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Representing the Politics of Memory: Narrative Strategies in Forna's *The Devil that Danced on the Water* (2002) and *The Memory of Love* (2010)

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how Aminatta Forna manipulates point of view to represent the politics of memory in her memoir, *The Devil that Danced on the Water* (2002), and her novel, *The Memory of Love* (2010). It proceeds from the view that memories of events and experiences differ depending on the point of view from which these events and experiences are perceived and consequently remembered (Fernandez-Armesto 1995, 26). Memories are also suppressed or privileged depending on their nature and their usefulness to the remembering subjects in the present and the future (Wade et al. 2002). It is this act of privileging, differing, 'deferring' and competing memories related to the same event or experience that in this article constitutes the politics of memory. As part of the examination of Forna's use of point of view, this article scrutinizes the remembered memories in relation to the remembering subjects to establish whether there is in Forna's representation, a relationship between the nature of memory and the impulse or decision to forget or to remember, and whether, again in Forna's representation there are accurate or true memories and inaccurate or false memories or a deliberate attempt to 'defer' some aspects of remembering and memories.

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Introduction

War has been inherent in African literary writing, for the past few decades. Since their independence, many states in Africa have witnessed civil wars, mass killings and other forms of indirect political violence (Strauss 2012). It is then no wonder, that topics of war and trauma have dominated African literature. Fictional works such as Chimamanda Ngozi's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Kinyanjui Kombani's *The Last Villains of Molo* (2204), Gil Courtemanche's *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali* (2000), John Ruganda's plays and several others, fictionalise war and trauma in Africa but most importantly, the pertinence of memory in exorcising the psychological trauma and in giving agency. Along with fiction, authors have also

adopted memoirs and life writing as a way of using the narrative to process trauma. Like Forna, authors such as Emmanuel Jal and Gael Faye, have penned memoirs that describe their trauma as a result of violence. These authors have adopted the child narrator's point of view in their memoirs, an approach that utilizes selective memory to access their past lives and possibly deal with their traumas.

Forna's works have received considerable critical attention from literary critics and journalists, among others, who have different opinions on the content and purpose of Forna's writing. Patil and Saha (2022) examine the intertextuality that binds Forna's three texts, *The Devil that Danced on the Water*, *The Memory of Love* and *Happiness*, through the themes of memory, war and trauma. According to Patil and Saha, Forna apposes European and African cultural, and political panoramas to form a connecting link between her three books using trauma. The texts in their view borrow from these typographies and each other and are interconnected through the themes of war, memory and trauma. Forna's strategy in Patil and Saha's view has a multidisciplinary approach where she employs aspects from psychology, clinical medicine, history and academia which is the basis of intertextuality. Forna thus explores trauma from political and social perspectives choosing a different representation in every text. Forna's style of writing for Patil and Saha allows her to narrate the memory of her own life and that of the characters in her texts by allowing her inner life to connect with the readers. These two scholars seem interested in the representation of memory and trauma in these three texts and how each narrative is connected to the other through trauma. Though they cite memory as a running theme in the three texts and as part of the connecting links, they do not delve into the components of memory (what this study terms the politics of memory) and how they play out in the texts. Eromosele (2022) views *The Memory of Love* as offering reflections on the possibility of social justice discourse on madness. For Eromosele, there is a fusion or blend between the 'mad body' and the 'national body' — memory as a trope to express the 'madness' that is occasioned by trauma. Eromosele cites memory as a tool that has been used in the text, to focalise the trauma that is experienced by the characters. In this article, I examine the nuances that accompany this memory hence the politics.

Imma (2017) analyses the politics of memory, reconciliation and forgiveness in two texts, one of which is Forna's *The Memory of Love*. For Imma, Forna writes against the 'public testimony of memory proliferated by the international truth and Reconciliation commissions in post-conflict societies' (142). Imma views remembering as a way of refashioning the past. He examines remembering in relation to forgetting in the masculine characters in *The Memory of Love* and the intimate spaces of memory-making. Imma's focus is on the silences and the selective remembering that at some point is meant to erase complicity and other times, repress memory in an attempt to avoid facing the trauma. In Imma's view memory and truths are depended on the spaces and contexts in

which they are told. This article recognises the subjectivity of memory but takes particular interest in how the politics of memory play out in Forna's two texts. The article argues that memoir writing offers a path to re-experiencing the past through memory to overcome trauma. The question, however, lies in just how this past is remembered. As such, the article assesses the narration of competing memories and the struggle and conflict between the told and the untold of the same experiences and events. I also recognize that not much work has been done on *The Devil that Danced on the Water* in terms of this approach and aim to redress this unjustified critical neglect.

