



universität
wien

DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

“Transgenerational Trauma in the
Contemporary South African Novel”

Verfasserin

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angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag.phil.)

Wien, 2013

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:

A 190 344 347

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:

UF Englisch UF Französisch

Betreuer:

Univ.- Prof. Dr. Ewald Mengel

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'Is becoming always filled with pain?'
[...] growth (becoming) and pain are indeed inextricably linked,
for growth often involves taking leave of cherished patterns and familiar securities.
Just as biological life is characterised by the continuous formation of new cells
and the dying of old ones ("death-life patterns"),
a healthy inner life is characterised by continual letting go of the old
and acceptance of the new;
in contrast,
the rejection of painful but necessary change leads to spiritual rigor mortis.
(Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela 21)

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1. Introduction

Insights into the genealogy of trauma reveal that it once was a controversial and much debated concept. Today, it is difficult to imagine it as a 'suspect condition' with specialists' primary objective of finding trauma victims guilty of bad faith. Nonetheless, in the 21st century, the trauma concept has undergone remarkable changes and is now thought of as holding an important place across various scholarly disciplines. Not least in the wake of 9/11, an increased interest in the nature and ensuing consequences of trauma could be observed. The current state of knowledge shows concern and full understanding for the disastrous and far-reaching impact of psychological traumas. Central to the entire discipline is that they constitute an 'all-shattering' experience which can exercise an unrelenting and life-long grip on those affected by it. Apart from the fact that researchers consider a full recovery unlikely, recent developments show an emerging interest in the idea that trauma can 'live on' and affect subsequent generations. The burgeoning field of epigenetics, with its investigations of trauma transference on the genetic level, has certainly contributed to shifting the focus to how psychological trauma can be passed on.

Herman advances the following crucial argument: "[t]o study psychological trauma is to come face to face both with human vulnerability in the natural world and with the capacity for evil in human nature. To study psychological trauma means bearing witness to horrible events" (7). While the challenge of looking into the eye of other's horror is argued to be one of the reasons behind an 'intermittent engagement' with the trauma question, the impact on its victims is much deeper. Trauma always implicates substantial loss and the inability to relate to the horror that lies at its heart. Research clearly shows that trauma survivors grapple with the morbid antagonism of voicing and silencing their traumas. While voices are being raised which ascertain that language will never provide the appropriate means of speaking about 'the unspeakable', others counter that there exists a form for expressing trauma, namely literature. Trauma research to date has tended to focus on explaining trauma in a scientific context and elaborated theoretical concepts rather than

acknowledging the wealth of literature that emerges from either within the core of trauma, or from its wider context.

One of the main thrusts of the present thesis is to make a strong claim for the crucial role of 'trauma literature'. Trauma experts like Schwab, or Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, make clear that a mere rational engagement with this dramatic phenomenon is insufficient. Within the last decade, researchers have taken an increased interest in the principles of literary narratives and their redeeming effects on survivors, who are in need of 'reassembling' the scattered parts of their integrity. Recent developments have seen growing appreciation of literature as a possibility for 'finding a voice' in trauma's aftermath. Certain investigations take this idea even as far as claiming literature as the best empirical source for studying trauma.

Attesting literature this essential role and returning to the fact that dealing with trauma implicates a confrontation with the 'evil in humanity,' this paper shall focus on a particular genre of literary narrative, namely the contemporary South African novel. Hearing the voices of Archbishop Desmond Tutu who formulates: "We are a wounded people¹," or Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela who say that: "[s]uffering is central to South Africa," (19) raises our awareness for the plight of this nation. The horrible legacy of Apartheid still hovers over South Africans until the present day and requires a confrontation and processing of the traumas suffered. Naturally, this traumatization has found its way into literature, making the contemporary South African novel suitable for approaching trauma and illustrating its transgenerational aspects.

Consequently, this thesis will focus on intergenerational trauma in the contemporary South African novel and put forward the claim that an intensive analysis of the selected primary sources has the potential to fruitfully complement a closer theoretical investigation of this particular trauma phenomenon. In other words, the primary concern is to provide a theoretical overview of trauma inheritance in order to apply and illustrate it by means of

¹ Archbishop Tutu

<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/frostinterview/2012/11/20121112125225>

literature at a later stage. In this sense, the present paper is divided into two broad sections.

The first part gives an insight into the according theory and begins by a rough outline of general trauma studies and will then go on to present trauma's transgenerational dimension. The further focus will be on how transgenerational trauma is processed in the literary South African context and how it mirrors and reflects theoretical considerations of the research field. While the novels are to be viewed against the national traumatic background of the Apartheid regime², they otherwise concentrate on the microcosm of families and communities. In this respect, Fedler's *The Dreamcloth* expounds the severe consequences of unacknowledged trauma within a family of Jewish immigrants to South Africa, whereas Hlapa's work *A Daughter's Legacy* presents the morbid transgenerational dynamics of trauma-induced silence within a rural South African community.

² Apartheid constitutes a traumatic legacy in its own right but an according analysis would clearly exceed the limits of this thesis. The interested reader shall be referred to Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*, which exemplifies the disastrous consequences of being entangled in the legacy of apartheid.

2. Trauma - Defining the Undefinable

Caruth, one of the highly influential trauma researchers, puts in a nutshell what seems like an inherent characteristic of the concept: “The phenomenon of trauma *brings us to the limits of our understanding*” (*Explorations* 4 [emphasis added]). As a matter of fact, she rightly maintains that the more we try to fathom the nature of trauma, the more we dislocate the boundaries of our understanding, ending with the sobering observation that it cannot be explained satisfactorily (Ibid.). LaCapra (*Writing History* 96) explains: “No genre or discipline ‘owns’ trauma as a problem or can *provide definitive boundaries for it.*” [emphasis added]. Some authors even go as far as using mathematics in an attempt to overcome this difficulty. Trying to understand trauma through defining variables and predicting percentages may give the impression of tackling the problem. However Luckhurst concedes: “[...] in our present state of knowledge it is only possible to account for about 45% of subsequent distress. [...] the exercise does illustrate *our understanding [...] is incomplete*” [emphasis added] (xiv). Herman concurs with this view: “The severity of traumatic events cannot be measured on any single dimension; simplistic efforts to quantify trauma ultimately lead to meaningless comparisons of horror” (33-34).

Such expert opinions substantiate the complicity involved in providing a cogent and conclusive trauma definition. Naturally, this observation leads to asking for possible reasons behind this challenge. While it is a fact that currently, this question too cannot be answered to full satisfaction and, above all, would exceed the limits of this thesis, it is assumed that certain aspects contribute to this complexity and shall therefore be considered subsequently.

2.1 A Comprehensive and Expansive Concept

First of all, talking about trauma allows raising the expansive and comprehensive nature of this concept. Having its origin in Greek, meaning *wound*, the trauma term has travelled a long way, permeating many different contexts and generating different understandings. In fact, first records of war-

related trauma extend from six hundred B.C. to two hundred forty year old Napoleonic War correspondences. Apart from such early historical evidence, it is generally assumed that trauma interest emerged somewhere between 1860 and 1870, in the course of a spawning industry where scientists started to take special interest in railroad accidents (see Fassin and Rechtman 36). Originating in the concern for these victims, trauma studies, broadly speaking, developed into three contexts: medicine, economy and psychology.

The first scientific endeavors were of biologic interest as clinicians pondered over the so called “railway spine” or “railway brain” (Ibid. 30). However, at this time trauma interest was not only found in the realm of medicine, but also in economy. In other words, industrialization generated a burgeoning insurance industry and provided an economic and, above all, financial context. At this time, dealing with traumatized people was not of benevolent nature, but aimed at finding them guilty of bad faith as work accident victims started claiming financial compensation. Some years later, traumatized soldiers were met with the same suspicion and found themselves accused of not wanting to serve their country (see Ibid 35-36). It was not until 1895 that psychological considerations appeared on the scene and as a result, medical trauma kept comparatively minor importance (see Luckhurst 1-2). In psychological terms, trauma no longer referred to a wound of the body, but to a wound of the soul. Researchers, amongst the most popular, Freud and Janet, were aware of the horrendous impact of trauma and tried to define their possible causes. This transition from medicine to psychology was an essential step in the formation of trauma understanding. Nowadays, it is recognized that both, physiology and psychology need to have a place in trauma studies³.

At present, the meaning of trauma has expanded to such an extent that it seems to reach far beyond medical, psychological or economic contexts. Mentioning trauma within a modern and constantly progressing 21st century

³ In this respect, Everly presents his *Integrative Two-Factor Model of Post-Traumatic Stress*, which elaborates on the description of the physiological and psychological constituents of post-traumatic stress (cf. 27-48).

does no longer engage the private as well as the public mind. In fact, it is possible to say that the trauma concept has penetrated into the minds of people to such an extent that it enjoys general acceptance and understanding:

[...] [Trauma] partakes so deeply of everyday life. Throughout the twentieth century [...] people have spoken continually about being traumatized by an experience, by an event [...] or [...] by an abrupt [...] and sometimes not even particularly malevolent, experience of social transformation of change. People also have continually employed the language of trauma to [...] the collectivities to which they belong to as well. (Alexander 2)

At first, this quotation does not only illustrate the term's comprehensiveness, but also gives an idea of trauma as a 'taken for granted' in society. Nowadays, humanity seems to be more susceptible to trauma than ever before. Fassin and Rechtman (2) refer to "a commonplace of the contemporary world," and note an expansion from the literal sense, to a metaphor for any tragedy. While they acknowledge that scientific advances and media coverage of extreme events have certainly expedited this process, they see other underlying reasons. They argue that this new sensibility for trauma or the novel "anthropology of sensibilities and values," (6) "[...] is rather the product of a new relationship to time and memory, to mourning and obligations, to misfortune and the misfortunate" (276). There was a time when casting a retrospective glance allowed commemorating and celebrating great historical achievements. However, this no longer holds true for the status quo. Now, looking back involves being confronted with horrible events, which paved the paths of the elapsed centuries (see 275). "[T]he discovery of the painful memory is a major anthropological phenomenon [...] It extends simultaneously to realities with a very wide range of historical reference [...]" (16). Accordingly, this new relation to the past shows how humanity tries to relate to it as a means of coping. Considering then the accumulation of horror in the 20th century, ranging from World War I and II and 9/11 to domestic violence, rape and childhood abuse, the metaphorical expansion to 'anything traumatic' does no longer seem surprising. In a South African context, looking back on history certainly entails a confrontation with colonialism and the atrocious apartheid regime. In how far such historical moments are intertwined with trauma, and especially, with its

inheritance will be addressed later on. What is more, the above-mentioned quotation holds yet another important aspect. Trauma is no longer used to refer to individuals only, but equally designates impact on whole communities and cultures. This particular kind of trauma has come to be known as *collective trauma* (see Kühner 27).

Summing up, trauma has ceased to designate mere physical injuries and is now primarily understood as a wound of the soul. While trauma victims were met with suspicion and perceived as impostors at a certain time, their role changed considerably when trauma came to be used as a metaphor of our cruel and traumatized age. Furthermore, initially referring to the impact on individuals, the term was expanded as far as describing the suffering of a whole collectivity. What is more, besides specifying the actual moment of the event, trauma evolved into a means of claiming history in an attempt of coping and mourning. In this sense, it does not seem as if trauma has reached a state where a conclusive definition is possible. At present, it even seems as if there are no restrictions to its use and understanding, blurring the boundaries of the concept. Even though exacerbating a conclusive comprehension in this manner, the comprehensive and expansive character equally demonstrates that trauma constitutes an important signifier of our time.

2.2 Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder – A Breakthrough?

Undoubtedly, from the many different stages that the trauma formation process underwent the introduction of post-traumatic stress disorder (henceforth referred to as PTSD) in 1980, has marked a fundamental breakthrough. Acknowledging PTSD as an impairment and suffering in its own right marked the end of a long, controversial and, above all, intermittent engagement with the trauma question (see Herman 7). With implementing the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), the *American Psychiatric Association* (APA) provided, above all, a means of diagnosis. This nomenclature sparked great interest in studying trauma and many researchers used and still use the DSM for substantiating their theories:

Those confronted with an experience involving ‘actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a physical threat to the physical integrity of the self’ considered to be outside the range of normal experience are diagnosed with PTSD if they present certain clusters of symptoms. Individuals who experience wars, disasters, accidents or other extreme ‘stressor’ events seem to produce certain identifiable somatic and psycho-somatic disturbances. (American Psychiatric Association qtd. in Luckhurst 1)

Although it seems as if PTSD has consolidated trauma theory, critical voices are being raised. According to the APA, trauma stressors are not to be found within the normal range of human experience. What the normal range of human experience encompasses and what not, has given rise to a lot of speculation. Herman for example, taking a feminist perspective, considers this formulation inappropriate, especially when talking about the sad fate of women all over the world. She argues that domestic violence, as well as sexual abuse are “so common a part of women’s lives that they can hardly be described as outside the range of ordinary experience” (32). What is more, the current sensibility for horror and trauma raises the question whether atrocities are not gradually becoming a firm component of certain people’s lives.

Furthermore, researchers (Caruth 1995; Everly 1995; Herman 1997; Palmer and Scott 2000; Fassin and Rechtman 2009) unanimously agree that PTSD does not have potential to diagnose post-traumatic stress entirely:

[T]he diagnosis of ‘post-traumatic stress disorder,’ [...] does not fit accurately enough. The existing diagnostic criteria for this disorder are derived mainly from survivors of circumscribed traumatic events. They are based on prototypes of combat, disaster, and rape. In survivors of prolonged, repeated trauma, the symptom picture is often far more complex. [...] Survivors of abuse in childhood develop similar problems [...]. (Herman 119)

As this quotation illustrates, researchers even go as far as to demand separate diagnostic categories for the amplitude of trauma syndromes. In their eyes, victims of prolonged and repeated traumatization, as well as childhood traumata for instance, must be considered in a different light.

Another weakness of the DSM concerns the question of in how far it is maintainable for scientists to speak in the name of those who suffered trauma.

In this sense, power differences enter the discussion:

[...] our images of trauma have been narrowed and constructed within the experiences and realities of dominant groups in cultures. The dominant, after all, writes the diagnostic manuals and informs the public discourse, on which we have built our image of 'real' trauma. 'Real' trauma is often only that form of trauma in which the dominant group can participate as a victim rather than as a perpetrator [...]. (Caruth, *Explorations* 102)

Fassin and Rechtman address this delicate issue and call attention to a fundamental paradigm shift in trauma studies. Accordingly, research quality and accuracy are now sensibly determined by the speaker's personal relation to the trauma in question (see 28). The question of who has the right to give voice to trauma, scientists or the victims themselves, is not new and equally well known in *postcolonial literary studies*⁴. Considering this dilemma in a South African context holds interesting insights as well. So far, professional trauma engagement is, in large part, the result of Western sciences. In this chapter, the quoted names of researchers demonstrate their general Western background. Broadly speaking, these theorists see a clear circumscribed traumatic event at the origin of post-traumatic stress. Nonetheless, it will be shown, at a later stage of this thesis, that this perspective is not adequate when talking about the traumatization of the South African people.

The points of criticism raised enable a view beyond the general acceptance of the APA's means of classification. It seems save to say that, in trauma studies, PTSD is a firmly established theory and has taken 'common truth' character. However, exactly these common truths, circulated and willingly accepted within societies, sometimes need to be challenged in order to learn more about them. The seminal contributions of the PTSD shall not be contested in any way. Nonetheless, it appears that the DSM needs to undergo further elaborations in the areas mentioned⁵. PTSD cannot provide a definition of trauma as "[...] [t]here are a number of acute and chronic post-traumatic

⁴ Cf. Lazarus V-VI

⁵ The next volume of the DSM, the DSM 5, will appear sometime in 2013, containing new thoughts and elaborations of PTSD
<http://www.psychiatry.org/practice/dsm/dsm-iv-tr>

syndromes of which PTSD is the most distinct and identifiable example,” (Palmer and Scott 10) or in Everly’s terms: “[...] PTSD may be viewed as an epiphenomenon arising from the more central phenomenon of post-traumatic stress” (*Psychotraumatology* 7). Currently, PTSD appears as the most ‘palpable’ syndrome on the surface of something that has not yet been fully ‘grasped’. It is clearly understood that there is much more to uncover than what we actually see. This awareness once more attests the trauma enigma. Essentially, even the influential DSM does not seem to master the myriad aspects underlying traumatic stress.

