to utilise language efficiently. However, the linguistic incapacity seen in his ellipses does not totally convey a total absence of speech, because for Balaev, the muteness of language represents how "wordless pain continues to inflict pain on psyche" (363). Roelf's language struggle, therefore, palpably demonstrates the paralysis of his emotional self.

Beyond Roelf's impotence to utilise language, Fugard may have purposely employed the ellipses to make the listener witness to the persisting remnants of apartheid trauma in South Africa's socio-cultural milieu. The saturation of ellipses in *The Train Driver* draws attention to the inner struggle of apartheid perpetrators seeking remission for their atrocities. Their mental conflicts mean that the country has yet to fully heal from the agony of apartheid scars or compensate their survivors. It must be noted that Fugard's depiction of this psychological disintegration is not confined to ellipses. The dramatist, for example, offers the audience a fresh perspective from which to explore his white protagonist's trauma-induced fragmentation. One way he portrays this idea is through Roelf's fast-paced movement, which Walder defines as "hysteria" ([Hysterical Nostalgia] 6). Observing his rapid movement, Fugard says that "Simon is watching Roelf's behaviour with disbelief and fear. Roelf travels to another tomb where he makes another cross. His behaviour

is becoming increasingly absurd" (*The Train Driver* 30). Fugard's graphic portrayal of Roelf's frenzied action clearly portrays that the character is in a state of turbulence, implying that his mind is unsettled, fractured, and fragmented. His fractured psyche shows his restlessness and helplessness resulting from communal neglect. Consequently, Roelf asks the audience to save him from his damaged mind by joining to restore the graveyard, which appears overgrown and cluttered. Speaking to Simon, Roelf says "roll up your sleeves and help me. You fetch stones and I'll make the cross…" (*The Train Driver* 30). Roelf's call to action, as LaCapra puts it, is a manner of "acting out" his purpose to seek redemption and empathy from the audiences (*The Train Driver* 23). Besides, his use of the imperative statement "you fetch stones" sounds as though he is inviting us to help him cure or mend is already split mind. However, his appeal to the audience is not potent enough to enable him to walk through his torment. This is because, as audiences, we are merely constrained to watching the hopeless situations of characters, meaning that we cannot supply the elixir that Roelf needs to restore his broken mind. Thus, his hope of closing up his wound becomes far-fetched since he has no one to facilitate his healing journey.

Roelf's hopelessness for healing may suggest why Veronica in *Coming Home* cloaks her emotional turmoil under the façade of happiness. At the outset, she is introduced to the audience as a confident and enthusiastic mother, returning from Port Elizabeth to start life a new in Karoo (her local village). She is also portrayed as a strong woman for being able to return home to cope with the "many memories" (*Coming Home* 59). "The many memories" symbolize her hidden agonies, but Veronica utilizes this metaphor to cocoon her painful adventures abroad. It is common for people in Veronica's situation to repress their lachrymose experiences in order to prevent further mental damage to their psyche. As such, the projection of confidence by Veronica is performative rather than natural because it is a deliberate act to restore balance to her fragile mind caused by her disappointing journey to Port Elizabeth. However, for trauma theorists, repression of such psychological wounds is temporal, as it can be triggered by symbols which resurrect the sordid images of the past. In *Coming Home*, Alfred is employed as a symbolic link to provoke Veronica's turbulent experiences. His introduction to the scene triggers her repressed distress, betraying her earlier controlled condition. First, the female protagonist feels troubled by the presence of Alfred, and secondly, whenever Alfred brings up the memory of their youth, she gets enraged:

> ALFRED: But why did it take you so long to come back?
>
> VERONICA: I don't know. You know how it is, man—you get busy and so put things off until tomorrow . . . and then when tomorrow comes it's now today . . . so you put it off again . . . and so it goes. (Pause. Veronica is embarrassed by her feeble attempts to avoid Alfred's question. (*Coming Home* 66)