Conceptualizing Point of View

The article uses Lye's definition of point of view to anchor its ensuing analysis. Lye (2008) asserts that the 'meaning' of a story is determined by several factors. One of the main factors is the matter of who is telling the story, and how. There are many 'positions' or 'perspectives' or 'points of view' from which a story can be told. By 'point of view', Lye continues to say, we generally mean two somewhat different things: first, the relation of the narrator to the action of the story — whether the narrator is, for instance, a character in the story, or a voice outside of the story; and second, the relation of the narrator to the issues and the characters that the story involves — whether the narrator is sympathetic, whether s/he agrees, supports or opposes a particular cultural practice, doctrine, ideology and/or philosophical inclination, that sort of question. When it comes to the relation of the narrator to the action of the story there are three types of point of view: first person, second person and third person point of view. These different perspectives result in different descriptions of the same story. The first-person point of view is where a character within the story tells the story. They may be a central or a peripheral character but part of the story (Bone 2005; Fludernik 2009). The story in this point of view is narrated through the observer's eye (Shokouhi et al. 2011). The second person is direct communication from the writer to the reader. This type of point of view is not mostly used by novelists except in children's literature. The third-person point of view is the most commonly used and is divided into two, limited and omniscient. Limited tells the story through the experiences, thoughts and feelings of the character. Omniscient tells the story knowing all characters' thoughts and feelings. (Bone 2005). The story in this point of view is narrated outside the observer's perspective (Shokouhi et al. 2011).

In this article, the interest is in what the use of different points of view does to and for both *The Devil That Danced on the Water* and *The Memory of Love* in terms of form and theme, or in other words, the way that Forna deploys point of view to explore the impact of war on the process of its remembering and rendition in the two texts. It is important here to note that the first text is a memoir while the latter is a novel. As such, it is consequential to note the differences in

representation in the two genres. While all literary works are a product of the socio-cultural environment of the author, authors do not merely record these happenings but also comment on them. There is a difference in the representation between the memoir and the novel, in the sense that a novel is considered to be entirely imaginative while the memoir is often deemed to be factual. However, there are studies to suggest that the memoir is a product of active selection and filtering of memories and therefore not entirely a factual representation of experience (Gatenby 2017; Norton 2008; Longo 2018). This study does a comparative study of the representation of the politics of memory in the memoir and the novel. The article deliberates how point of view demonstrates the forms in which memory, particularly traumatic memory can be construed depending on whose point of view they were presented.

The Child Narrator in *The Devil that Danced on the Water*

Aminatta Forna has explained that the process of writing her memoir, *The Devil That Danced on the Water*, was one of remembering. Aminatta was personally affected by the events that took place in her country during her childhood and she paints these events in words that take her readers on a mind's journey to the Sierra Leone of the 1970s where these events happened. Expectedly, Forna deploys the first-person narrative point of view to narrate these events. Intriguingly, the narrator is a ten-year-old girl — Aminatta's younger self. In the latter part of the book, Forna brings in interviews that introduce other voices. These are the voices of characters who were adults at the time that the ten-year-old was going through the experiences she narrates. Forna has pointed out that she placed her memories alongside the memories of others and the collective memories of a nation (Forna and Nicolae 2006). In using several characters and consequently narrators, Forna shows us that people do not always remember events in the same way.

The most conspicuous and obvious conflict of memories is that between Aminatta's memory and that of Morlai Salieu, one of the characters who was used to build a case against Aminatta's father. Contrary to what Aminatta remembers, Morlai Salieu claims to have seen Dr. Forna, Aminatta's father, on the night of the explosion at Kamara Taylor's house. When challenged by Aminatta, he loses his temper and gets defensive:

'How do you know?' he demanded. 'How do you know? You were not there.'