2.3 A Controversial Core

The difficulty of explaining trauma holds yet another important aspect. As aforementioned, the deeper we try to penetrate the heart of trauma, the more we seem to lose ourselves. A possible reason for this may be that the heart of trauma, to a certain extent, consists of paradox and controversial dynamics, which keep the enigma of trauma alive. In other words, it seems as if controversy would be inherent to trauma. There are certain paradoxes which, broadly speaking, can be subsumed under two main oppositions.

Comprehending the first paradoxical duality requires a closer contemplation of Caruth’s influential trauma theory. In her eyes, trauma “is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (*Unclaimed* 3-4). In this view, the reason for subsequent distress is to be found in the unexpectedness and overwhelming power of the trauma stressor. Through this literal ‘attack’ on the human being, all common ways of sense making are eliminated and particularly in this malfunction lies what Caruth describes as the pathology of trauma: “The pathology consists, rather, solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly [...]” (*Explorations* 4). This trauma theory (further on referred to as *unclaimed experience*), has not only had great influence but illustrates an underlying

paradox namely “that in trauma the greatest confrontation with reality can also occur as an absolute numbing to it, that immediacy, paradoxically enough, may take the form of belatedness” (*Explorations* 6). As a result, the first essential controversy to be found within trauma is the sheer inexperience through its full experience, or “trauma’s indirect relation to reference” (*Unclaimed* 7). Caruth furthermore argues that this indirect relation engenders yet another opposition. The endless repeated reliving of the event is such that trauma, primarily, is no crisis of having nearly died in the event, but rather the fact of having survived it. In her eyes, post-trauma represents a constant crisis of survival due to the destructive force and lasting impact of ‘the traumatic’. Consequently, the mysterious relationship between dying and surviving constitutes another paradox of trauma (see *Explorations* 9).

Coming to talk about the second paradoxical duality, Herman illustrates what she calls the dialectic of trauma. This theory describes the “aftermath of an experience of overwhelming danger, [where] [...] intrusion and constriction establish an oscillating rhythm” (47). The impact of intrusion has already been touched upon in Caruth’s theory where the traumatic event repeatedly imposes itself on the survivor. As far as constriction is concerned, contrary forces seem to be working away on the individual. In this state, the trauma victim has become unable to perform the simplest actions as the pure and elemental experience of helplessness, lived during the trauma, has rendered him or her utterly numb. The dialectic of trauma then, according to Herman, shows two opposing and particularly different powers. In this sense, the trauma victim is attacked by the trauma again and again therefore kept in a state of high vigilance and constant alert, but at the same time rendered entirely numb. Apart from giving this antagonism a name, Herman offers concrete examples of how it can manifest itself in the lives of survivors. At first, trauma has deep impact on relationships. In this respect, its dialectic becomes evident when survivors feel the desperate need to be close to somebody despite their virtual inability to enter relationships: “The profound disruption in basic trust, the common feelings of shame, guilt, and inferiority, and the need to avoid reminders of the trauma [...] all foster withdrawal from close relationships. But the terror of the traumatic

event intensifies the need for protective attachments” (56). Furthermore, survivors find themselves in a state of being torn between the profound wish to relate what has happened and the constricting force of silence. By emphasizing the importance of the patient’s trauma story for psychotherapy, Scott and Palmer hold the view that victims are in fact glad to finally talk about their trauma. Nonetheless, it is no exaggeration to say that there is much more to relating one’s trauma than simply giving the course of events (see 3-4). The researchers place great emphasis on the fact that it can even be seriously dangerous for victims: “[...] treatment is asking the patient to take tremendous risk, to give up all the protective behaviors and psychological strategies [...]” (3). To put in a nutshell, when traumatized patients are not cautiously and professionally guided in telling their tale, this may lead to re-traumatization through the all too vivid recollections invading the survivor mercilessly during the narration.

Besides showing that controversy lies at the heart of trauma and consequently complicates the concept, the antagonisms mentioned equally offered a first insight into post-traumatic symptomatology. At this stage, it seems necessary to elaborate on these partly covered symptoms, not only for completion’s sake, but due to the assumption that a more detailed account of the symptoms involved offers yet another possibility for attaining a better understanding of trauma. As a result, the aftermath of trauma, in this case referring to its most prominent symptoms, as well as perspectives on healing, shall be treated in more detail subsequently.

2.4 The Aftermath

*I was still mentally prepared and nervously organized for War.
Shells used to come bursting on my bed at midnight,
even though Nancy shared it with me;
strangers in the daytime would assume the faces of friends who had been killed.
When strong enough to climb the hill behind Harlech and visit my favorite country,
I could not help seeing it as a prospective battlefield
(Graves 257).*

Individuals, who have to live through horrendous events, will suffer from predictable psychological wounds (see Herman 35). While this seems to be a sad fact, issues are not clear-cut as for the decisive factors provoking this harm. On the one hand, the event as such is foregrounded: “The most powerful determinant of psychological harm is the character of the traumatic event itself. Individual personality characteristics count for little in the face of overwhelming events” (57). Herman clearly holds the view that subsequent distress has its origin in the horrible event itself and affirms that individuals do not have anything they could possibly oppose. This clearly contradicts Caruth’s point of view who states that the traumatic is not inherent in the event itself, but in the individuality of each human being: “[...] the pathology cannot be defined either by the event itself – which may or may not be catastrophic, and may not traumatize everyone equally [...], achieving its haunting power as a result of distorting personal significances attached to it” (4). Caruth makes an interesting observation when she attributes trauma impact to individual perception. In this view, personal significance given to the event, as well as previous experience are seminal factors for developing a post-traumatic pathology. To put it differently, trauma impact is very much dependent on individual perception, or as Palmer and Scott put it, “individual thresholds” (15).

Although the individuality of trauma perception seems conclusive, researchers identify factors which can increase the likelihood of post-traumatic stress. Palmer and Scott suggest five broad constituents influencing subsequent distress: precedent psychiatric history, social support, gravity of physical injury, time passed since the event, and the present severity of the symptoms (see xiv). Herman generally shares this view and accentuates that: “[...] those who are already disempowered or disconnected from others are most at risk. [...] Traumatic life events, like other misfortunes, are especially merciless to those who are already troubled” (60). Having said this, it appears that people, who are not affected by prior psychiatric histories, grave physical wounds, and currently severe symptoms, when given enough time and social support, actually stand good chances to escape relatively unharmed. Unfortunately, trauma impact is not as straightforward as this: “Though highly

resilient people have the best chance [...] [there is no] reliable protection. The most important factor universally cited by survivors is good luck” (59-60). Bearing this in mind it must be assumed that every individual runs risk of being traumatized. When trauma then has finally struck, overwhelmed and invaded the individual, specific symptoms remain in its wake and can persist long after the event.

2.4.1 General Symptomatology

In spite of some critical consideration the DSM is of great value for providing an overview of general trauma symptoms. Essentially, the APA elaborated three main symptom areas:

The first cluster of symptoms relate to the ways in which ‘the traumatic event is *persistently re-experienced*’ – through intrusive flashbacks, recurring dreams, or later situations that repeat or echo the original. Weirdly, the second set of symptoms suggests the complete opposite: ‘*persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma*’ that can range from avoidance of thoughts or feelings related to the event to a general sense of emotional numbing to the total absence of recall of the significant event. A third set of symptoms points to ‘*increased arousal*’, including loss of temper control, hypervigilance or ‘exaggerated startle response’. Symptoms can come on acutely, persist chronically, or, in another strange effect, appear belatedly [...]. (American Psychiatric Association qtd. in Luckhurst 1[emphasis added])

Taking an ‘enlightened view’⁶ on trauma, the three general symptoms of re-experience, avoidance and increased arousal are understood as a natural reaction in the wake of trauma. In other words, numbing for instance is a particularly helpful physical defense mechanism mobilized by our brain in the fight for survival. Accordingly, symptoms of intrusion, avoidance and increased arousal are also considered normal in the wake of trauma⁷. Pathology is said to start when these symptoms persist over an unnaturally long period of time. Palmer and Scott claim that, broadly speaking, there exists a chance for natural recovery within two years (see xiv).

⁶ As for the “enlightenment thinking” of trauma, symptoms are perceived as a natural and rational response to terrible events (see Alexander 3).

⁷ For further information on natural trauma reactions cf. Huber 38-51.

As far as the respective symptoms are concerned, the phenomenon of intrusion or 'persistent re-experience' was already considered briefly in the previous section. The so called "death imprint" (Lifton qtd. in Herman 38) which trauma leaves behind, firmly attaches to victims and comes to haunt them through intrusive recollections that can take the form of flashbacks, nightmares or psychophysiologic reaction to certain stimuli. In this respect the concept of triggering plays a crucial role. In other words, the survivor runs constant risk of reliving the trauma through being reminded or 'triggered' by external stimuli that are in some way reminiscent of the horror. What is valid for all of these intrusive manifestations, and making them particularly troubling, is that they create the feeling of genuinely reliving the moments of greatest fear. Another trauma reaction related to intrusion but not mentioned in the quotation above is *reenactment*. Referring, but not restricting it to traumatized children, Terr describes this condition as follows "The everyday play of childhood [...] is free and easy. It is bubbly and light-spirited, whereas the play of that follows trauma is grim and monotonous [...] post-traumatic play is obsessively repeated [...] [and] so literal [...]" (*Too Scared* 238-247). Possible explanations for such reenactments, as well as for intrusive phenomena in general, are to be found within the theory of *unclaimed experience*. Through missing out on the actual experience and due to humanity's strive for meaning which Frankl describes as "the primary force of life" (99), the individual is consistently compelled to relive the trauma in order to complete the meaning making process that was not attained during the event (see *Unclaimed* 62). Corresponding to what Horowitz called the "completion tendency" (qtd. in Everly, *An Integrative* 40) where trauma victims suffer from permanent re-experience in order to finally integrate 'the traumatic', intrusion is also viewed as some kind of coping strategy for coming to terms with what could not be fully understood during trauma.

The second symptom seems like a natural consequence of the first. Through showing avoidant behavior (also referred to as constriction or numbing), the survivors seem to protect themselves from intrusion. This avoidance can go as far as that people find themselves in a state of complete numbing. In this respect, co-morbidity of substance abuse, for self-medication

and the numbing of other symptoms, was found to be a common complication of PTSD (see Herman 44). Moreover, constriction can reach from affecting relationships to having impact on the future of survivors. From a certain moment onwards, the alienation is so overwhelming that any connection to non-affected people seems impossible (see 51). Additionally, healthy and happy people are constantly pondering over their future. However, the motivation or ability of such anticipation and planning appears to be no longer part of trauma survivors' lives (see 46).

Finally, increased arousal, the third prominent symptom mentioned, refers to a condition where individuals are in permanent expectation of horror to return and overwhelm them once again. After experiencing absolute helplessness in the face of most unbearable horror, survivors are, incessantly on guard and in a state of alert. In fact, trauma survivors lack 'normal' thresholds for alarm and relaxation. Reaction to stimuli of their environment can be unnaturally strong and incomprehensible to outsiders. What is more, traumatized people do not seem capable of ignoring repetitive stimuli but rather react to each single one of them as if they were a new potential source of horror. The nervous system seems to be affected to such an extent that hyperarousal even persists during sleep, resulting in heavy sleep disturbances (see *Ibid.* 35-36).

As far as the evolution of trauma symptoms is concerned, Herman notices a particular delicacy. While intrusion predominates in the immediate aftermath, it becomes gradually replaced by symptoms of constriction. She describes the problem of this development as follows: "The constraints [...] lack drama; their significance lies in what is missing. For this reason, constrictive symptoms are not readily recognized, and their origins in a traumatic event are often lost" (49). As constriction and numbing seem to gradually dominate in the life of trauma survivors, making an appropriate diagnosis becomes more and more difficult. Without clearly noticeable effects of intrusion and hyperarousal, trauma victims are frequently misunderstood in their suffering. Taking this into account, Palmer and Scott refer to a shocking number of 66% of patients who were

misdiagnosed with other mental disorders such as schizophrenia, for instance, although they showed, after closer examination, clear PTSD symptoms (see 4).

2.4.2 Recovery?

Caruth draws a somewhat gloomy picture of the trauma recovery process. In her view, the aftermath of trauma cannot be perceived as a fortunate survival, but as "the apparent struggle to die" (*Unclaimed* 63). What makes post-trauma existence so unbearable is the constant and destructive intrusion of the 'the traumatic' through the characteristic repetition compulsion involved (see 62-64). With advancing these arguments, Caruth sticks to her theory of *unclaimed experience*. She postulates that, due to trauma's indirect relation to reference, every attempt to access trauma memory in order to make meaning of and finally work through it must be doomed to fail. Considering these assumptions, integrating trauma is, according to Caruth, beyond the scope of the affected and, as a result, not possible.

Although Herman states that: "[r]esolution [...] [and] [...] recovery [are] never complete," (211) and Fassin and Rechtman equally claim that it is the "psychological impact [of trauma] that emerges as the clearest, most lasting, and most incontrovertible [...]," (2) they agree that it is possible for survivors to work on integrating trauma. The ideal case for such an integration process is described as gradually confronting the traumatic memory in a pace that is manageable for the individual concerned. In this respect, understanding trauma emotionally as well as cognitively is the primary aim. Through this continuous and gradual engagement with the source of post-traumatic stress, the initially unclaimed experience is appropriated and finally given the necessary meaning (see Horowitz qtd. in Roth and Newman 322-323).

It is commonly understood that relating to trauma is best achieved through talking about it or, as Herman puts it: "Sharing the traumatic experience with others is a precondition for the restitution of a sense of a meaningful world" (70). As already mentioned, talking about one's trauma bears the risk of being re-traumatized. Nevertheless, avoiding this confrontation blocks the healing process and therefore makes the trauma story of survivors one of the most

efficient tools in psychotherapy⁸.

Another vital component of trauma recovery is social support. Even if survivors are torn between seeking contact and complete withdrawal, it is a fact that the social surrounding has a great influence on the outcome of the recovery process. Trauma leads to a shattering of the most inert feeling of autonomy and individuality and this can only be regained in the way it was once attained, with the help of others. The feelings of being accepted and loved despite the alternating symptomatology, as well as a feeling of being safe and protected are seminal (see Herman 61-63).

Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela (vii) aptly describe the healing of trauma as: “the restoration of the self and the reclaiming of one’s sense of control of memory, of the capacity to reflect, understand, and to perceive things as they are or were [...]” This quotation shows that a complete recovery of trauma seems not possible. In other words, through integrating ‘the traumatic’, patients can regain control over themselves and their lives, however, it seems save to say that they will never be entirely freed from what happened.

2.5 Towards the Essence of Trauma

Trauma’s comprehensive and gradually generalized terminology, yet immature diagnostic criteria as well as inherent controversy seem to presuppose difficulty for describing trauma conclusively. However, it is assumed that knowing about this enigma and engaging with some of its manifestations constitutes a first step for better comprehension. What is more, considering prototypical symptom clusters of post-traumatic stress have equally important potential to teach us more about what it means to be traumatized. Even though it is maintained that a cogent and conclusive definition of trauma is not yet possible, developmentalists as well as existentialists provide greater insight into the essence of trauma.