Veronica avoids Alfred's questioning, perhaps to detach herself from revisiting her unpleasant experience. At this point, the audience begins to comprehend that her migration to Port Elizabeth in quest of a greener pasture was not a prosperous voyage for the protagonist. If she had realised her dream in the town, she would have proudly or excitedly answered Alfred's interrogation. Her decision to remain mute connotes that her sojourn in the city has been somewhat miserable. Her silence resonates with Caruth's theory that traumatic representation often defies straightforward narration, expressed in the form of silence and a gap ("Trauma, Time, and Address" 173). As such, Veronica's muteness does not mean she is free from trauma; it merely reinforces the muffled distress she bears. Refusing to narrate her past to Alfred and even to the audience is an effort to prevent herself from evoking the horrendous memory. In *Coming Home*, it is evident that not only Veronica but even Alfred shies away from offering physical expressions due to his hidden fears. When Veronica asks him if he has eventually realised his dream of obtaining a "bicycle", he responds by stating, "Maybe" (*Coming Home* 67). The word "maybe" suggests that he has something he is concealing from Veronica. The subsequent probation of Alfred by Veronica exposes his anxiety about divulging his background, particularly Oupa's money, which he initially intends to divert for his own use.

It is noteworthy that the characters' concealment of their pasts serves as a microcosm of South Africa's hypocrisy, where perpetrators of apartheid policies are reluctant to acknowledge their atrocious roles. Just as Roelf's family in Fugard's *The Train Driver* repudiates the acknowledgement of Roelf's psychological turmoil, Alfred and Veronica wittingly withhold their histories from each other and, as a result, prolong their mental discomfort and misunderstanding in the room: "VERONICA: For God's sake, Alfred, stop now! What's the matter with you, man? Three years since I've been back, "Remember this! Remember that!" Is that all you got in your head? Stupid bloody memories? Ja. Stupid and useless." (*Coming Home* 84) However, trauma is intrusively overwhelming and cannot be eliminated if not given a definite expression. For Veronica, her refusal to comfortably describe

her ordeals to Alfred creates resentment and frustration. While she is explaining her failure in Port Elizabeth and how she contracts AIDS in the metropolis, Veronica absurdly gets furious at him. In her words, "Fuck you, Alfred Witbooi! Fuck you!! What sort of mother do you think I am? Do you think we would be here if he had it too? We'd both be dead... and it wouldn't be AIDS that did it" (*Coming Home* 87). It is crucial to clarify that Alfred does not intend to exacerbate her pain, but the tremendous sorrow of being a disappointment or a person with HIV/AIDS causes Veronica's anger. Her discomfort and incapacity to manage it echo the strong psychological effect of trauma on her. While Alfred is eager to offer her emotional support, Veronica is content with isolation due to her sickness. Veronica's anxiety about her HIV status is justified, at least within the setting of the apartheid system. HIV in South Africa became prevalent at a period when the country was healing from the heat of racial injustices engineered by dehumanising policies. What this means for Veronica is limited access to excellent healthcare, which is exclusively considered a white right, as well as a lack of communal support. Considering these concerns, she passionately rejects Alfred's recommendation of the hospital, making the possibility of recovery illusory:

> VERONICA: I said no! For God's sake, Alfred, are you now so dull that you don't even understand the word "no"? All I need is rest. What I'm suffering from is . . . is exhaustion. So let us just leave it at that. And for God's sake don't talk about it to anybody. I don't want the people in the village skinnering about me. If they ask you about me you must tell them I got a very bad flu. (*Coming Home* 85)

Fugard, with the word "exhaustion" conveys how the female protagonist has been left entirely disoriented by trauma. Veronica, sounding fatigued, also intones her loss of hope in recuperation. This sense of disillusionment pushes her to entertain death as the only remedy to her psychological condition. Not only Veronica, Roelf in *The Train Driver* also demonstrates a desperate attempt to die. Their compulsive requests raise a critical question because requesting death is socially unappealing, and not many people will boldly entertain it as the characters yearn for it. If the idea of dying is culturally daunting, what might be the motivations behind the characters' desperation for it and how can we view their choices in the context of post-apartheid trauma?