'Oh but I was there,' I told him. 'But I was there.' (Forna 2002, 343)

Morlai Salieu's memories differ and conflict with those of Aminatta. This also happens with other characters that Aminatta interviews. They remember the same events differently and challenge one another. This, in my view, is where the politics of memory lie; characters experienced events together but now remember them in contradictory ways. However, the politics of memory do

not just take between characters but also within characters. The question therefore is, which is the true and accurate memory of Aminatta's past and consequently of Sierra Leone's past? Forna uses the experiences of a child to lay bare the past of the people of Sierra Leone. A child is not a key player in the social events of everyday life. A child lives in the shadows of the adults in charge of them. Children are also known for naivety and for having a limited view. Yet Forna uses the memories of a ten-year-old to tell the story of herself, her family and her nation. Aminatta herself tells us that she was a passive observer of adult mannerisms behaviour and conversations:

I didn't question my life: I hadn't learned to. Nor had I yet learned not to. I don't think I asked about Big Aminatta, or Jim or even my father. I had no yesterdays and no tomorrows. My days were routine, punctuated by small deeds, minor happenings; I was roused by occasional petty excitement and endured a series of childhood mishaps. (Forna 2002, 109)

Her memory is short-term, people cease to exist in her memory as soon as they leave their compound; yet Forna relies on the memories of this child to reconstruct the past of a family and a nation.

While this point of view seems disadvantaged in so many ways in terms of how much information she is freely given by adults, how much Aminatta can comprehend and how much she can remember, Forna seeks to give it strength by exploring the personality of Aminatta. The adults around her force themselves to forget. They persuade Aminatta and her siblings to forget and dissuade them from asking questions, but Aminatta is curious. She wants to find out what is happening, and what the adults are hiding from her. Aminatta, therefore, learns to spy, 'eavesdropping on adults' conversations, rifling through newspapers, devising lines of questioning and building onto her fragmented layers of truth' (2002, 109). Her siblings too conduct their own research and the three constantly exchange the information they find. At her age, Aminatta is naïve and is, therefore, yet to learn to take sides. She takes everything as it comes and thus can be trusted to give the true account of events from the information she has gathered without any alterations because of the adults around her. Aminatta at her age has not had the chance to make many mistakes which would compel her to remember things differently. She then harbours these memories all her life, trying to piece together scraps of truth and make sense of the fragmented images.

It is because she is determined to find out what everyone else does not want to see, what everyone is hiding that she sees a lot. She may not have been able to comprehend much of what was going on around her but that does not mean she did not see these things. She notices the strain between her parents, between her mother and grandfather and the evils happening in her country; the things people pretended not to see. When her father was the minister of finance, she saw what was happening:

People always said they did not see what was happening to their neighbours, the arrests, the burning houses, the children shot at dawn, the prime minister's growing power. People were rendered blind, deaf and dumb and they plead ignorance. But even I, a child who lived life vicariously through my parents, my pets, the people who surrounded me, who saw only what was going on in her world — even behind the protection of those walls I saw enough to sense the coming storm. My father saw it, too, because he was at the very centre of the cyclone. (Forna 2002, 164)

Honesty that is attributed to children is what makes them believable. Despite all the challenges Aminatta goes through collecting and piecing together information, we expect her to give a true account of events and memories. It is then because of this attribute, that Forna decides to use a child instead of the adults who were not only part of the events but also understood what was happening and obviously had a better memory than young Aminatta.

Forna comes back after twenty-five years to research the events surrounding the death of her father, to fill in the gaps and holes in her memory. She is an adult that no one can shut down for asking questions. People can now open up to her and Aminatta expects them to tell her the truth. She, however, realizes that people are telling a different story from what she remembers. There is an obvious struggle between what she remembers and what her interviewees remember. The difference in their memories could be attributed to time. The twenty-five years between the time the events were experienced and the time these experiences are remembered may have made these characters forget most of what really took place. However, while this may be partly true for some characters, like Aminatta's stepmother, Yabome, who went through a difficult time and had taught herself to forget; others, like Morlai Salieu, did not forget but rather devised different lines of memory that would 'exculpate' (2002, 343) him. 'Salieu had devised a version of events that left him blameless' (2002, 343). The only problem, though, as Aminatta points out, is that Morlai Salieu had miscalculated how much Aminatta already knew. Aminatta challenges Salieu, and the story changes after realizing his mistake and miscalculation:

He stumbled: 'Well ... I ... from my own memory ... maybe it was a vision ...' He kneaded his forehead. His words came out in staccato, partial sentences. 'After this rebel intervention ... my whole mind is gone. I was completely sick. I did not think I would survive. My statement ... I memorized it. But everything that was in my brain. I don't know ...' (Forna 2002, 342)

Earlier on Salieu seemed sure of the events that transpired during the night of the blast but now that Aminatta seems to recall more than he thought a child could remember his story changes. Memory is unreliable since it does not reproduce the past but rather it reconstructs it. The narrative is, therefore, supposed to select and shape one's memories (Couser 2005). There is bound to be a difference between what is remembered and what happened. However, the differences in memory can be equated to wilful amnesia — a phenomenon in which people deliberately try to forget or suppress unpleasant memories either as a coping

mechanism after experiencing trauma or due to shame or guilt or actively trying to avoid taking responsibility for the role they played in causing others trauma. Wilful amnesia, though related to dissociative amnesia, is a little different in that in dissociative amnesia, people have no conscious access to the memories (Staniloiu and Markowitsch 2018). Salieu chooses to forget the role he played in the execution of Aminatta's father probably because of the shame and guilt or because these memories are traumatic for him. Therefore, it is easier to stick to the past that exonerated him. It is easier to believe that he had no choice. This change in the story makes it hard for us to believe everything else that Salieu says. In a way, Forna seems to be rubberstamping Aminatta's memory as the true and accurate memory of the events that took place in Sierra Leone in the 1970s. Forna places all the characters' memories side by side with young Aminatta's memories, showing us what these characters remember, how their memories differ from Aminatta's memories, and what their similarities are while at the same time validating Aminatta's memory as the true memory because every time their memories differ, Forna depicts Aminatta as the one who remembers rightly. Englund (2021) acknowledges that children play an important role in the literature on post-colonial violence. He points towards the early development of children in violent situations which provides a balance between their intrusiveness into adult spaces and their perceived helplessness. War and violence, break the child protectionist frames that are placed by adults to shield children from active participation in conflict (Berents 2019). As such, Forna's fronting of the child's memory as being reliable and superior not only because of their curiosity but also because they mostly reside in the shadows as well as due to the invisibility that enables them to gather information from adults without the adults noticing their presence. On the other hand, the movement of Aminatta across the border has had an impact on her. According to Koczan et al. (2021), the movement of people across borders especially when they are moving from a less developed nation to a more developed one, allows them to achieve a higher income as a result of the high productivity in the destination country. As a result, they gain more financial power which also equates to social power. Coupled with the fact that Aminatta is no longer a little girl but a grown aggrieved woman looking for the people responsible for her father's execution gives her power over those who participated and who are already feeling the shame and the guilt of their role. As such her interviewees are denied the moral ground to defend themselves. Nevertheless, by giving her interviewees a chance to respond to her accusation, Aminatta is proving her memory correct and not a figment of her imagination.

While Forna justifies Aminatta's memory as being true, the choice of the child narrator also seems to be a brilliant choice since Aminatta's innocence as a child creates sympathy for her victimhood at the hands of a more powerful and dictatorial authority (Seraphinoff 2007). A young narrator according to Seraphinoff (2007) creates a degree of distance and her message which serves to lessen

hostility to that message. Aminatta's memory is, however, fragmented. Aminatta points out that her memories are like the 'discarded differently coloured squares of mosaic- meaningless fragments' (Forna 2002, 160). Her memories cannot follow a chronological order. The fragmented nature of children's memory and narration makes it hard for children to tell the story in chronological order (Eskonen 2005). Eskonen explains that how long or how detailed the narration is, is related to what kind of topic the child is covering. When matters are difficult, children tend to be brief. According to Kummerling (2007), early childhood memories until the age of six or seven are distinguished by a fragmentary quality, thus also contributing to the inability to name the exact date and time of the memory fragments. A subject like the memory of the events that people are trying so hard to hide from children, memories that even adults taught themselves to forget and which children like Aminatta and her siblings are encouraged to forget and dissuaded from asking questions about is a difficult topic to be narrated by a child. Through research, however, Aminatta is able to piece up information until she comes up with a comprehensive and coherent form of memory.