Turning to the theoretical concept of *weltanschauung* seems one of the most

⁸ For a more detailed account of psychotherapeutic approaches cf. Scott and Palmer 2000.

appropriate ways of understanding what lies at the heart of trauma. This theory grounds itself on the assumption that humans clearly distinguish themselves through their constant striving for meaning. While other beings seem to content themselves with finding their place in the world through reward and punishment, humanity constantly tries to understand themselves and the world around them (see Pennebaker and Susman 327). Perceiving one's life as secure and having a sense for the self are central to this theory (see Everly, *An Integrative* 37). While this explanation is rather short, it is possible to complement the idea of *weltanschauung* with other theories. According to Bowlby, human beings feel the need to constantly develop models of their environment as well as themselves. These *working models* can be equated with an attempt of defining themselves and their lives for assuring a meaningful and somehow predictable transition from one living moment to the next (see 82). Furthermore, the well-known concept of *Urvertrauen* is of equal relevance. The essence of this term is the establishment of basic trust. Through the bond to the first attachment figures, children are able to develop a sense for safety and trust. Developing this understanding constitutes the basis for belief in oneself and others. Nothing supports a human being more than this substantial aspect (see Herman 51). "The original experience of care makes it possible for human beings to envisage a world in which they belong, a world hospitable to human life" (Ibid.). Moreover, Epstein identifies four basic human needs which lend themselves to understanding the concept of *weltanschauung* better. According to him, humans need to believe that "(1) [t]he world is benign, a source of pleasure, a rewarding place; (2) the world is meaningful, predictable, controllable, and just; (3) the self is worthy (lovable, good, competent), and (4) people are trustworthy and worth relating to" (qtd. in Roth and Newman 330) in order to be in harmony with themselves and the world.

Turning back to trauma then enables the claim that it is the holistic blow to *weltanschauung*. Arguments taken from the core of trauma studies confirm this assumption "Traumatic events destroy the victim's fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, the positive value of the self, and the meaningful order of creation" (Herman 51), "Trauma is the antithesis of order,

protection, and security" (Everly, *An Integrative* 40) or:

The overwhelming effect of trauma ruptures the multiple layers of the ego's protective organizational fabric. This organising matrix of the ego includes [...] the individual's basic assumptions about the world, such as belief system and sense of trust in others, physical aspects of one's body, social networks, and so on. (Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela 24)

In this sense, trauma seems to represent the absolute contrast to basic human understanding of the self and the world. Trauma is not only contesting, but shattering and annihilating basic trust in safety and self with horrendous effects. When the foundations of meaning are shaken and finally ruined, the individual is left with a wound comparable to the extermination of what has formerly constituted the essence of meaning to life. The core constituents of *weltanschauung*, safety and sense of self, are what is attacked and finally destroyed through trauma. Ideally, every human being is equipped with a sense for trust, which is then the feeling of being safe and secure from any harm and the belief in the good of people. These basic assumptions represent the strongest protective shields, enabling people to protect their innermost self. However, trauma is the breaching of borders – any borders. Trauma has the power to break down any walls of defense. Once all boarders and protective shields have been effaced, what is left is the utterly helpless and highly vulnerable core of a person's life, becoming penetrated and invaded with the most horrible feelings of fear. When the substance has become infected and contaminated with the black essence of trauma, any sense for the self is no longer valid. The utter helplessness of trauma victims consists precisely in the fact that no autonomous act of defense, every attempt to protect what constitutes the self is of no avail. In such a case, the self ceases to exist and trauma has finally extinguished what 'was once called a human being'.

3. Transgenerational Trauma

As it was shown in the preceding section, trauma is an experience beyond imagination. With the shattering force of destroying the *weltanschauung* of human beings, it certainly counts among the most horrendous blows of fate. Its 'firm grip' or 'death imprint' is most clearly demonstrated by Caruth's theory of *unclaimed experience*. While this conception stems from general trauma theory, it shall be argued that it can be of equal relevance for considering trauma over generations. Broadly speaking, extending Caruth's conception of trauma as an incurable phenomenon, leads to asking the justified question whether it is as persistent as to outlive the individual concerned. In this sense, Fassin and Rechtman suggest the following:

The slave, the colonized, the subjugated, the oppressed, the survivor, the accident victim, the refugee – these are concrete images of the vanquished whose history, far from disappearing along with their experience of defeat and misfortune, is reborn in the memory of subsequent generations. (16 [emphasis added])

This argument hints at the fact that 'misfortunes' do not disappear with the death of victims but survive and live on in descendants. To put it differently, trauma can be as terrible as exceeding normal PTSD symptomatology and can consequently invade subsequent generations, leaving them with the task of working through it (see Volkan, Ast, and Greer 10). Gabriele Schwab, in her invaluable contribution to the field of trauma transmission, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (2010), puts it bluntly when saying that "[t]he legacies of violence not only haunt the actual victims but also are passed on through the generations" (1). She argues that violent histories are connected to each other dialogically, thus creating a transferential dynamic into which individuals can be absorbed. Furthermore, she remarks on how memory is involved in this process. While memory is influenced by many experiences, she emphasizes that it is particularly important to understand it as a condensed amalgam of interrelated, conflict-loaded histories (see 29-30). In this sense, human memory is perceived as a vessel, which consists of various dire stories. What is more, the study field of transgenerational trauma shows a frequent use of metaphors of illness. While Luckhurst stresses the contagious

nature of trauma (see 3), Schwab equally draws on the lexical field of disease and aptly describes transgenerational trauma as follows:

Violent histories generate psychic deformations passed on from generation to generation across the divide of victims and perpetrators. No one can completely escape the ravages of war or the dehumanizing effects of atrocities [...] The damages of violent histories can *hibernate* in the unconscious, only to be transmitted to the next generation *like an undetected disease*. (3 [emphasis added])

Similarly, McGlothlin refers to the so called “phantom pain” (9) that offspring of heavily traumatized victims can suffer from. As phantom pain constitutes a medical phenomenon where patients express an impossible feeling of pain e.g. in the area of amputated extremities, it is actually not the pain of descendants but the wounds of their ancestors that are ‘still bleeding’. For him, transgenerational trauma represents an “epistemological state of exile” (229). Through being cut off from the source of the misery, following generations are left with a mysterious and tragic puzzle, consisting of strange fragments and dire gaps that have been passed on to them (see Schwab 14).

Moreover, the quotation presented above is important for yet another reason. Although it still constitutes a sensitive topic, it is now commonly recognized that descendants of both, victims and perpetrators can be left with a traumatic heritage. Bergmann and Jucovy, referring to Nazi offspring, raise awareness for the fact that “[c]hildren of Nazis are also victims” (29). Although victims and perpetrators are found on opposite sides of the divide respectively, they are nevertheless conjoined in bearing a history that is, in fact not their own. In terms of children of perpetrators, it is primarily the guilt of their forebears that is passed on to them, mostly due to the fact that antecedent generations did not, or simply could not acknowledge the atrocities they had committed (see McGlothlin 24). Furthermore, Nandy’s concept of *isomorphic oppression*, an umbrella term for the heritable psychic deformations of trauma, gives better insight into the fate of persecutors. Referring to Césaire, Nandy identifies a particular form of isomorphic oppression where “[t]he colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an *animal*, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal” (qtd. in Nandy 31). To put it differently, in

order to perform atrocities, most perpetrators need to develop certain psychic abnormalities. An illustrative example for this process of change can be found in Patricia Schonstein's novel *A Quilt of Dreams*. Reuben, the son of Jewish immigrants to South Africa, who serves his military boarder duty in times of apartheid, is commanded to execute a young black political activist. In counseling sessions, he finally finds the words to talk about this trauma:

'The one I shot was a boy of about eighteen. [...] We just had to close ourselves off, otherwise we couldn't have done what we did. One bullet each behind the head' (279-280). 'The first one you kill is hard. But after that, you just shoot and don't get emotional [...] [*I]ike you've just shot a chicken or the guy's pig or livestock*'. (284 [emphasis added])

The novel's protagonist finds a way of coping with the atrocities he is ordered to commit and as a result, shuts himself off from emotions entirely. Apart from other deformations of his psychic well-being, he accustoms himself to reducing his victims to animals, therefore making a hideous beast out of himself.

While trauma as such is characterized by its "death of time" (Kijak and Funtowicz 30) where past, present and future have lost their coherent order, transmitted trauma also carries for both, heirs of victims and perpetrators, a strange temporality. Apart from breaching the natural borders of the affected generation in order to befall non-concerned parties, trauma heirs are "caught up in a sort of time warp," (Volkan, Ast, and Greer 4) or "time tunnel" (Kestenberg, *A Metapsychological* qtd. in Connolly 611). In other words, second generations are part of a nation, collectivity, group or family which has been traumatized although the actual time in which the disaster happened is not shared in this otherwise 'close relationship'. Nevertheless, this 'time tunnel' does not only refer to the lack of sharing the moment of trauma, but also encompasses disturbances in time perception in subsequent generations (Connolly Ibid.).

Due to a prevailing temporal discrepancy, Codde places emphasis on the fact that equating different generations can be delicate: "[...] the term trauma has become increasingly problematic if applied to later generations. The danger lies in unwarranted equation of radically divergent experiences [...]" (64). In this sense, seeing e.g. death camp survivors on the same 'trauma level' as their grandchildren, who were raised under completely different conditions, can be

problematic. Bearing this in mind, the concept of *postmemory* has gradually been considered as an alternative term for describing the situation of more distant descendants. Presenting a mnemonic line of thought, Marianne Hirsch devised this conception and elucidates its essence as “a powerful and very particular form of memory [...] because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through imaginative investment and creation” (22). To put it in other words, the connection to progenitors can also be established by means of strong imaginative ties rather than having received a traumatic heritage as such.

In 1959, Mannheim, strongly doubted that it is possible to really possess memory that has not been personally acquired in ‘active and direct life experiences’ (see 296). Contrarily, Gardener, is convinced that “[...] transmission [...] takes place silently and in secret, *but actively*” (299 [emphasis added]). Besides stressing that memory can be actively transferred, she also mentions an invaluable characteristic of transgenerational transmission, namely silence⁹. Hirsch raises an equally critical issue by speculating whether integration of trauma would only be possible in the following generations, after the immediacy of the horror has started to fade into the background (see 12). In this context Bar-On convincingly argues:

In der Nachkriegsgesellschaft konnten die Menschen funktionieren, sich um ihre eigene physische Existenz kümmern, ohne sich andauernd um die Vergangenheit zu kümmern. Das bedeutet jedoch auch, dass die weniger unmittelbaren psychischen Prozesse – das Betrauern der Toten, das Durcharbeiten der Hilflosigkeit und Aggression [...] die Wiederherstellung von Vertrauen in sich selbst und andere – auf bessere Zeiten verschoben werden mussten. Bessere Zeiten, das hieß [...], auf die folgenden Generationen [...]. (20)

This argument shows once more how trauma victims are engulfed in the abyss of horror. The example of World War II survivors brings the devastating consequences of trauma home to us and raises our awareness for the fact that some individuals might just not find the necessary strength – already ravaged by the misery – to integrate what happened to them. This fact is important in

⁹ The crucial role of silence in the trauma transmission process will be presented at a later stage of this chapter, cf. section 3.2.1 Silence

two ways: the impossibility of relating to and working through trauma is characteristic of PTSD, but also and, most importantly, represents the salient cause of haunting legacies.

3.1 Glimpse into the Study Field

To begin with, trauma transmission has currently attained a specific place in science. “Traumatic stress experienced by mice early in life has epigenetic repercussions that reverberate across multiple generations.¹⁰” Such headlines have repeatedly covered by newspapers, as well as online articles in the last years. This caught the attention of the public and gave transgenerational trauma a new dynamic. The field of epigenetics is trying to prove that stress-induced genetic abnormalities are heritable. Besides impressive results in animal experiments, advances are equally being made in human medicine: “[t]he reality of intergenerational trauma has also found confirmation in the findings of the neurosciences such as the research of Yehuda et al. (2000, pp. 1252-1259) which showed that “the lasting hormonal changes found in Holocaust survivors with PTSD have been replicated in a high percentage of adult children of these survivors” (Connolly 610). In this context, Gardener refers to a phenomenon called “constitutional transmission,” which describes “a genetic predisposition for an emotional state such as anxiety or depression [which] is passed down within a family” (299). The genetic aspect behind trauma transmission would certainly merit consideration in its own right. However, even though representing a fascinating field of interest, this thesis will not go into detail as far as natural sciences are concerned. Having said this, the interested reader shall be referred to the online sources mentioned in the following footnote¹¹.

¹⁰ Elghanayan <http://www.biotechniques.com/news/Trauma-inherited-via-epigenetics/biotechniques-304127.html>

¹¹ For a general overview of the scope of epigenetics cf.:
 Blech <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-58656897.html>
 Fellner <http://www.psychotherapiepraxis.at/pt-blog/traumata-vererbung/>

Apart from this ‘boom’ in genetics, scientific knowledge on the transmission of trauma has gradually been acquired and established within the elapsed centuries, taking a special focus on the impact on following generations (see Volkan, Ast and Greer 11). These scientific engagements produced various ways of referring to transgenerational trauma, amongst others, “Secondary Traumatization” (Rosenbeck & Nathan 1985), “Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)” (Figley 1995), “Covictimization” (Hartsough & Myers 1985), “Secondary Survivor” (Remer & Elliot 1988), “Traumatic Countertransference” (Herman 1997), and “Vicarious Traumatization” (McCann & Perlman 1990). Apart from this, it is possible to find traces of trauma transmission in the illustrious DSM IV. Kühner explains: “[d]ie offizielle Diagnose [PTSD] enthält darüber hinaus jedoch das Kriterium, dass die Bedrohung der Zerstörung auch »einer anderen Person« (»DSM IV« zit. nach Fischer/Diedesser 1998) gegolten haben könnte“ (62). What Kühner seeks to explain here is the DSM IV’s reference to possible traumatization through witnessing or learning about trauma from others (see Palmer and Scott 17). In other words, being directly concerned by trauma is no longer a criterion for subsequent distress. Most importantly, the *Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders* acknowledges the fact that traumatization *encompasses, but is not limited to* individuals directly affected by the horrible event [emphasis added]. Even if the DSM has not yet made more specific references, the fact that being directly exposed to trauma is no longer the only valid criterion, has paved the way for understanding how ‘the traumatic’ can travel across generations.

What is more, it seems as if certain disunity prevails among researchers with regards to the actual beginning of transgenerational trauma studies. While some scholars regard Abraham and Torok’s work on the “haunting phantom” as seminal (see Schwab 78), others praise the reputed study group around Kestenberg, which investigated second-generation Holocaust victims (see Connolly 610). While the mentioned contributions certainly pioneered the study field, it is a fact that references to transgenerational trauma can already be

Weitlaner <http://www.pressemitteilungen-online.de/index.php/trauma-folgen-aus-kindheit-werden-bis-zu-drei-generationen-weitervererbt/>

found as early as 1913, namely in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. There he states that: "[...] no generation is able to conceal any of its more important mental processes from its successor. [...] An unconscious understanding [...] left behind by the original relation to the father may have made it possible for later generations to take their heritage of emotion" (qtd. in Gardner 299). Even though Freud does not speak of trauma transference as such, he stresses the possibility of transferring psychic material between generations. With his publication of *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud seems to have elaborated on this line of thought:

Trauma, as *wound that never heals*, succeeds in *transforming the subsequent world into its own image*, secure in its capacity to *re-create the experience from one generation to the next*. The result is that the next generation is deprived of its sense of social location and its capacity to creatively define itself autonomously from the former. (qtd. in Prager 176 [emphasis added])

This quotation illustrates what was indicated at the beginning of this chapter. If trauma, in Caruth's terms, is understood as an incurable and persistent phenomenon, it seems possible to say that it can live on in subsequent generations. While Freud's contributions significantly influenced scientific interest in trauma transmission, it cannot be denied that further and more detailed investigations have been undertaken in psychoanalytic work with second-generation Holocaust survivors (see Gardner 297). In other words, current understanding of inherited trauma is, in large part, based on work with children who did not directly experience World War II, but still showed phobic, depressive and pessimistic behavior, as well as PTSD related symptoms (see Sorscher and Cohen 493). Since then, transgenerational trauma has been established as a firm component of psychoanalysis (see Kühner 67) and reaches far beyond the original 'mother-child-focus' (see Volkan, Ast and Greer 28).