Exploration of these questions is viewed from the angle of dissociation. However, before dissecting the motif of death through this concept, it is integral to explore how death is presented differently in the texts. In both plays, death is shown from

distinct angles. While the demise of Roelf is expressly depicted in the former play, it is not clearly stated whether Veronica dies at the denouement of *Coming Home*; yet, her near-death situation can be assumed from her behaviour. First, Veronica's rejection of Alfred's suggestion of medical care may reflect her embrace of the death to come. Secondly, trusting her son in the custody of Alfred also exposes another prospect of her inevitable demise. Lastly, Alfred remarks that she does not "look so well," underlining how severely the disease has devastated Veronica and how it may lower her chances of survival. However, Veronica is not scared of dying. Her daring amidst her dwindling spirit is foregrounded when she makes Alfred a surrogate father to her son. In her words, "When I go, child welfare will come to grab him, and there won't be anybody to stop them and say, 'No, you can't do that. I am his daddy. He stays with me" (*Coming Home* 93). Her forceful usage of "when I go" metaphorically conjures Veronica's acceptance of her death.

Similarly, Roelf, in *The Train Driver,* embodies Veronica's fearlessness despite the possibility of violence from the Amagintsa. The Amagintsa are young black boys and are a symbolic legacy of violence born of apartheid in the black community. Being attuned to their danger, Simon encourages Roelf to escape the vicinity because the hooligans would "take out their knives" because Roelf does not belong here (*The Train Driver* 19). Simon's statement illustrates the racial gap that continues between white and black. However, Roelf stands firmly amidst Simon's warming, rhetorically enquiring, "Go where? There's nowhere to go from here" (*The Train Driver* 19). His bravery reveals his willingness to die, and the reason for this can be explored through Caruth's dissociation. Chemengui says, "dissociation becomes the body's defence mechanism against the remembrance of a horrific past, which is thereby reflected in the victim's sense of detachment and lack of communication with the outside world" (65). Chemengui's statement implies dissociation as a therapeutic instrument of navigating pain for people experiencing anguish. In *The Train Driver* and *Coming Home*, death thus represents a symbolic dissociation mechanism of escapism for both Roelf and Veronica. Again, both characters are intensely subjected to misery, disorientation, and psychological suffering by their horrible experiences, and they are conditioned to struggle with their agonies in isolation. The only realistic way for them is to go into stillness, where their shattered memories become numb and forgotten.

Roelf and Veronica's detachment through death does not translate into their complete healing because the traces of the events that are inscribed in the unconscious suddenly re-emerge through recurring, distorted recollections to plague the survivors. While Roelf is deceased, the anguish he leaves behind metaphorically endures in South Africa. That is to say, his demise continues to cement the marginalisation of blacks. As a result of his death, Simon, the gravedigger, is immediately dismissed from work, leaving him stranded without any assistance. Also, in *Coming Home*, trauma presents an infinite cycle of memory in Veronica's room. After Veronica's disastrous dream, Mannetjie continues to be troubled by the memory of his grandfather. His remembrance mirrors the stretch of trauma, from one generation to the other. The continuity of traumatic events in the two texts challenges how apartheid is remembered in South Africa. If the traumatised community had been provided collective support to help them act out and work through their predicaments, survivors might have been more willing to confront their challenges without recourse to death. As Herman accurately puts it, what the country needs is to create a real relationship with those suffering from apartheid trauma to achieve both private and national recovery. However, if this connection is not present, "traumatised people" such as Veronica and Roelf will "feel that they belong more to the dead than to the living" (Herman 37).

Conclusion

This paper demonstrated that traumatic memory destabilises individuals when it is left unprocessed, unacknowledged, or unsupported by society. In *The Train Driver* and *Coming Home*, Fugard communicates Roelf and Veronica's psychological distress through fragmentation, provocative language and silence. Notably, the paper emphasised that silence in both plays mirrors how the post-apartheid South African communities have refused to confront the enduring scars of apartheid. Consequently, it maintained that the affected characters turn to death as a coping mechanism against their fractured conditions. The study argued that their reliance on death — though it may mean they are numb to the jagged torment of trauma —does not imply a total lack of a painful history in the South African society.

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