After finding out that characters remembered the same event differently, and lied about events while others taught themselves to forget, it is also important to examine the reasons why most characters taught themselves to forget these events. Most of the characters wrap these experiences, package them and put them away and, with time, forget them entirely. According to Randall (2010), integral to forgetting is prioritizing: evaluating the significance of what our senses bring to us and either retaining or discarding them depending on our priorities and agendas at the time. Some characters come to realize their mistakes; they know the wrongs they did and since the memory of these events haunts them, they totally block and relegate them to their unconscious minds. Some like Aminatta's stepmother Yabome, were victims. The memory of these events is painful, so she teaches herself to forget and with time she actually forgets. Aminatta is making her remember and it is not easy. As the narrator observes:

For years Yabome had hidden her thoughts from the world, at a time when talk was perilous. She had taught herself to forget. Now she was being forced, by me, to remember. I was her listener, hungry for detail, but the hardest challenge for both was to brush away the layers of secretiveness and unlock her memory. (Forna 2002, 333)

In my view, it is because of this difficulty in remembering (either as a result of trauma or deliberately refusing to remember) that creates the differences in the stories that the characters tell and thus the politics of it. This long silence and forcing herself to forget is a term Nietzsche refers to as 'active forgetting' (cited in Aydin 2017.) Aydin posits that people banish traumatic experiences from their thoughts as a coping mechanism. On the other hand, the delicate state of Sierra Leonean politics at the time put her and her stepchildren in a vulnerable state, having already lost Dr. Forna for speaking up. To protect herself and the children, she needed to keep her mouth shut.

The effects of memory and the politics of memory cannot be ignored either. Aminatta goes from place to place asking people to uncover that which they had kept deeply buried between them. Her main aim is to find out the truth about the death of her father. She, however, does not ask herself what remembering these things would do to the people she interviews and what the knowledge of it would do to her. Memories are very powerful and they have a tendency to change who we are and our perception of things and events. Memory, according to Magnussen et. al (2006), is a central part of the brain's attempt to make sense of experience and tell coherent stories about it. Our memories, Magnussen et al. (2006) argue, are powerful and fragile products of what we recall about the past, believe about the present and imagine about the future. They affect our present and dictate our future:

I had spent twenty five years in ignorance and one year gradually uncovering some of the truth, yet now I could barely remember what it felt like not to know. It was through this terrible knowledge; of the lies and the manipulation, the greed and the corruption, the fear and violence had been with me forever. So this innocence lost what it feels like. The country had changed, I had changed. Lumley Beach, where I sat with Simon watching a sulphurous sun disappear behind the bank of the clouds stretched across the horizon, was no longer the same. As for the past, it was irrevocably altered. (Forna 2002, 379)

It is clear from these utterances by Aminatta, that remembering and finding out things about the past alters or changes everything we were ever familiar with and believed in. Some of the memories become hard to assimilate and live with. "I knew it would take months to absorb what I had learned. To begin to live with my new past. I had shed my old past, the one filled with unanswered questions, secrets and ghosts" (2002, 388).

Memory and the politics around it can therefore also be said to be important in forgetting. It is in remembering the past and reliving it that helps those involved and affected to make peace with it, thus, they can move on to the future without intrusions or interference from the past. With time, therefore, they remember the details but not like they had lived but more in a manner of a dream that has just ended.

The child narrative perspective seems to have been effective in representing the memories of Sierra Leone's past. Other voices come in handy in filling in the gaps in the child's memory but while some memories compliment the memory of Aminatta, others openly challenge it. However, Aminatta's memory becomes the gauging line with which to evaluate the truth, validity and accuracy of the memories of other characters since after all *The Devil That Danced on the Water* is Aminatta's memoir. The next section examines the different voices Forna brings in to narrate the memories of war in *The Memory of Love* where both victims and perpetrators are given a chance to narrate their own experiences. The aim is to examine the effectiveness of multiple narrative points of view in narrating traumatic memories. The second peels away from the naivety that is

attached to the child narrator's point of view and examines the complexity of memory of traumatic situations. It presents multiple narrative points of view as complementing each other to give a comprehensive understanding of the traumas of war.