Even though trauma inheritance is commonly acknowledged among scholars, it needs to be said that the field is still in its infancy (see Baranovsky et al. 248). While the impact and the effects on descendants have received substantial attention, the question of 'what is actually transmitted' has not been sufficiently considered (see 247). First and foremost, the vast bulk of existing

research consists, in large part, of clinical studies where researchers use cases of their clients to illustrate and prove their assumptions (see Baranovsky et al. 252). Sorscher aptly takes on this delicate issue by stating that: “[t]his inconsistency within literature is probably due [...] to numerous methodological limitations. [...] a predominance of case reports over controlled studies, small sample sizes, sampling biases, lack of standardized instruments and control groups, [and] inadequate control of investigators’ biases [...]” (493). Gardener even states that most of the existing case studies “[...] may raise more questions and concerns than they answer or illustrate” (307). Essentially, despite an existing research body, Volkan, Ast and Greer critically remark that gained insights have not yet found their way into the officially and non-governmentally operating organizations that are actually in charge of the traumatized of our age (see 11).

3.2 *Mechanisms of Transmission*

As the brief excursion into the study field showed, trauma transmission has gained an important scientific status. However, in spite of a vast amount of studies conducted among, for example, Holocaust survivor descendants (now becoming gradually replaced by veteran studies), no definite agreement on the actual mechanisms of transmission has been reached. Accordingly, Dekel emphasizes: “[...] the mechanisms by which trauma and/or its symptoms are transmitted are scarcely known and lack empirical base” (284). It would be wrong to say that the question of how trauma is finally passed on has not received attention. Nevertheless, it seems safe to say that there exists an accumulation of various theories that still lacks structure and coherence. In this context, the following section presents an attempt of embedding transference mechanisms within a structure in order to provide a preliminary overview.

Broadly speaking, it is assumed that the direct opposition of disclosure and silence represents the basic dynamics of transmission. As far as disclosure is concerned, it is a matter of fact that, generally speaking, transference of

memory, knowledge or history happens “directly” (see Dekel 285) by means of language. In terms of trauma survivors, there is the rare but extreme case of overwhelming and ‘flooding’ the mind of listeners with a sheer unmanageable amount of information. In case of children, this transmission can go as far as confronting them with stories that are not adequate for their stage of development (Ibid.). Nonetheless, the impact of “obsessive retelling” (Baranovsky 247) can be equally traumatizing for individuals during later stages of development. Schwab, herself a child of the post World War II era, gives an account of exposure to seemingly endless war stories, serving as a means of integration for their narrators but leaving a nameless horror in the soul of a child (see 42-44).

Even though direct communication accounts for the most obvious form of transference, it is a fact that trauma victims are scarcely capable of communicating their horror. In other words, research shows that traumas “are things hard to recount or even to remember, the results of a violence that holds an unrelenting grip on memory yet is deemed unspeakable” (Schwab 1). As mentioned in the preceding section, trauma is a blow to the integrity of humanity and can consequently wipe out any means of relating to it. However, it will be shown that direct linguistic reference is not necessary for trauma to be passed on. In this respect, Dekel raises awareness for another form of transmission, equally settled in the realm of language though characteristic of its absence:

Communication might become indirect, confusing and ambivalent. [The listeners] detect and receive clues about the past and about their parents’ present behavior [where] [...] only partial details of the [...] traumatic experience are disclosed [...] Lack of knowledge or partial knowledge can lead to imaginary completion [...] and the made-up story may be even more frightening than the real one. (Dekel 285)

Paradoxically, something is being communicated although, in fact, nothing is communicated at all. In other words, traumatized individuals, to a large extent, keep their past secret and do not reveal their suffering. Such an attempt to conceal may often result in ambiguous and disturbing language use. In this case Schwab speaks of a gap that is being transferred: “Today, I am convinced that I picked up on something untold, silenced, violently cut out. [...] Words could be split into what they said and what they did not say. It was as if they

carried a secret that cast me out. I had a vague sense of something deadly, words filled with skeletons” (43). This language of secrets leads over to one of the probably most important mechanisms of trauma transmission – silence.

3.2.1 Silence

The human body is equipped with certain physical reflexes that can assure survival in situations of deadly peril. In this sense, human beings may, for example, instinctively close their eyes in the face of danger. Although this represents a comparatively minor survival reflex it can nonetheless, metaphorically, stand for the powerful shields that protect human beings from their most dreadful experience of elemental fear – trauma. Metaphorically speaking, closing one’s eyes to horror is comparable to a magic formula that feigns the disappearance of misery when no longer looking at it. Similarly, Schwab, who addresses the silencing of trauma, refers to “a form of magical thinking in which [...] one attempts to *make something unbearable go away*” (5 [emphasis added]).

Essentially, the ‘unspeakability’ of trauma reaches deep into its transgenerational aspect and constitutes, at the same time, one of the most powerful means of transmission: “With the increasing research it has also become clear that *one of the principle factors in the intergenerational transmission of trauma is the incapacity on the part of the survivors to remember, to mourn and to symbolize the trauma*” (Connolly 610 [emphasis added]). Furthermore, Schwab stresses that “[t]he silencing of past atrocities *is the most common way in which traumatic legacies are transmitted to the next generation*” (34 [emphasis added]). Gardener (297) comes to talk about “an inhibition of thinking and a pact of silence surrounding the original traumatic experience.” In fact it is exactly this unreflected, non-integrated body of thought that is handed down to descendants (see Eizerik 388-389).

Such an unintegrated legacy can be silenced in different ways. First of all, a particular form shall be mentioned. In this case silence is not necessarily found on the linguistic, but on the emotional level. This emotional silence is characterized by relating to trauma in a mere factual way. Coming to talk about

post-World War II Germany, Schwab criticizes attempts to factually rehabilitate the country: “We received factual knowledge of the historical events. And yet, I would later realize, the silence had not been broken. Silencing in Germany at that time was not a withholding of facts; it was caused by the absence of any kind of emotional engagement [...]” (11). In this respect, it is not so much linguistic silence which causes a traumatic legacy but the inability to emotionally engage with trauma.

Another very common way of hushing up unbearable experiences is effected by splitting trauma off in order to repress and bury it completely. Accordingly, any form of distraction is welcome. Making use of *screen memories* for example is a way of burying a personal trauma under a heap of strange traumata, not related to oneself. This is to say that through facing and engaging with other stories of horror, the individual can forget about his or her own misery as these traumata of strangers serve as an effective means of distraction (see Schwab 22-23).

While some try to silence trauma within themselves, others “externalize” it as “through [this] stable externalization individuals can free themselves from the pathological influences of their bruised parts” (Volkan, Ast and Greer 35). This process of externalization is an effective means of repression as trauma is completely split off and then ‘virtually’ projected onto another individual. On the surface, such persons seem to have escaped unscathed because, for a certain amount of time, they are able to implant their pain into another individual. However, this idyll may not last for long as their trauma can always fall back on them (see *Ibid.*).

Nonetheless, it seems safe to say that attempts of ignoring and repressing are futile and, above all, counterproductive. Through the silencing process trauma seems to become increasingly contagious. Schwab explicitly stresses that “[t]he falsification or disregard of the past or the deconstruction and silencing [...] is the breeding ground for the [...] *return of [...] secrets on the level of individuals, families, communities, and possibly even nations*” (57 [emphasis added]). As suggested, the impact of traumatic secrecy is powerful to

the extent that legacies can be transferred on a level as big as a whole nation¹². On the small group level on the other hand, silence often encompasses family secrets where mostly shameful traumatic events are silenced and repressed, therefore leading to a befalling of the successors in the family line (see Schwab 13).

3.2.2 The Unconscious

As already mentioned, falsifying, repressing, cutting off from emotions, externalizing or taking it to the grave may give the impression of banning trauma from one's life, however, "[...] *trauma can never be completely silenced since its effects continue to operate unconsciously*" (Schwab 79 [emphasis added]). Substantially, Schwab underscores that trauma cannot be kept secret as even silence, the seemingly most effective way of banishing trauma, is not effective. This ineffectiveness explains itself in agreement with the fact that there exists a "crucial fluidity of psychic borders," between individuals (Volkan, Ast and Greer 27). To put it in different terms, there does not only seem to be sort of a 'supernatural' unconscious connection between parents and their offspring (see Burlingham qtd. in Gardner 302), the unconscious interplay between adults is equally acknowledged (see Gardener 302). Accordingly, the above cited researchers suggest that a silent transmission is effected by means of the unconscious and therefore illustrate the latter's seminal role. Although understanding the unconscious as the crucial component of silent transmission, the question is raised how the unconscious actually intervenes in the process. In this sense, among others, two possible ways shall be presented subsequently. Schwab skillfully elucidates that:

[m]emories are passed on from generation to generation, most immediately through stories told or written, but more subliminally through a parent's moods or modes of being that create a particular economy of aesthetics of care. Formed during the earliest phases of life, the latter are often remembered not as thoughts or words or stories but existentially as moods or even somatically in the form of embodied psychic life. Often it

¹² Cf. Section 3.3 Transference on the Cultural Level

is through the transgenerational transmission of body memories and forms of somatic psychic life that trauma is unconsciously received and remembered. (51)

In this sense, children who are confronted with silence are still able to perceive the horror through, as Schwab calls it, *embodied psychic life*. Here trauma is unconsciously mirrored in the moods, behavior as well as on the body of victims. She argues that children concerned actually “become avid readers of silences and memory traces hidden in a face frozen with grief, a forced smile that does not feel right, an apparently unmotivated flare-up of rage, or chronic depression” (14). In other words, even when words are missing, the body seems to take over a certain part of the communication. This somatic body language logically operates on the unconscious level and may therefore be hard to identify. However, as subtle as embodied psychic life may be, it certainly affects the unconscious of descendants.

Besides this psycho-somatic component of unconscious transmission, Fonagy draws on attachment theory in order to explain how the unconscious of parents can find its way into offspring. He maintains that: “[...] the infant’s observation of the self becomes meaningful in the context of the caregiver’s reactions to his or her expressions of intentionality. The internalization at the core of the child’s self is a perception of the caregiver’s perceptions of him or her as an intentional being [...]” (102). To put it in simpler terms, the identity of children is significantly influenced, if not dependent, on parents’ reactions to the child’s behavior. Through seeing its actions mirrored and reflected back upon him or herself, the child can gradually form an identity. However, what happens when the adult counterpart, the mirror, is afflicted with trauma and therefore cannot fulfill this task? In such a case, when the child misses out on receiving a reflection of his or her own personality, it is compelled to incorporate the image of the caregiver. This is a particularly delicate issue with traumatized parents as “[their] dissociated core is an absence, rather than genuine psychic content. It reflects a breach in the boundaries of the self, creating an openness in the [child’s] self to colonization by the mental states of the attachment figure” (105). To recapitulate, a trauma afflicted attachment figure cannot provide the child with the natural and vital reflections which the child needs in order to learn

about him or herself. The personality of traumatized people is mostly of a torn apart nature, a dissociated self that needs to be reassembled laboriously. In this respect, the only reflection the child receives is the 'perforated' self-image of the parental figure and consequently incorporates it into his or personal fabric. By this means, a gap, if not various ones, are transferred, leaving the child without stability in terms of traumatizing circumstances. With these voids, the child is finally unprotected and helplessly exposed to the unconscious flow of the traumatic.

3.2.3 A Theory of Secrets - The Transgenerational Phantom

As far as the transgenerational consequences of silence are concerned, it seems safe to say that no other concept has proved as influential as Abraham and Torok's theory of secrets. As the terminology suggests, in the center of the researchers' work stands a secret. Most importantly, their understanding of secrets is not comparable to the word's common definition as: "[f]or the authors, a secret is not primarily a hushed-up fact, a covert plot, a private feeling, or confidential knowledge kept from others" (Rand 99). Abraham and Torok rather concerned themselves with "the psychological weight of unwanted, shameful, or untoward reality and [...] [humanity's] tendency to isolate painful realities, thereby removing them from the free circulation of our ideas, emotions, imaginations, creations, responses, initiatives, and contact with other people" (Ibid. 102). Essentially, their theory roots in inexpressible mourning at the origin of which stands a trauma of loss (see Ibid. 99) or to express it in the authors' words: "there was the metapsychological traumatism of a loss or, more precisely, the 'loss' that resulted from a traumatism" (Abraham and Torok, *The Lost* 141). The impact of this loss is such that the individual cannot possibly endure the painful reality and consequently locks the horror in an unreachable area of his or her soul (see Rand 102). This secret then seals the horrendous consequences of trauma and all associated affects with the aim of eternal repression (see Ibid. 99-100). Nevertheless, any account of Abraham and Torok's concept is incomplete without shedding some light onto the mechanisms which underlie the formation of this secret place within individuals:

introjection and *incorporation*. For the authors, these two mechanisms represent the basic foundations of the human soul and its functioning. In order to attain full comprehension of these essential concepts, each one shall be briefly considered in its own right.

To begin with, the idea behind introjection is “that the psyche is in a constant process of acquisition, involving the active expansion of our potential to open onto our own emerging desires and feelings as well as the external world [...],” or in other words, “the constantly renewed process of self-creating-self” (Rand 100). As a matter of fact, introjection then stands for the normal and ‘sane’ way of dealing with traumatic loss, namely for gradually working through it and integrating it into the psychic fabric. On the other hand, as far as incorporation is concerned, Torok notes that:

[t]his mechanism does suppose the loss of an object in order to take effect; it implies a loss that occurred before the desires concerning the object might have been freed. The loss acts as a prohibition and, whatever form it may take, constitutes an insurmountable obstacle to introjection. The prohibited object is settled in the ego in order to compensate for the lost pleasure and the failed introjection. (*The Illness* 113)

As these illustrations suggest, introjection and incorporation are fundamentally different concepts “[a] sharp distinction, indeed a mutually exclusive opposition” (Rand 101). On the one hand, we find a representation of a harmonious and well-ordered life progress, and on the other, the horror of trauma and the major obstacles this entails. With introjection and incorporation we are confronted with the process of making the self as well as its complete opposite, namely the impediment of self-development (see 101-102). Schwab elucidates: “[a]ccording to Abraham, under normal circumstances a person mourns a loss by *introjecting* the lost person or object. Introjection facilitates integration into the psychic fabric. By contrast, a person who refuses to mourn incorporates the lost object by disavowing the loss, thus keeping the object ‘alive’ inside” (1). In this sense, introjection is a gradual process involving the whole psyche and demanding from the individual to put effort into rehabilitating the self, while incorporation “is instantaneous and magical” (Torok, *The Illness* 113). Emphasizing this ‘magical aspect’ of incorporation, Abraham and Torok argue that such a “[...] fantasy is

essentially narcissistic; [because] it tends to transform the world rather than inflict injury on the subject” (*Mourning* 125).

Even though introjection and incorporation represent an antagonism as obvious as day and night, it can be argued that the two concepts are intertwined in a certain way. Torok argues that “[t]he ultimate aim of incorporation is to recover, in secret and through magic, an object that, for one reason or another, evaded its own function: mediating the introjections of desires.” In other words, nature demands to acknowledge and deal with traumatic loss by means of introjection. However, when introjection fails, incorporation is the ‘only way out’. But choosing this path actually means to ‘defy the laws of nature’ which is why “[...] incorporation is an eminently illegal act; it must hide even from the ego. Secrecy is imperative for survival” (*The Illness* 114). Torok’s arguments indicate that incorporation is a result of unsuccessful introjection and therefore shows the only point of contact between the two psychological dynamics. The researcher makes clear that:

[t]hirsting for introjection despite an insurmountable internal obstacle, the ego tricks itself with a magical procedure in which ‘eating’ (the feast) is paraded as the equivalent of an immediate but purely hallucinatory and illusory ‘introjection.’ [...] it is merely a language *signaling* introjection, without accomplishing it [...] Realizing that incorporation is a form of language, which merely states the desire to introject, marks an important step [...]. (Ibid. 115)

Accordingly, it can be argued that incorporation is a natural consequence of failed introjection. Natural in the sense that incorporation, in view of shattering trauma, “exempts the subject from the painful process of reorganization. [...] [I]ncorporation is the refusal to acknowledge the full import of the loss, a loss that, if recognized as such, would effectively transform us” (Abraham and Torok, *Mourning* 127). At times, traumata are so unbearable that facing them would mean to virtually ‘shatter into pieces’. As it was argued in the previous chapter, trauma has the horrible potential to destroy the *weltanschauung* of human beings. Consequently, rebuilding ones *weltschauung* presupposes to be ready to reassemble ones shattered pieces in a difficult and tedious process. In this context, incorporation stands for the human failure of choosing this stony path.

From Secrecy to the Crypt

Returning to Abraham and Torok's transgenerational trauma theory, it can be argued that incorporation is the driving force behind, if not even the actual embodiment of their theory of secrets:

The words that cannot be uttered, the scenes that cannot be recalled, the tears that cannot be shed-everything will be swallowed along with the trauma that led to the loss. Swallowed and preserved. Inexpressible mourning erects a *secret tomb* inside the subject. Reconstituted from the memories of words, scenes, and affects, the objectal correlative of the loss *is buried alive in the crypt* as a full-fledged person, complete with its own topography. The crypt also includes the actual or supposed trauma that made introjection impracticable. A whole world of unconscious fantasy is created, one that leads its own separate and concealed existence. (Abraham and Torok, *Mourning* 130)

Incorporation as a failed attempt of introjection, as the researchers put it, forces individuals to build a secret tomb inside themselves where they can banish their trauma to. In this context, the so far used terminology of secrecy is complemented, if not replaced by what Abraham and Torok call *the tomb*, or *the crypt*. To be more precise, the crypt "marks a definite place in the topography. It is neither the dynamic unconscious nor the ego of introjections. Rather, it is an enclave between the two, a kind of artificial unconscious, lodged in the very midst of the ego. [...] The ego is given the task of a cemetery guard" (*The Topography* 159). The importance of keeping trauma secret is the primary aim of so called "cryptophores", which denotes the people who have erected a tomb inside themselves (see Abraham and Torok, *Mourning* 132). This policy of secrets goes as far as building tombs inside language as well. In other words, as a fierce means of protecting their secret crypt, cryptophores distort language and empty it of all possible clues which could hint at the dead body inside themselves. This language of secrets is known as *cryptonomy* (see Rand 105) or, as Schwab puts it "linguistic scars of trauma" (4).

Nonetheless, the essence of transgenerational trauma lies in the fact that these erected tombs cannot remain in the dark: "[t]he unspeakable words and sentences, linked as they are to memories of great libidinal and narcissistic value, cannot accept their exclusion" (Abraham and Torok, *Mourning* 132). At times, without any possibility of relating to the crypt, the body of the cryptophore

remains as the only 'venue' for establishing a connection between the cemetery and its guard. Interestingly, Abraham and Torok suggest a link to so called psychosomatic illnesses which they, partly, attribute to the fact of having entombed a secret that cannot rest (*Self to Self* 163). According to the authors, those repressed traumata, the buried and entombed secrets, which refuse their burial, finally develop a life of their own. In other words, incorporating trauma through erecting a secret tomb inside oneself gives rise to what has come to be known as *the transgenerational phantom*.

The Haunting Phantom

Abraham and Torok's theory of the *haunting phantom* represents the fruits of more than twenty years of collaboration (see Rand 165). The authors aptly demonstrate the transgenerational relevance of this theory:

While it is a distinct clinical and theoretical entity, the *idea of the phantom is also a direct extension of [...] previous work on secrets and crypts [...]* *The phantom represents the interpersonal and transgenerational consequences of silence. [...]* [T]he idea of the phantom concerns itself with the unwitting reception of someone else's secret. Though manifest in one individual's psyche, the phantom eventually leads to the psychoanalysis [...] of several generations (parents, grandparents, uncles, et al.) through the symptoms of a descendant. (Ibid. 168 [emphasis added])

This quotation nicely summarizes the argumentation which has been undertaken in this section so far. The phantom theory has its origin in Abraham and Torok's reflections on secrecy or, as it is also called, the intrapsychic tomb. Rooting in reflections of incorporating and enclosing a crypt, the phantom is then described as the inevitable consequence of generations which are shrouded in and invisibly connected through silence. The phantom theory connects folklore and psychology in a particular and interesting way. Giving "psychological substance to age-old beliefs," Abraham and Torok achieve to couple irrationality with rationality in order to create new and meaningful knowledge (see Ibid. 166-167). Taking a closer look at folklore can indeed enlighten us on the basics of transgenerational trauma. The belief that the ghosts of the dead can return in order to haunt the living is as old as time and rooted in all civilizations. While ghost stories may vary from culture to culture, it

is a commonly held belief that, among the crowd of the undead, some are especially prone to haunting, namely “those who were denied the rite of burial or died an unnatural, abnormal death, were criminals or outcasts, or suffered injustice in their lifetime” (Ibid. 167).

While the unacknowledged ghosts of folk myths represent a very apt and illustrious explanation for understanding the haunting from within the tomb of cryptophores, this comparison cannot be taken literally. It is certainly not the dead who return from their graves, but the business they had to leave unfinished in the world of the living. To be more precise, it is the voids produced through secrecy that survive in subsequent generations, haunting them. In this sense, the phantom is nothing else but a fabrication of the heirs of these gaps (see Ibid.) Torok furthermore clarifies:

In general terms, the "phantom" is a formation in the dynamic unconscious that is found there not because of the subject's own repression but on account of a direct empathy with the unconscious or the rejected psychic matter of a parental object. Consequently, the phantom is not at all the product of the subject's self-creation by means of the interplay between repression and introjections. The phantom is alien to the subject who harbors it. (*Story of 181*)

With these arguments it becomes evident that the haunted individual is not to be equated with the cryptophore. The person who entombed a ghost inside him or herself can certainly experience haunting through the dead body encrypted within his or her soul. However this is not to be confused with the situation of following generations. As Torok stresses, the phantom that comes to haunt is not the phantom of the persecuted descendant, but the unfinished business that was refused to be introjected in the former generation. It is then the task of the heirs to deal with and finally bury this phantom.

The value of Abraham and Torok's theory is uncontested. As we are currently confronted with a 'flood' of clinical case studies focusing on transmission of PTSD, their conception provides a toolkit for working on the basis of transgenerational trauma. It has the potential to clearly illustrate the basic functioning of transgenerational trauma and offers an apt terminology for its description. What is more, it seems safe to say that this theory can provide

valuable contributions for cases that exceed individual, as well as family psychology:

Aspects of this concept have the potential to illuminate the genesis of social institutions and may provide a new perspective for inquiring into the psychological roots of cultural patterns and political ideology. [...] Abraham and Torok's work enables us to understand how the falsification, ignorance, or disregard of the past-whether institutionalized by a totalitarian state (as in former East Germany) or practiced by parents and grandparents-is the breeding ground of the phantomatic return of shameful secrets on the level of individuals, families, the community, and possibly even entire nations. (Rand 169)

Having said this, Abraham and Torok's ideas are not only valid for small-scale transmission but can include and explain the heritage of large-group trauma. Schwab asserts that the *phantom theory*, although focusing very much on the family domain, lends itself to incorporating larger groups of people who are united through traumatic experiences beyond the family line. As she puts it "Abraham's concept of the phantom is particularly relevant for an analysis of the transmission of historical trauma though [sic] the cultural unconscious" (78-79). In this sense, the focus shall be shifted in order to include large-group chosen trauma and its peculiarities.

3.3 Transference on the Cultural Level

It needs to be said that trauma can be handed down on different levels of human relationships. The more intensively researched transference through the close and intimate bonds of family lines is mostly the first that springs to mind. Nonetheless, this aspect of trauma heritage represents only one side of the coin as "[t]raumatic [...] legacies may be transmitted individually via unconscious fantasies of parents and grandparents, *as well as collectively through the cultural unconscious*" (Schwab 77 [emphasis added]).

In this respect, one specific researcher has put particular effort into investigating the transmission of large-group traumas. In collaboration with Gabriele Ast and William Greer, Vamik Volkan dedicated the seminal work *The Third Reich in the Unconscious* to investigating the collective aspects of trauma

transference. The researchers' work grounds itself on the assumption that "[...] transgenerational transmission of large-group chosen trauma [...] is sufficiently distinct from [other] mechanisms [...]" (42). With this argument it is possible to understand and acknowledge the transmission of collective traumas as a distinct concept which needs consideration in its own right. In order to account for this particular phenomenon it is, first of all, important to define and understand what a collective trauma is:

[...] when members of a group experience a severe and collective trauma, it is not simply a matter of many individuals of that group sharing similar symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, utilizing similar defense mechanisms or exhibiting symptoms of similar psychological problems. Such traumatic events affect all those under the ethnic or national tent [...]. (Volkan, *Transgenerational Transmissions* 86-87)

This quotation nicely illustrates that an accumulation of individual trauma symptoms, meaning many individuals who share the same trauma effects, cannot produce a collective trauma. Volkan aptly uses the metaphor of a collective tent in order to elucidate his conception. Alexander argues in a similar way when he states that "[...] cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, *a tear in the social fabric*, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" (61 [emphasis added]). Kühner makes clear that a mere reference to history is also not sufficient for the genesis of a cultural trauma. This is to say, not any tragic historical event will be introduced into the canon of traumatic collectivity (see 101). In this respect, Alexander elaborated some criteria that need to be fulfilled in order for trauma to achieve cultural relevance:

It must be remembered, or made to be remembered. Furthermore, the memory must be made culturally relevant, that is, represented as obliterating, damaging, or rendering problematic something sacred - usually a value or outlook felt to be essential for the integrity of the affected society. Finally, the memory must be associated with a strong negative affect, usually disgust, shame, or guilt. (36)

In this context, Volkan, Ast and Greer argue for designating cultural or collective trauma as "chosen" trauma. In their eyes, it is the unconscious choice of a whole collectivity to perceive a certain trauma so important as to include it into their collective identity and shared mental representations. They further say that

“[...] chosen trauma forms thousands of millions of people designated - ‘chosen’ - to be linked together through their shared mental representation of that trauma” (42).

According to Abraham and Torok’s theory of the *tomb*, Volkan affirms that “[t]he transgenerational transmission of such a shared traumatic event is linked to the past generation’s inability to mourn losses of people, land or prestige, and indicates the large-group’s failure to reverse narcissistic injury and humiliation inflicted by another large group [...]” (*Transgenerational Transmissions* 87). As this quotation suggests, the inability to introject the trauma creates a crypt that is then passed on. While this shows clear parallels to the aforementioned theory of secrets (primarily concerned with the secrets of individuals and their family), the collective crypt, especially its content, is distinctly different. The content of such a collective trauma is naturally related to the bigger national or ethical tent. Keeping this in mind, the tomb of larger groups may contain the wounds of loss of property or national heritage or even the unfinished business of converting afflicted shame and humiliation caused by adversary groups. Rising from the collective crypt, the collective phantom then embodies a “complex of mental representation that is passed to future generations who, as ‘carriers,’ must cope with the unmastered psychological tasks given to them by their ancestors” (Volkan, Ast, and Greer 25).

As far as its actual transmission is concerned, large-group traumata show yet another peculiarity. Volkan, Ast and Greer refer to their theory of *deposited representation* (36) which stands for the fact that transmission of chosen trauma goes far beyond children’s mimicking of their parents. Essentially, representations of the shared trauma are actively circulated within a collectively wounded society (see 43). The authors explain that:

[...] there is another type of unconscious fantasy that is developed solely by the child from images of the traumatic experiences suffered by the large group or groups to which the child belongs; the shared mental representation of the group’s history becomes connected to some aspect of the child’s developmental conflicts and thus comes to appear in the ‘content’ of such unconscious fantasies. (40-41)

The mentioned history-related unconscious fantasies refer to the fact that the minds of subsequent generations are not only filled with traumatic self- and

object representations of their parents or their personal developmental traumas. Accordingly, it is the “children’s reactions to images of [...] the general historical trauma their parent’s group suffered that have been deposited in children by significant adults [...],” which represents the characteristic of chosen trauma transmission (Ibid.) In other words, as far as chosen trauma is concerned, mental representations of the latter, not the individual trauma histories of relatives, circulated within the affected group, gain great importance and are responsible for assuring the heritage of national wounds.

A final remark on chosen trauma shall be concerned with a fascinating, nevertheless worrying aspect. Volkan, equally interested in large-group identity issues, raises awareness for the fact that chosen trauma possesses a certain latency and can therefore hibernate for a long time, sealed off in the unconscious of a nation until needed. In other words, chosen trauma may gain a strange form of utility in the hands of the wrong people:

Over generations [...] *chosen traumas* [...] become more than a memory or shared piece of past. With time, the chosen trauma changes function. The historical truth about the event is no longer important for the large group, but what is important is that through sharing the chosen trauma, members of the group are linked together. This component of ethnic, national or religious identity [...] can be reactivated and exert a powerful psychological force. Leaders intuitively seem to know how to reactivate the chosen trauma [...]. (*Transgenerational Transmissions* 88)

This argumentation suggests that chosen traumas have a particular longevity. While researchers like Schwab are sure that the haunting quality of trauma fades with each transmission (see 81) this seems to be only partly true for collective wounds. As Volkan notes, one of the special characteristics of trauma on the collective level is the fact that, although laid to rest long time ago, it can be reactivated as if it had never been forgotten. In such a case it becomes possible to feel a sudden connection and affiliation to generations that have vanished long time ago. With identifying this long shadow of collective trauma, Volkan certainly provides a valuable analytic tool for large-group conflicts.

3.4 Reactions to a Traumatic Heritage

As already stated in the previous section, concrete ways of how trauma is transferred are still unclear. While research has not yet yielded conclusive results, Pearrow is even convinced that this will never be achieved. Nevertheless, by drawing on Ancharoff, Munroe, and Fisher (1998) she attempts an overview of the most apparent mechanisms of transmission. She refers to the importance of silence and disclosure, but also comes to talk about identification and re-enactment (see qtd in Pearrow 79). Although any attempt has to be undertaken to shed light on this still unclear subject, it shall be argued that it is not as straightforward as Pearrow puts it. As far as silence and disclosure are concerned, it was shown that they are to be found at the core of transmission dynamics. However, emphasis shall be put on making a clear distinction between mechanisms of transmission and reactions such a heritage can provoke with descendants. In this respect, identification and re-enactment, for example, would refer to reactions and consequently not be counted among mechanisms of transference as such. In other words, as demonstrated, trauma can basically be transmitted via the direct or more indirect mechanisms of language use or absence as well as through a dysfunctional family environment. This is transference in its strictest sense (as for the line of argument presented in this thesis). In opposition to that is the reaction of people to traumatic heritage. Eventually, trauma is not gradually instilled into a dead object but a living being that will certainly show reactive responses to 'this thing' passed on. Thus, the most evident reactive responses of trauma survivor offspring shall be considered.

First of all, children (or subsequent generations in more general) may react by identifying with their ancestors. This form of identification should not be confused with the general curiosity that children feel for their parents' past. It can be considered the normal course of life that offspring take an interest in the stories of their caregivers and ask questions about historical facts. However, this behavior is not necessarily intentional and may happen 'en passant' (see Kühner 75). The case can be particularly different for children of trauma

survivors. Bergman maintains that these children feel a special and more urgent need to learn about and discover the past of their parents, “they have a mission to live in the past and to change it” (101). In this sense, offspring identify with the older generations as they feel the need to somehow undo the horrors of the past. On the other hand, the motivation for identification can be different on the side of perpetrator offspring as these may develop a certain fascination for the horrible deeds of their ancestors (see Kühner 75). Certainly, establishing such a close connection to the parental generation can have considerable consequences. Dekel reckons that “[...] children may identify with the projected parts of their fathers’ emotions, and perceive his experiences and feelings as their own. These unconscious processes can make it difficult for the child to form a separate self [...]” (284). Prager similarly remarks that “[...] children differentiate less completely from their parents, see themselves as protectors of their parents rather than vice versa, and tend to inhibit their own impulse to establish independence and autonomy” (177). Having said this, problems with autonomy and identity formation are commonly found with children of trauma survivors.