Multiple Narrative Points of View in *The Memory of Love*

Multiple narrators and an omniscient narrator have been used by Forna in this novel to remember and narrate the experiences of the civil war that hit Sierra Leone between 1991 and 2002. These characters remember the events and experiences of war differently. As pointed out by Fernandez-Armesto (1995), history happened to people who experienced it variously at a time, registered it mentally in contradictory patterns and recorded it mutually in contradictory ways. Through narration, we are able to follow the disparate mental processes of the characters (Ouma 2011). It is therefore possible to say that people remember the past differently depending on how they experienced it. The use of multiple narrative points of view by Forna makes obvious the politics of memory.

All texts are embedded with multiple meanings and one way to examine these meanings is to peel away the layers through consideration of perspective, positioning and power (Jones 2006). Forna uses multiple narrative points of view to control the reader by 'limiting what they can know at any given stage in the story, by showing them aspects of the story from a vantage point that may or may not, skew their understanding, by manipulating them at every turn' (Bone 2005, 2). In this novel Forna mostly uses the first-person narrative point of view where she allows particular characters to narrate their own version of experiences from their memories. She also uses an omniscient narrative point of view to tell memories that the characters cannot. These memories are revealed through dreams and flashbacks. Vickroy (2002) argues that multiple accounts sometimes reinforce and challenge one another. Characters will not always agree on the details of what happened in the past, especially a past that was traumatic and in the case of *The Memory of Love* the traumatic past of the Sierra Leonean civil war. According to Vickroy (2002), the complexities of traumatic memory and a subject's positioning in relation to the difficult past are suggested by the use of multiple voices and positionings within the characters as well as within the individual self.

Memory is and has always been selective. People always tend to forget unpleasant experiences and so do the characters in *The Memory of Love*. As Mitsztal (2010) explains, memories of everyday life events are transformed, distorted or forgotten because autobiographical or episodic memory changes over time as we change. Remembering is therefore never complete or accurate. Forna uses several characters to narrate the memories of the past so that they can complement each other, and help each other remember the details of the unfortunate events of their past. Trauma makes people want to forget or suppress any

memories of the painful events. However, everything that happens is permanently stored in the mind. Therefore, all the details of the past can eventually be recovered with the right technique (Brockmeier 2002). The problem is that these memories are always recovered in bits. Multiple narrators can therefore help piece these memories together and come up with a comprehensively coherent and most probably valid version of that memory of the past experience. For this to happen, narrators have to have a consensus on the details of their memories.

The story of Agnes, for example, is told by several characters. Agnes has the most painful story in the novel, yet Forna does not allow her to tell her own story. This could be attributed to the fact that traumatic experiences can inspire not only a loss of self-confidence but also confidence in the social and cultural structures that are supposed to create order and safety (Vickroy 2002). The trauma that Agnes experienced made her lose confidence and trust in herself and every other person around her. This is the reason why she keeps running away from home. The characters narrating Agnes' story do not, however, seem to be experiencing any difficulty in remembering the details of the experiences of Agnes and her family. According to Herlihy and Turner (2007), when people witness accidents or crimes, some details are more likely to be remembered than others. Eyewitnesses to highly emotive events, such as violent crimes, tend to have a good memory for central details. Though these characters did not experience the events themselves, they seem to share in Agnes's pain and they too find it hard to relive this past through remembering. The struggle to remember or not to remember thus does not lie only on the person who experienced it but also on the witnesses. These characters complement each other. Where one character is unable to continue telling the story, the next one picks up from where the previous one left and the cycle goes on and on until the end of the story. Narrators of the characters' memories also have a hard time remembering and narrating these experiences aloud. The question here is, why are these characters able to tell a story that Agnes herself cannot? Their emotions are high yet the story flows from one narrator to the other with less difficulty. Forna seems to be telling her readers that memories are easily told by those who did not experience the events themselves. It is possible for characters who are not really part of the events but mere witnesses to remember and narrate painful events because they are objective. The omniscient narrator's work in this part is to show us the reactions and emotions of the narrators as they tell the story. The narrator also acts as a focal point, a connecting thread of these different narrations:

The old woman stops speaking. She is no longer looking at Kai but down at her lap. He can hear her breathing. There is silence. Somebody in the room urges her to continue. It is Ishmail's aunt. The old woman looks at her and then back down at her hands. 'What did you see?' asks Kai speaking for the first time. She swallows and her voice drops almost to a whisper, 'I saw Jaja.' (Forna 2010, 312).