In the sense of having a certain mission, descendants may feel the need to resolve or to repair. Consequently, reparation and resolution can be seen as another reaction to traumatic heritage. Volkan’s concept of the *deposited image* lends itself to describing such a process. His theory “involves the depositing of an already formed self or object image into the developing self-representation of a child under the premise that there it can be kept safe and the resolution [...] postponed until a future time” (*Transgenerational Transmissions* 86). Descendants become a “reservoir for a traumatized [image],” and are, unconsciously, assigned the task of resolving the unreflected past. Such a development presupposes that “survivors have not resolved their conflicts [...] it is they who initiate the passing of those images to the children, together with associated psychological tasks such as repairing [...] and reversing the humiliation of the events” (37). This is of course valid for both, descendants of victims and perpetrators. When it comes to the latter it is mostly the rejection of guilt that leads to its transference (see Weigel 269). In this respect, Schwab

makes an interesting suggestion when referring to a heritage of responsibility, rather than guilt: “[a]mong the legacies unwittingly inherited by future generations, I argue, is the task of breaking the silence in order to take responsibility for the violence [...]” (34). As far as trauma victims are concerned, resolving the past may consist in working through failed psychological processes such as reversal of helplessness or mourning of losses (see Volkan, Ast, and Greer 3). Summing up, on the one hand it seems that the urge to repair and resolve can stem from a willing and intensive identification with the parents caused by strong feelings of empathy. On the other hand, researchers identify an unconscious component where tasks may be unconsciously assigned through the ignorance of previous generations.

There is yet a third common way of how descendants can react to a traumatic heritage, namely reenactment. Brenner for example refers to the phenomenon of “simultaneously living in two worlds,” (120) as children have been observed to reenact scenes of their parents’ trauma. Schwab explains that descendants are faced with the delicate task of living and telling a story of which they are actually not the protagonist. As this transmitted life-story was never fully experienced, the subsequent generations have a very limited means of relating to it. The author notices the occurrence of plaguing dreams, fantasies, somatic disturbances, or the strange compulsion *to repeat parts of the trauma* [emphasis added]. In the particular case of survivor offspring, such uncanny symptoms often appear as the only way of how the buried past retells itself (see 81). Furthermore, Kühner emphasizes the crucial role of silence by arguing that the transmission of a gap leads children to be fixated on their parents’ life to such an extent that they create and act out this void in their own life-story (see 71).

Several theoretical concepts elucidate the phenomenon of reenactment. The already mentioned ‘time tunnel’ of trauma for example comes in handy for comprehending the time distortion behind reenactment which causes descendants to “weave their parents’ past into their own developmental experience, as well as unconsciously relive moments of the parents’ survival

experience [...]” (Brenner xii-xiii). Moreover, Gardener refers to Kestenberg’s theoretical model of *transposition* (1993), which describes descendants “complete immersion,” into their ancestors trauma story (301). Comparably, Kogan adopts a similar stance when describing the phenomenon of *concretization* where patients become the actors of their parents’ lives without knowing what they are doing (see 804).

While such arguments hint at an unconscious form of reenacting, Danieli (1985) raises awareness for the fact that parents, particularly those who escaped the ravages of war, may willingly train their children how to survive in the case of another prospective misery. In this respect, children will consciously reenact the strategies of survival that they have been taught by their parents, even without acute danger in sight. On the whole, reenactment seems to be a way of ‘regaining’ or ‘retelling’, sometimes consciously but mostly unconsciously, a story that is not one’s own. While this seems like a conclusive statement, it is a fact that reenactment counts among the phenomena that still poses questions to researchers. Kühner emphasizes that the current state of research is not yet satisfactory. The difficulty involved is the heterogeneity of this phenomenon as there exists a spectrum of possible reenactments that, although related to the trauma, can differ considerably from the actual course of events (see 70). In this respect relating certain behavior to parents’ traumatic life-events proves sometimes difficult.

After having considered three possible reactive responses, it seems safe to say that, although each one represents a phenomenon in its own right, identification, repairing/resolving and reenactment are closely interrelated. In other words, reparation and reenactment for example may stem from a close identification with the caregivers. Or, to put it differently, after having identified with the traumatic past, reenactment may serve the purpose of finally introjecting and working through the failed resolution process. Whichever way one looks at it, these three concepts cannot be considered in isolation from each other.

4. Literature and Trauma – Filling the Void

While the first part of this thesis aimed at providing the necessary theoretical background, it is now time to 'breathe some life' into scholarly theories and scientific considerations on trauma inheritance. According to the convincing argumentation of Schwab, such an undertaking may be affected by resorting to literature:

[...] [I]n order to make trauma accessible, a form needs to be found that translates into language or symbolic expression an experience that is only unconsciously registered and left as a mere trace on the affective and corporal levels. Literature and arts can become transformational objects in the sense that they endow this knowledge with a symbolic form of expression [...]. (8)

The difficulty involved in relating to trauma is generally acknowledged among researchers and was subject to some discussion in the previous section. Although 'finding a voice' presents an enormous challenge for trauma survivors, the author acknowledges literature as a "transformational object" which provides a means for relating and expressing the 'unspeakable' (see 7). She even goes as far as distinctly designating literature as one of the most suitable "empirical data" which can be used in order to account for trauma transference (see 3-4). Comparing and contrasting artistic language to juridical language use, Felman similarly attributes the former great potential to provide an infinite space for exploring and dealing with psychic life (see 253). While the lion's share of Schwab's work on haunting legacies focuses on "writing from within the core of trauma," as for instance memoirs or testimonies (see 41), Codde equally emphasizes the endeavors of third generations' writing: "In order to bridge the epistemological abyss that separates them from this inaccessible era, third-generation authors take the imaginative leap implied by the concept of post memory [...] to fill in the blanks left by their absent history" (64). Codde's remark is of particular importance as it extends the range of empirical literary data available. In other words, it shows that even subsequent generations, which were not directly affected by a certain traumatic event, can have a sense of affiliation with the suffering of their forebears and may feel the need to explore and appropriate this past by means of literature.

Even though LaCapra's critical remarks on the delicacy involved in trauma writing are equally acknowledged¹³, the following second part of this thesis makes a strong claim for considering the art of literature as a crucial tool for illustrating and challenging trauma theories. As Schwab formulates appropriately "[...] fiction, poetry, and film can create a more protected space to explore the effects of violence from within multiple voices embedded in imagined daily lives" (5). In this sense, three contemporary South African novels will be under closer investigation in order to enable an application and illustration of the theory presented in the first section.

¹³ LaCapra comes to talk about the phenomenon of transference which describes the tendency of becoming too involved in one's suffering with clear impact on trauma communication (cf. LaCapra, *Representing* 110).

5. The Dreamcloth

The first work of South African literature, Joanne Fedler's *The Dreamcloth*, is an illustrious and very special example as far as transgenerational trauma is concerned. This novel lends itself to addressing and illustrating the haunting effects of trauma like no other. According to Volkan's concept of *chosen trauma*, trauma transmission may concern individuals as well as thousands or even millions of people. However, in *The Dreamcloth*, the reader becomes entangled and drawn into a story centering on the shameful family secret of Jewish immigrants to South Africa. The feeling of shame, as well as the pride and ignorance of certain family members, leads to the hushing up of the traumatic incident. In this manner, the unspeakable is denied the natural process of introjection and therefore doomed to slumber in a family crypt as long as three generations. With regard to the fact that trauma cannot be silenced forever, the buried family secret eventually returns and literally 'befalls' the third-generation female descendant. In this sense, the distinctiveness of Fedler's novel is enhanced as it presents the probably most distinctly identifiable haunting phantom in the contemporary South African novel genre. Naturally, this novel lends itself to exemplifying Abraham and Torok's theory of secrets. What is more, the novel's focus on 'trauma across generations' equally seeps into the narration of the book. *The Dreamcloth* consists of six parts where an omniscient and non-intrusive narrator 'jumps' from generation to generation and grants insights into the different characters involved. This narrative technique skillfully illustrates how three generations can become prisoners of a silenced tragedy.

While the narration creates different protagonists at different stages of time, the plot revolves around the granddaughter Mia and her struggle with a burdensome legacy from childhood to adulthood. Already at the beginning of the novel, it becomes clear that Mia is in some way 'different'. The reader is introduced to the adult heroine who, working as a journalist, chases international human tragedies in order to report on testimonies of Bosnian ethnic cleansing victims, people involved in the Tiananmen massacre, or Somalians ravaged by civil war. After a passionate night with "a lovely man, but

a stranger nonetheless,” (Fedler 13) the young woman reveals her peculiar ‘gift’: “Suddenly everything became shrill - even the silence - and she knew with the clarity of physical pain that planets had shifted. [...] [S]he cupped her hands over her skull to hold her ghost still. It wrestled free. *Settle*, she thought, *just settle down. I’m trying to figure it out*” (Ibid.). Whereas the first chapters of the novel play with and dwell on this uncanny issue, the reader immediately comprehends that Mia must be possessed by a ghost. Other characters, which gradually discover uncanny parallels to Mia’s grandmother Maya, provide clues pointing to the origins of this spook. Bewildered by his daughter’s strange behavior Issey, the father, appropriately remarks “My God- she’s just like Ma [...] Just like the old lady” (44). Moreover, this suspicion is fed by the presentation of grandmother Maya’s life, which the author skillfully intersperses throughout the novel. The life stories of these two women are interrelated and show clear parallels. Through weaving the grandmother’s traumatic past into Mia’s present, Fedler sends her heroine on a long journey of identity struggle where the restless ghosts of the past must be appeased and a family secret uncovered and integrated.

Having said this, the subsequent chapter will concentrate on demonstrating the transgenerational aspects of *The Dreamcloth* with particular focus on its ‘ghostly manifestations’. The central analysis will lean on the novel’s structure and provide analytic insights into crucial characters of the different generations involved. Accordingly, and drawing on (transgenerational) trauma terminology, the structure of the following chapter shall initially zoom in on the first generation, Mia’s grandmother, who is ‘the origin’ or the ‘root’ of the haunting trauma. Furthermore, the so called “trigger” for the creation of the transgenerational phantom will be under closer investigation, which puts the essential role of Maya’s husband into the centre of attention. Eventually, the analysis will deal with Mia, the third generation representative, who has become the ‘vessel’, or, in other terms, the heir of an unintegrated trauma, as well as the host for an unacknowledged and restless phantom.

5.1 Maya – The Origin

*'This room, this cold dark place-I shall return to it every time I close my eyes,
for you made it warm and bright,' Maya whispered.
'You, with your copper hair and your nimble fingers.
You, my Rochel-a. You.'* (Fedler 193)

As already stated, the particular structure of *The Dreamcloth* offers the possibility of taking an insight into the origin of the trauma that eventually encompasses and haunts several generations. In this respect, the novel clearly sets itself apart from the other primary text used. It can be argued that *A Daughter's Legacy* does not provide such a concrete and detailed depiction of the original traumatizing circumstances. What is more, through abducting the reader not only into the grandmother's lifetime, but also into her world of feelings, Fedler draws the portrait of a woman whose 'true self' had to be hidden from contemporaries, as well as the generations to come. Taking this into account, Maya's story stands at the beginning of *The Dreamcloth's* central problematic and provides the 'material of which transgenerational traumas are made.' In other words, all further developments of the plot are related to the grandmother's life events, which makes a more detailed account of her story invaluable for understanding the considerable effects on her descendants.

Maya Kaslowski's deeply sad story unfolds in the harsh and degrading living conditions of Lithuania, prior to World War II. Just like for all other members of the small Jewish community in Kovno, Maya's life means a constant struggle for survival. Not only the grim winters, raging diseases, famine and extreme poverty make it a hostile place; the constant threat of persecution holds its firm grip on every Jew. Although partly tolerated by native Lithuanians, a lot of Jews face xenophobia and hostility, which makes expulsion the harsh reality of their life. It seems as if God has left this place and his "chosen people" a long time ago:

[...] happiness was something behind your eyes, imaginary, mythical, like the stories of Jonah in the belly of the whale and of the courage of David who felled the giant, Goliath. Only in sleep could she be far from the cold, the frostbite, the dizzying hunger. In dreams she danced, sang and

laughed until pain melted away and a kind of glory opened up. (Fedler 153)

In face of this daily misery, the economic aspects of marriage become more and more important. In this context, Maya, daughter of a respectable family, “the obedient daughter, the woman of valor with her price above rubies,” (75) finds herself in an arranged marriage with Yankel, a stranger. She soon starts to understand that she is, more than any other unhappily married woman, not made for such a relationship. It is not that her husband would be unkind or violent for Yankel seems to be truly in love with his wife. The reasons are subtler and more far-reaching than the reader may suspect at first “She was not made the way God made Eve, from the rib of Adam, but of some other substance. Being his wife, she was in exile from herself” (31 [emphasis added]). In the rare moments that she finds for herself, she puts her suffering to paper. However, for Maya, this process is much more than simply keeping records in a diary:

And there, between her and the paper, words appeared, rendering a life within her - not the one she manifested in the company of others, but a hidden life that rumbled in the margins of her self. [...] Here alone was her sacred space, her place at the altar [...] And only in this way and at this time did she feel a pulse in her blood, a heat from beneath her apron, a shaking of something [...]. (74-75)

Through living a life in denial of her true self, Maya finds refuge in poetry. The consolidating blankness of white paper, to be filled with her substance, provides her with the only means of surviving the hardships of the little Lithuanian village, as well as the lie of her marriage.

Until this point, a crucial detail about Maya’s personality is kept secret. Whereas the clues are gradually accumulating throughout the pages, the reader is kept in the dark as long as the middle of the second part of the novel. The already mentioned biblical reference to Maya’s ‘other substance’ becomes meaningful with a fateful encounter at the communal bathhouse where the women of the village indulge in the rare luxury of personal hygiene. It is there that Maya, for the first time, lays eyes on the widow Rochel, an equally impoverished and emaciated shadow of a woman, whose talent for sewing is the only meager source of income for her small boy and her. Maya is

immediately drawn to this woman and feels the strange feelings of happiness and desire stirring inside her. From this day onwards, Maya sees a reason in rising each morning, as no day can pass fast enough to bring the end of the weekend, the date of the communal bathing, closer. Cautiously and hesitantly, the two women begin to develop a bond that seems almost supernatural. With a natural mutual understanding for each other, Maya and Rochel secretly share their most inner selves. Maya, who had always kept her writing secret, shares her poetry, while Rochel discloses her most secret dreams which she sews into pieces of cloth, composed of the remainders of her customers' orders. Inventing excuse after excuse, Maya tries to meet Rochel as often as possible and soon feels that she is deeply in love with the seamstress:

She looked around. Could anyone see her? How could she be so girlish when others were so serious? She berated herself, 'Stop this nonsense, Maya.' But the nonsense soaked her to the bone like a herring in salt water. And before she could stop herself, remind herself that she was a married woman with food to prepare for her husband, her feet, her insolent rogue barely-shod feet, twirled her around and around, and then her arms spread out and she spun and spun [...] giggles of laughter and tears of delight gushing out of every unplugged part of herself [...]. (106)

One day, after Maya had dug her hands into the ashes of Rochel's little house, scorching her hands in a desperate attempt to save what was already lost, she manages to convince Yankel to accept the now homeless widow and her son into their poor household. The women's silent prayers seem to be heard the day Yankel announces his departure to South Africa as he intends to search for a new home and refuge from the gradually spreading Anti-Semitism in Europe. Her husband promises to bring Maya as soon as he is settled and is even talked into caring for Rochel and her son as well. Three years elapse where Maya and Rochel can indulge in and finally consume their love. The two lovers easily forget about the sickly boy who is left in a corner of the small shag, forced to watch the whole scene. Eventually, a world collapses when Yankel sends for Maya to join him in South Africa, promising that he would do everything in his power to bring the widow and her son as soon as possible.

The goodbyes of the two female lovers certainly present one of the central issues of the novel. To put it differently, the actual event of bidding farewell is a deeply traumatizing experience and shatters the secret world of dreams and love that the two have erected. The hardships of Kovno were only bearable and finally 'worth living' with their love as the sole anchor to hold on to. Besides the fact that the feelings between these two women are presented as intense to the extent that none of them can imagine being only one minute apart, it is the uncertainty of their reunion that leaves Maya and Rochel desperate with grief. In this sense, Maya's departure to South Africa represents the trauma, which will become central for the haunted descendants. While the reader surely understands that this goodbye presents a life-shattering experience, some clearer and more direct references to its traumatic effect can be found.