The omniscient narrator also gives the background information of the narrators and their surroundings. The novel's readers are therefore able to listen to the story from the narrators and see how they feel through the interjections of the omniscient narrator. The omniscient narrator is almost exclusively a reliable narrator. What this narrator tells the reader is considered true, fair and accurate. The omniscient narrator tells the readers of those memories that the first-person narrator tries not to remember, those memories that they try to keep in their subconscious but which force their way out through flashbacks, dreams and hallucinations. The readers see this struggle between the told and the untold through the omniscient narrator. He/she allows the readers to see that which is hidden. It is no wonder, then that we as the readers fail to understand why Kai distances himself from the people around him. It is through the omniscient narrator that we learn about Kai's painful past and that he uses his job to escape his past. Instead of judging Kai, we start to feel sorry for him and are finally relieved when Adrian helps him.

Vickroy (2002) argues that readers are told the story to help reconstruct experience and retelling as trauma writers expose them to a variety of voices, subject positioning and symbolizing that highlight the chaotic and disorienting aspects as well as representational possibilities or approximations. The use of multiple narrative points of view by Forna helps readers to follow the emotions of the characters. The story as told by an individual character is not the same as one told or reported by an omniscient narrator or the author. It is important to allow characters to speak up on their own, and tell their readers what happened to them in the past. A narrator who belongs to the world of the story is more efficient in telling the story than a person who is merely reporting what might or might not have happened. This narrator directly conveys information to the reader without having to filter it through the consciousness of other characters and is therefore able to represent events from within. When a character narrates their own experiences, it helps them internalize them, understand them better and hopefully heal from them because narrating is a form of reliving this past.

While the first-person narrator tells the experiences as they happened, there is an obvious struggle between those memories they want to remember and those they do not want to remember. The painful memories seem to have been completely blocked from their conscious minds. Kai, for example, is one of the most difficult characters in the novel. He lives in the present, reveals nothing of his past and does not talk about his future. Kai chooses to forget his past because of the nature of memories he has of that past. Van der Kolk, Hopper, and Osterman (2001) argue that the memory of traumatic events is experienced as if the event and one's response to it- sensory, cognitive, emotional and psychological- were happening all over again. It is for this reason that Kai chooses to block the memories of his past from the conscious mind. Unspoken memories, however, come to the surface through hallucinations, flashbacks and dreams. Kai, for example, dreams of the night he was thrown over the bridge:

That night he dreams of the bridge. The railings pressed into his back. A face close to his. There is shouting. And pain, like a claw hammer at the back of his skull. The pressure of his temple. The agonizing paralysis. Then the sensation of weightlessness. He wakes with the taste of blood and metal in his mouth, a ringing in his ears, images crashing against the line of his consciousness. Only the sound of his cousin knocking gently on the door brings him back to himself. (Forna 2010, 237)

It is, therefore, evident, as explained in the previous section, that the politics of memory do not only take place between characters but also within the characters themselves. Victims and perpetrators are not able to tell a comprehensive story of their past. To understand them, we have to go back and forth from their conscious to their unconscious state of mind. However, characters have to confirm their experiences. Through Adrian, characters get to tell their story and confirm the words of the omniscient narrator. So then is the author telling us that the only true memory is that of the victim? Can any other memory be relied upon or is it just that of the person who experienced the events? In my view, memory has a purpose, that of healing. The omniscient narrator can tell us of the struggle but if characters have to overcome the evils of the past, they need to relive that past by expressing it.

As memories within an individual character challenge each other, those between characters also challenge one another. Mamakay and Cole are examples of characters whose memories openly challenge one another. From Cole's narration of his past, the picture that Adrian gets of Cole is that of a harmless man, always a victim of circumstances only trying to make peace with himself on his death bed. Mamakay's story as narrated to Adrian, however, paints Cole as a traitor who thrived during the war by being a coward and betraying his friends and family and now — instead of owning up to his mistakes — is using Adrian to create a version of the story not by lying directly but by omitting the part that implicates him. While Mamakay seems to have made peace with her past, she is angry at her father for betraying her and lying about it.

Cole here is painted as an unreliable narrator who 'skews perspective, manipulates emotion, hides facts or plays for sympathy' (Bone 2005), and indeed we fall for this play. We look at Cole as a man in love and sympathize with him for the fact that the woman he is in love with is married and does not feel the same way about him. We see him as a friend, a lecturer at the university, a husband to Saffia and a father to Mamakay. When Mamakay tells her side of the story, Cole loses credibility because he has given a distorted picture of reality. Sympathy thus shifts from Cole to Mamakay. We feel sorry for her for having to drop out of school because of her father's betrayal and we admire her for being able to make peace with her past and her resilience to move on.

Forna does not, however, just stop at this revelation. She gives Cole a chance to respond to Mamakay's story through the questions posed by Adrian after he discovers that Cole has been lying to him all along. Forna intends to show us the reason why Cole is lying. Cole betrayed his friends, his daughter and his

wife all in the name of trying to survive which the readers of his story would view as selfish. Remembering what he did and did not do, and thinking about how he could have done things differently, may become too painful for Cole since there is nothing he can do to right those wrongs now. Instead of blaming himself, therefore, Cole decides to remember his actions differently. He decides to write a different version of the story, one that he wants to believe. Cole wants to believe that everything he did was for his family and his survival in a cruel and unforgiving world. The only way to forget the wrongs he did is by telling and retelling the story the way he wants to remember it; hoping that one day it will be 'the real' version of the story and the only version of the story. For this to happen though he needs someone who was not there during the war, someone who does not know what happened and who therefore cannot judge him. Someone who will listen, believe his story, and hopefully tell others and make the story authentic:

You are just a mirror he can hold up to reflect a version of himself and the events. The same lie he's telling himself and everyone else. And they're all doing it. Whatever you say, you will go away from here, you will publish papers and give talks and every time you do you will make their version of events the more real until it becomes indelible. (Forna 2010, 351)

Cole is, therefore, using memory not only to write his version of the story but also to redeem himself.

Forna also uses multiple narrators in the novel to act as witnesses of what is taking place in one another's subconscious. In doing so, they also help each other to remember. The patients in the asylum share rooms and therefore listen to what their colleagues say in their dreams. During sessions, they tell Adrian what happened. Soulay a patient in the asylum who was a government soldier turned rebel dreams and calls his mother in his dreams. However, when asked, he cannot remember. His roommates have to tell Adrian what he does in his dreams.

'What was the last dream you had?'

The young man shakes his head. It is slow going. A shuffling and a snorted laugh from somebody in the room. 'Adecali. Yes?' says Adrian, turning to look at Adecali.

... 'What is it, Adecali? What do you want to say?'

'He hollers for his mama. He jumps out of his bed.' (2010, 316)

Since these characters cannot remember their dreams, the revelations by their colleagues help Adrian to help these patients remember them and hopefully, too, the real events. Memory repeats itself through dreams and hallucinations as the memory of traumatic events breaks the barriers between the conscious and the subconscious. It breaks the individual's coping mechanisms and disrupts their functioning because it oscillates between the outside and the inside,

connecting the imaginary and the real (Vickroy 2002; Mueller-Greene 2022). Remembering too as shown in this novel affects the characters. The effect here is that of healing. We see most characters being able to go back to their normal lives after they can remember. A good example here is Kai: before being able to talk about his past, he is determined to leave Sierra Leone for the United States. He wants to leave everything behind and start afresh in the United States with his friend Tejani. However, when Adrian helps him to relive his past through memory, he is finally at peace, stays home and even offers to take care of the girl left behind after Mamakay's death.

Conclusion

Forna effectively uses multiple narrative points of view to show how characters remember the experiences of war differently and how these different memories challenge each other openly. This struggle depends on who is telling the story. The story as told by a victim, for example, is not the same as the one told by the perpetrator, and neither is it the same as one told by a bystander. Multiple narrative points of view show these struggles clearly. However, these struggles do not only lie between the characters but also within these characters. While most of the victims want to forget their painful experiences, these memories pop up in dreams and hallucinations and so, at times, it is hard for them to distinguish between the remembered and the real. This is what makes the politics of memory; the suppressing, belatedness, forgetting and remembering of past painful experiences. In giving these characters a chance to relate their own experiences, Forna also gives them a chance to deal with this past.

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