First of all, it is possible to trace a formulation that seems like a direct reference to Cathy Caruth's trauma theory "She packed her suitcase, a small leather valise she had brought with her from her father's home into her marriage. It sat gaping on the bed, an open wound, a silent screaming mouth [...]" (191-192 [emphasis added]). As the first theory chapter has made clear, in her seminal work, *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth uses the parable of the wound and the crying voice to illustrate the nature of trauma "[...] it is always the story of the wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (4 [emphasis added]).

Such an unavailable truth, also standing for the infamous 'unspeakability' of trauma, is equally presented to the reader: "The room was filled with hands and their tasks, as if all the things that needed to be said had found their way into fingers, for the things to be spoken were immense and words could not hold them. Not even poetry" (Fedler 192 [emphasis added]). Furthermore, by comparing this farewell to the horrible act of skinning oneself, the deeply traumatizing impact of the departure becomes even more evident: "It was not a garment she cast off on that day, but a skin she tore off with her own hands, to leave Rochel behind [...]" (193 [emphasis added]). With reference to the human skin, the author brings the devastating effect of trauma home to the reader. The skin's basic function of protecting humanity's vital anatomy is reminiscent of the

famous “protective shield metaphor” used in trauma theory “We describe as ‘traumatic’ any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield. It seems to me that the concept of trauma necessarily implies a connection of this kind with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli” (Wilson 14). In other words, Maya’s traumatic departure to South Africa robs her of any protective shields, literally tears off her skin and leaves a fleshy and bleeding bundle of a human being, helplessly exposed to the powerful penetration of her horror. At the long feared departure, Maya receives one of Rochel’s dreamcloths, a square of embroidered fabric that, from this day onwards, will be more precious and valuable to her than anything in the world.

After thirty-nine days of having been imprisoned on a ship that is supposed to bring her into a new joyous life, an exuberantly happy and ‘sexually starved’ husband awaits Maya at the port of Cape Town. Confused by all the new impressions, the emotions of her husband as well as the strange language, Maya’s unbearable pain eats away on her, causing her to withdraw from the outside world more and more:

She undertook the task of holding onto memory as one who nurtures a sickly child. She was familiar with every intimate crevice of nostalgia. In reverie; she would lose herself; no longer able to feel, nor caring that she could not, the lines between memory (of the way her eyelashes touched the soft belly of skin under her eyes), and longing (for the roughness of her seamstresses [sic.] hands on the nape of her neck). (Fedler 283)

Appalled by her husband’s sexual longing and holding firmly to her promise “[that] she would never be touched again by another, for her body was imprinted with only one kind of love,” (160) Maya starts mutilating her private parts with Yankel’s razor in order to feign a constant flow of menstrual blood. After an unbearably long time of self-possessed abstinence, Yankel starts dreaming and fantasizing about having intercourse with his wife and is shocked when Maya announces her pregnancy. Obviously, the child is the fruit of Yankel’s supposed nightmares where he actually rapes his wife. After her second pregnancy and, above all, to prevent her husband from coming to her chamber at night, Maya finally chooses needle and string, in loving memory of her seamstress, to sew together the parts that should never have known any other love than Rochel’s.

Meanwhile, the situation in Europe is getting worse and worse and the enactment of a travel prohibition allows no Jew to leave Lithuania. After several years of hoping and holding to the endless stream of letters arriving from South Africa, Rochel begins to understand that her situation is hopeless and feels that “[t]here was no more of her life that she could live” (253). Leaving her boy to find her corpse hanging from the ceiling of the old shag, Rochel sets an end to her life. Reminiscent of many great love stories in literature, Rochel’s suicide also brings an end to Maya’s miserable existence “And then the wailing began. A piercing cry of one in physical torment, as Maya clutched her left breast in her hands and began a weeping that lasted eight full days. Her hand on her bosom had to be prised off [by the Jewish burial service] when she finally joined her lover in rest” (322).

5.2 Yankel – The Trigger

And when she was dyink [sic.] for the love of another, I nursed her.

In my arms – no one else’s – she died.

Her last breath I was there for.

That,’ he said emphatically, waving the sickle of his forefinger,

‘is also love’ (Fedler 310).

The miseries and hardships of Lithuania have been Yankel’s fate for as long as he can remember. Since his childhood days, he has experienced the harshness of life with loss as an unwelcome, but ever-present companion. After the early death of his mother, he had to witness his siblings perish, yielding to the unrelenting and deathly grip of poverty. Although nobody was speaking of Hitler at that time, the young Jew learnt the meaning of the word “Jewish expulsion” during a horrid twenty-mile march in the cold winters of Lithuania, searching for some spot where they would be tolerated, for some time at least. As an adult, he indulges in a self-declared pious and righteous life and holds his young spouse, a girl from a righteous and good Jewish family, in high esteem.

This is the little background information Fedler provides on Maya’s husband Yankel, the prospective grandfather of Mia. Generally speaking,

Yankel, as a character, seems to hold a supposed minor role in *The Dreamcloth*. Compared to major female characters such as Mia or Maya for example, Yankel is rarely given a voice throughout the novel. However, it shall be argued that appearances are deceiving in this respect. Having said this and considering the fact that little is known about the inner life of Mia's Zaide, it seems safe to say that he, nonetheless, holds an important if not essential role in Fedler's work. Yankel is the first to be directly affected by Maya's tragic fate. In other words, his wife's secret affair as well as her early death are presented as a major trauma for a truly loving and caring husband. These events shatter Yankel's meticulously erected pious life to such an extent that he is not able to undergo the difficult process of introjection. Additionally, prior to World War II it was virtually impossible for a committed and avowed Jew to openly speak about homosexuality. Consequently, Yankel's deep traumatization, but especially his ways of dealing with it are the most salient features of this character. To be more precise, part one of this thesis strongly emphasized the power of the transference mechanism of silence and it is exactly in this respect that Yankel's role becomes momentous.

5.2.1 A Fatal, Unsuccessful Integration Process

Broadly speaking, Yankel's acts of silencing and falsifying are the seminal aspects which eventually produce the haunting trauma of Fedler's novel. When referring back to Schwab who stresses that "[...] silencing [...] is the most common way in which traumatic legacies are transmitted to the next generation," (34) the impact of Yankel's deeds becomes the more obvious. Confining non-introjected trauma to a silent tomb does not simply 'happen' but requires the "illegal and secret acts" (Torok, *The Illness* 114) of a significant individual involved. In other words, a crypt wherefrom a phantom can set off in order to haunt the living needs to be erected and watched over by someone, a cemetery guard, so to speak. When Maya finally joins her beloved Rochel in death, an impossible and, above all, forbidden love affair comes to an end. Yankel, who is the only one to know about the true reasons behind his wife's supposed insanity, as well as her early death, is left as the only true witness to

this shameful family tragedy. Essentially, as the unfolding plot shows, none of the family members knows the real cause of grandmother Maya's much too early demise. His two sons Shmooley and Issey believe Yankel's story of the supposed heart attack and consequently become the first descendants involved in this lie. Taking into consideration that *The Dreamcloth* is a novel entirely dedicated to demonstrating the haunting effects of silence, Yankel's salient role in Fedler's work is uncontested.

Although it is not possible to gain full insight into how Yankel actually deals with his role of the cheated husband, the novel clearly stresses his deep feelings for Maya. Consequently, the final loss of her leaves him bereaved. But there is even more to it as Yankel shows a very specific and peculiar mourning process. The narrator aptly summarizes that "Mama Maya was bigger and grander in death than in life" (62). After his wife's demise, Yankel sets himself the target of virtually 'keeping his beloved alive'. Remembering and relating to her in any possible way becomes his vital essence. In this respect, the two young boys are frequently left to themselves as their father locks himself in his small chamber, learning every single poem of Maya by heart. There he would sit for hours on end, desperately reciting her words about love not even to be bothered by the hesitant knocks of his children, even scolding them not to disturb him "I am with your mam now" (61). Besides appropriating each line of her poetry with fervent eagerness, the weekly Passover meals can be considered as the highlight of this 'death cult':

Mama Maya's ghost came to visit each Friday night, when the white Shabbos tablecloth [...] was laid out. Like the spirit of Elijah the Prophet, for whom a place is laid out at every Passover table, her place at the bottom end of the table gaped wide and hollow. Zaide Yankel insisted on singing *Ashet Chayil* addressing the lap of the empty chair, and reminding his boys that their mama was, indeed, a woman of valour. He talked her up for them, holding them to her watchful eye: 'Don't slouch in your plate, Isselah. What would your Mama say?' or "Would your Mama let you eat with those dirty hands?" (62)

The arguments presented clearly show the mourning of a husband who is deeply traumatized by the loss of his beloved wife. According to general trauma theory, Yankel's capability to mourn his loss can be seen as an attempt to

successfully integrate and face his trauma. However, the heading of this section refers to an 'unsuccessful integration process', so how is this to be understood? In fact, research suggests that the conditions for the genesis of a crypt include, above all, a failed process of introjection. As Abraham and Torok make clear, becoming a cryptophore requires "the refusal to acknowledge the full import of the loss [...] In fine, incorporation is the refusal to introject loss" (*Mourning* 126-127). However, Yankel does not ignore the death of his wife, but actually creates a 'full-fledged death cult' in remembrance of her. He does not directly incorporate the loss of his wife but virtually indulges in dealing with and confronting it again and again, an exaggerated cult of introjection, so to speak. Therefore, the justified question arises how grandfather Yankel's behaviour eventually creates the fatal crypt.

Ashet Chayil or "a woman of valour," denotes a Psalm that is traditionally sung by the husband to his wife at the Passover dinner (see Fedler 62). Within its lines, but especially the way Yankel uses it to commemorate Maya explains the erection, as well as the contents of the crypt. As already mentioned, Yankel insists on singing this hymn of praise at every Passover following Maya's death. Mercilessly pressing his sons to join him in this song of praise and substantiating, again and again, what a righteous woman their mother was, is strongly reminiscent of a morbid compulsive behavior. In other words, it is not so much that Yankel exaggerates in keeping the memory of his wife 'alive' but more the idea of preserving a picture that shows her as a 'woman of valor' that is striking. In this sense, the Psalm illustrates his desperate efforts to hide that his righteous wife actually ended, according to Jewish tradition, as a 'fallen woman'. Indeed, even as an old man and grandfather, Yankel has not grown weary of affirming Maya's immaculate righteous nature. His perseverance and fervor have the desired effect as he manages to virtually 'brainwash' his children. This becomes particularly evident when Issey, now an adult and father of Mia, consults the venerable Rabbi Goldenbaum to help with his daughter's horrible nightmares. Suspecting a transgenerational connection, the Rabbi probes the ancestral line and is particularly interested in learning more about

the grandmother's life. Issey's reaction to the investigation of the Rabbi is particularly interesting:

'But what, if I may ask without offending, was she like as a Jewess?' Issey blinked. 'As good as any other,' he said, shifting his weight from the left buttock to the right and crossing his legs. 'Was she a tzadeket? A true daughter of Israel?' 'She was my mother,' Issey said. 'She was a gifted and wonderful woman. Tragically, she died when I was very small.' [...] 'What, may I ask, did your late mother die from?' 'I think it was a heart attack.' 'She was very young to have a heart attack,' said the Rabbi. 'Nonetheless, that is what she died from,' said Issey his body rigid. [...] 'What are you getting at?' [...]. (133-135)

The lie, which was passed on to him, is now in danger of being uncovered. Issey obviously feels very uncomfortable with the Rabbi's interrogations and is clearly a victim of his father's incapability to acknowledge the real circumstances of his wife's tragic end. Even if Yankel succeeds in maintaining his culture of secrets until the end, trauma researchers agree on the fact that children, nevertheless, feel the presence of hidden secrets. Although Issey does not consciously know that his father willingly transmitted a lie, the quotation shows that he senses the presence of a hidden truth.

At this point it is necessary to understand shame as one of the driving forces behind the erection of the family crypt. As mentioned in part one, shame plays a salient role in the traumatic microcosm of families, and Yankel is, indeed, a character who strives for a righteous way of life. Having known about the hardships of life from an early age onwards, Yankel profoundly relates to the religious doctrines of the Thora. When Maya beseeches him to shelter Rochel and her small boy after the loss of their miserable home, Yankel understands it as his Jewish duty to help those in need. The bribing of authorities in order to be admitted to the ship for South Africa with a ticket that has just expired the day before provokes considerable feelings of guilt in him. What is more, when the view of the narrator shifts to focus on the third generation involved, grandfather Yankel is presented as the wise and honourable Jewish head of the family in charge of Sabbath prayers. In the context of Yankel's devotional life, Maya's infidelity naturally poses a threat to this meticulously erected idyllic world. [...]

he had decided that this was the final indignity she would be allowed to inflict on him” (314 [emphasis added]).

Yankel's strong feelings of shame certainly play an important role for his incorporation of Maya's love story. Nonetheless, it must not be forgotten that he is also a cheated and hurt husband. While it remains unclear when he starts to understand what is happening behind his back, Yankel is depicted as the committed and loving husband who nurses his wife until she dies for the love of another. It shall not be argued that human beings are not capable of developing love bonds that go beyond jealousy and hurt pride. However, reading Yankel's character rather suggests that the prospective loss of his spouse made him ignore and suppress what was happening in front of his eyes. He incorporated that Maya's love was for another, a woman. Consequently, he appropriates her love poetry and claims every single line for himself, fantasizing that it is him she addresses. In his desperate attempt to create a world of phantasm where Maya and he would still be the loving couple, he contents himself with occupying a marginal space in the overwhelming love story of the two women. As a result, Yankel does not only silence the shame a lesbian love affair entails, but the affair as such. As husband who is truly in love with Maya, he is not able to acknowledge that she cannot love him back in the same way.

On the whole, Yankel's role as the cryptophore of the novel is certain but not immediately obvious. As he openly acknowledges the loss of his wife and shows acts of mourning, an incorporation of the trauma cannot be detected right away. However, the nature of his mourning is clearly perceived as strange and morbid. It is actually the rigor and his obsessive behavior that provide the essential hint. Even though he does not bury the loss as such, he buries Maya's true-life story as well as the circumstances of her death. Representing a dangerous threat to his personal 'weltanschauung', he 'swallows' the shame- and painful course of events and condemns it to eternal silence. In this sense, reminiscent of ancient folklore wisdom, Maya's ghost is denied a truthful burial. The broken heart, as well as the wounded pride of a loving but cheated husband condemn her true residue to confinement in Yankel's personal crypt.

This is the essence of Yankel's unsuccessful integration process. Carrying this crypt, he becomes a "living dead" (Fuss qtd. in Schwab 2) who shall considerably influence the life of his descendants. As the narrator remarks towards the end of the novel: "Those who have stopped living and yet still breath are deadlier than old ghosts with shattered hearts" (331).

5.3 Mia – The Vessel

Old ghosts do not mean to hurt the living.

They do not seek victims, only hosts.

Some dust will not settle.

An explosion is sometimes the only way out (Fedler 329).

As folklore has it, death does not necessarily bring an end to the living substance of human beings. Some people may even go as far as claiming that the boundaries of the mundane and the transcendental are blurred in peculiar ways. While one can believe in this or rather smile at it incredulously, one thing is certain: Fedler's novel creates a fictional world where the supernatural has a set and even central position. As already mentioned, in terms of transgenerational trauma theory *The Dreamcloth* is an invaluable literary source as it distinctly addresses and expounds the impossibility of silencing unintegrated trauma. According to Abraham, who argues for the return of "the dead who were shamed during their lifetime or those who took unspeakable secrets to the grave" (*Notes on* 171), the novel creates such a phantom and skillfully weaves it into the story. Having learned about the tragic circumstances of grandmother Maya's life, as well as of how her true self has been buried within a deep and unreachable family crypt, it becomes understandable why Maya's soul is presented as finding no peace and redemption in death.

While the narrative perspective is constantly shifting, granting insight into various characters, one particular shift is exceedingly striking. As the epigraph of this section implies, Maya's ghost is given a voice towards the very end of the novel. Reminiscent of a confession, the ghost gives reasons for its return:

Metaphor does not melt away without a fight – it struggles in the face of extinction – unlike so many of the Jews, herded into gas chambers. Not made of that which returns to dust, it travels with the soul passed on, unshared, unvoiced. The wordache became, you could say, unbearable. Swirling in the eye of the storm that longs to break onto the white page, she was dizzy with the need to touch the living. This is why she had to haunt her. (330)

Skillfully choosing the words of a true poetess, the narrator expresses Maya's desperation for returning to the realm of the living in order to fill the pages, which she had to leave blank. A sort of unfinished business is addressed, which primarily consists in her desperate wish to regain a voice in order to make the living listen to what was ignored and denied.

These words of vindication, breaking free from the confinement of a secret and horrible crypt, provide the context for Mia's story. Falling back on Schwab who appropriately compares descendants to "empty vessels [that] hold a deeper terror that remained untold," (43) Mia becomes such a repository for the unfinished business of the shamed and unacknowledged ghost of her grandmother. In other words, with Mia the novel presents a character, which lends itself perfectly to illustrating and discussing the haunting effects of a transgenerational phantom as well as its 'exorcism'. Having said this, the following section will concentrate on demonstrating how Mia's haunting exactly shows in order to conclude with demonstrating the redeeming effects of finding a voice and acknowledging the silenced truth.

5.3.1 'When the Dead Waltz with the Living' - Mia's Burden

Transgenerational trauma researchers appropriately compare a transgenerational phantom to a ventriloquist. Considering the fact that Mia is presented as having "a ventriloquist, like a stranger within [her] own mental topography," (Abraham, *Notes on* 173) the question arises how this puppet player actually 'pulls the strings', therefore influencing and controlling the girl's life from birth until adulthood. Thus, the actual manifestations of the haunting, or, to put it differently, Mia's reactions to her traumatic legacy will be under scrutiny.

First of all, it can be argued that Mia's body is considerably involved. Corresponding to research "[t]he phantom is alien to the subject who harbors it" (Torok, *Story of* 181). The grandmother's ghost as well as her unfinished business stand in no relation to the child's personal life, which leaves Mia with no means of expressing the trauma. In this sense, her body becomes involved as the virtually only place where her legacy can find some form of 'verbalism'. Such bodily manifestations occur when the "[t]he melancholic crypt is pushed to the periphery of the psychic apparatus: the body" (Abraham and Torok, *Self to Self* 164). Having said this, it is possible to identify certain somatic expressions of Mia's traumatic legacy.

The first and most striking bodily inscription becomes evident within the first days following her birth. After a strenuous and, not least, dangerous birth, the medical personnel, as well as Mia's parents are more than astonished to find that their daughter shows a peculiar birthmark just above her forehead. While birthmarks as such cannot be considered extraordinary, the narrator hints at the involvement of the supernatural: "On the third day after her birth [Issey] noticed what could only be described as a fingerprint on her skull – a pale oval dent on the centre line of her head. It looked like a birthmark and yet the deliberation of its shape made it seem as if it had been crafted there by human hand, rather than by nature (40 [emphasis added]). In the course of time, Mia develops remarkably deep black and curly hair while the hair from the birthmark grows in a silvery white. Towards the end of the novel, it is nobody else than Maya's ghost who admits having created this bodily sign of her presence: "Some ghosts leave black traces in fingernails, freckles in unexpected places, red patches – what the living call 'birthmarks'. She chose to leave a shaft of moonlight in her hair" (Hlapa 330).

What is more, Mia's childhood is clouded by terrible nightmares, which, at times, even persist after her awakening. In this sense, those dreams resemble terrifying hallucinations that relentlessly have the little girl in their firm grip. The first 'nocturnal attack' shows as follows: "That night the dream came back. And even the light turned on didn't make it go away. The needle in her hand, her hand full of blood... She sat up in her bed, her body was icy with

sweat. ‘Dream, dream go away, come again another day...’ she whispered” (55 [emphasis added]). Furthermore, Fran, Mia’s mother, observes yet another uncanny hallucination: “Mia could not have literally burned herself – there was nothing on the stove, it wasn’t Sarafina’s ironing day – and god, how she hated to be interrupted while pruning. Still, she had pulled off one of her muddied gloves, glanced briefly at Mia’s hands, unscorched [...] Mia had shaken her head. ‘My hands are burning, look!’” (109 [emphasis added]). These quotations illustrate the two recurring themes of the girl’s nightmares. Once, Mia finds herself holding a needle, her hands all covered in blood, and then again hallucinates that her hands are burning. Considering Maya’s course of life, it seems safe to say that Mia’s mind is flooded with the most dreadful pictures and sensations that directly reflect different stages of her grandmother’s deplorable life journey. On the one hand, Mia virtually relives the moment when grandmother Maya digs her hands into the scorching ashes of Rochel’s burnt house, and on the other, has to endure her grandmother’s desperation and horror when the latter finally chooses needle and thread to sew herself up in order to escape the raping of her husband.

These nightmares and hallucinations haunt Mia until adulthood where her ghost invades and influences her body in yet another very peculiar way. Broadly speaking, Mia develops a strange relationship to men, in particular, the love act as such, leaves her with the weirdest bodily cravings:

Sex always left her with a craving for one or other taste – a post-coital urgency that demanded immediate attention, like a full bladder, a sneeze, revenge. It was as if each lover hammered a furious longing for flavour into her. She would always leave the scene of passion with ungracious haste and head for a kitchen, a delicatessen, a herb garden. There she would be drawn to suck on the bark of a cinnamon stick or bite into the nub of a raw ginger or a full jalapeno, hungering for their sting [...]. She had chewed cardamom pods and garlic cloves (without undressing their papery petticoats) whole. Bouquets of basil leaves had been torn from their stems; filigrees of honeycomb bitten full. Intimacy always left her bereft. (16)

In this context, it has to be mentioned that Mia is incapable of entering a relationship with a man. Truly living her gift of being a temptress, she plays with her talent in bed and actually indulges in the carnal sensations of coitus “[b]ut

leave them she always did. Just when the sweetness became its sweetest; the longing its most intense. Heartbreaker, cock-tease, commitment-phobe – she'd been called them all [...]" (27). Besides the bodily pleasure she derives from her brief encounters with men, getting intimate with them is inextricably connected to feeling a deep and gaping void inside her. In these moments, emptiness seems to spread like an all-devouring flood. In frantic attempts of counteracting this horrifying process, the flavors of basic and non-processed foods represent the only remedy. While the novel does not provide a respective link to Maya, it can be argued that Mia's reactions are comparable to the emptiness that men created in her grandmother. Feeling only truly attached to women, men left Maya with a void that could finally only be filled by her true love to a woman. What is more, Mia's constant running from getting closer involved with her lovers could be due to her ghost's distrust in men. Throughout her lifetime, grandmother Mia never learned to fully trust in them as all the men in her life, including her father and brother, had disenthralled her in some way or another. Interestingly enough and showing yet another parallel between the two female generations, Mia's best friend Henrietta (Henri), seems to be her true love and soul mate. The narrator explains that: "Mia had fallen in love with her at nineteen because Henri could see ghosts" (83). The strong bond between the two women becomes even more evident when Mia finally returns to South Africa after years of restlessness: "Henri could feel her, just as she always could – Mia's invisible Siamese twin, hovering, watching. [...] This was the love Mia had missed. One that does not press or invite itself. Girl-love was so different to the carnal connection she had to men [...]" (90 [emphasis added]).

It is possible to detect another effect of her grandmother's legacy. While the somatic impact of Mia's post-coital cravings is obvious, her involvement with men and women hints at another impact of her 'being possessed', namely re-enactment. In an unconscious way, Mia seems to re-enact and mirror her grandmother's love relationships. With a woman as her only true soul mate and a gaping void left by men, Mia's behavior is highly reminiscent of her grandmother. As this is not the only aspect of re-enactment to be found with Mia's character, this phenomenon shall receive more detailed attention.

As the respective theory in the first part of this thesis illustrates, re-enactment can take various forms. While there is the willing act of repeating certain aspects of one's ancestral past, mostly due to a strong personal and emphatic identification, re-enactment can also operate on the unconscious level. What is more, certain re-enactments may be of such a subtle nature that the link to previous generations is hard to establish. To give an example, while Mia is not exactly repeating her grandmother's love relationships, it is still possible to see a certain connection between the two women. What is more, in view of the different manifestations that such a compulsive repetition can take, Mia shows a particular form. This is to say, that she is plagued by so-called "concretisation". Kogan describes this phenomenon as referring "to patients who act out the traumatic aspects of their parents' lives without understanding what they are doing" (qtd. in Gardener 300 [emphasis added]). In this case, descendants have to deal with confusion on many levels. In other words, they may confound boundaries between themselves and the actually traumatized individual, the present and the past, as well as illusion and reality (see *Ibid.*).

As a matter of fact, Mia's childhood and adult life are full of strange behavior, which she repeats unconsciously. The better part of her repetition compulsion roots, although more subtly than obviously, in her grandmother's vocation, her gift and passion for poetry. In other words, it is grandmother Maya's deep relation to the realm of words and her skill for the different manifestations of language in general, that are, so to say, 'reborn' in Mia. From the beginning of her life, the granddaughter shows a peculiar affiliation to language. On the day of her birth, the wailing and crying begins. Mia is one of those infants that literally 'drives her caregivers up the wall'. As Fran, her mother, is not able to relate to the child, it is Issey who is driven mad by Mia's incessant crying. Nonetheless, through a lucky coincidence, while expressing his desperation through some lines of Tennyson, he asserts to his utter amazement that poetry has the power to appease the restless child:

He looked down at Mia. Her eyes had visibly darkened [...] as if some old place had called her to its shadows. 'What did I say? What did I say?' He tried to remember what his last words were [...] 'My life is dreary, I would

that I were dead...’ Tennyson! Did you like that?’ Mia’s eyes fixed on him, imploring, expectant. ‘I can give you more – wait’. (Hlapa 43)

Moreover, Mia develops a real, and above all, unnaturally early talent for basic language skills. At the age of ten months, she already utters her first words and does not only amaze her puzzled relatives but, most of all, sends goose bumps down their spines. Initially, Issey still tries to interpret his daughter’s first attempts on speaking as ‘Dad’, but finally gives in and has to admit that she effectively produces the word ‘dead’. The second word ‘fire’ that finds its way across the child’s lips is certainly no more comforting. Furthermore, Mia starts reading at the age of four: ‘Fran, do you get what just happened?’ he whispered harshly. [...] ‘She can read.’ ‘Can she?’ ‘She just read those flashing words inside the rectangle with the pink globes. [...] Fran shrugged. ‘Is it normal for a four year old to be able to read?’ Issey asked. [...] ‘But did you teach her?’ [...] ‘Me? You must be joking.’ ‘So how...?’ (52) The child’s general affinity for poetry and the link to her deceased grandmother become particularly evident when Zaide Yankel visits for the weekly Passover dinner, his wife’s poetry in his bag:

On this night, Mia crawled down the hall towards his voice, and into the lounge. She toddled up to the chair where the large brown envelope lay, placed her dimpled hands on the sheath of its body and, for a while, did not move. But then she pulled it down into her lap and held it to her chest. [...] nobody was near enough to hear Mia’s voice, as she held the envelope to her heart, saying, ‘Mine’. (47)

This extract is indeed special. Mia, no more than a toddler, claims her grandmother’s poems as hers. The reader clearly understands that the child has no possible way of knowing the content of the brown envelope and especially no reason for calling it ‘mine’. Nevertheless, with reference to the girl’s phantom, the puzzle pieces fall into place. It is as if Maya’s ghost is speaking through the body of her granddaughter, reaching for her own lyric words.

With the elapsing years, Mia also develops remarkable writing skills, although the contents of her stories do not at all correspond to the age of the child. Fran, alarmed by Mia’s worried teacher, remarks “We have a child who writes about houses burning, babies dying, dogs with one eye, goats that bleed, hearts tearing, limbs in dustbins” (116). The substance of the child’s stories is

filled with horrible details that are strikingly reminiscent of Maya's impressions of Kovno. Essentially, the inextricable connection between Mia's strong need to write and her phantom becomes particularly obvious in her adult days: "And, when the ghost woke up at insane hours, she wrote furiously, using up three full diaries, the blank sides of [...] tobacco paper and a handful of paper serviettes" (20 [emphasis added]). Just like her grandmother, Mia equally feels the strong compulsion to put pen to paper. While this represents an illustrious example of unconscious re-enactment, it is, above all, a direct consequence of her possession. In other words, Mia's obsessive writing is a possible way for the phantom to reach to the surface and use the host for expressing the unsaid. This direct connection between the two souls even goes as far as that the ghost actively interferes in Mia's writing: "She stopped. The ghost did not want to write. She pushed the nib of her pen on the page, insistent now. C'mon, help me out here. The ink seeped out of the nib onto the page making a blot" (26 [emphasis]). Apart from giving an idea of how the process of writing can provide a means of coping with traumatic distress, these extracts show that Mia, in the course of her maturation process, understands her 'particular situation' and clearly relates to her phantom, even entering in direct communication with it. In this sense, Mia's pressing need to fill blank pages can be understood as a coping process, but also as a channel for the phantom, through which it can exercise control over its host. In this manner, Maya's ghost can partly satisfy its egoistic desires that made it return to the world of the living in the first place.

Another interesting form of re-enactment presented in the novel allows a reference to Terr's concept of "post-traumatic play" (*Too Scared* 238-239). Fedler's central heroine reveals a hobby which is evocative of a playful repetition compulsion: "Some were childishly constructed from plasticine [...] Others made of folded paper [...] Things with wings had always forced their way into her fingertips, demanding creation. With wings, you could fly away, leave a place behind, make it small with distance" (Hlapa 95). As long as she can remember, Mia has been crafting small winged figures. Interestingly enough, this uncanny fascination for handicraft remains. These winged figures show a clear link to her grandmother as the latter had the desperate wish to leave

South Africa and fly back to the one place where she had left her heart. This idea is substantiated by the pity Mia feels for ‘unwinged’ creations: “In the cup of her hand, she chiselled blind angels, some winged, other wingless. Sometimes in pity for those unable to fly away, she searched for triangles of paper or tinfoil [...] and gave them wings” (20). What is more, this ‘inherited yearning’ for flying away and leaving a place is also expressed in the nursery rhyme which small Mia heartedly repeats over and over again. Still in her adult days, the words of this simple rhyme provoke intensive feelings in her: “Fly away Peter, fly away Paul,’ she mused. ‘Come back Peter, come back Paul.’ Come back... such a mournful phrase, it sickened her with grief” (Ibid.).

As somatic issues as well as unconscious re-enactments determine the life of the heroine, it can be said that *The Dreamcloth* presents a haunted descendant whose life seems completely engulfed in the shadows of the past. Until the day Mia is finally granted absolution, she struggles and wrestles with the “piggybacking,” (Volkan, Ast, and Greer 43) of an unintegrated past.

5.3.2 Redemption for a Restless Soul

Taking into account that Mia’s suffering actually begins with her birth, it is interesting to note that her immediate surroundings show quite different reactions. To begin with, her mother’s role is particular as it is characterized by ignorance and abandonment. Since Mia’s birth, Fran’s incapability to relate to her little daughter goes far beyond post-partum depression. Instead of showing understanding and providing motherly warmth and support, Fran keeps a cold and distant relation to her daughter. Fran’s understanding for Mia’s difficult situation is virtually inexistent: “I don’t like such horrible stories, do you understand me?’ [...] ‘Sorry isn’t good enough! You should be writing about fairies and happy things. [...] Do you hear me? Enough! I want happy stories!’ (111). It is also her mother who puts the hallucinating child off by simply saying “Go wee and go back to bed” (56). However, in the course of the novel, certain insights into Fran’s character are provided and skillfully woven into the plot. From this the reader begins to understand that Mia’s mother is herself, a heavily

and multiply traumatized individual. Apart from having been molested and raped by her uncle throughout her childhood and teenage days, Fran is mostly affected by the stillbirth of her first child: “Fran held on to him for three days, little wisps of lullabies peeping from her dry lips, finally parting with his cold still body as sleep claimed her” (41). With Fran’s inability to integrate this dreadful blow of fate and the fact that Mia’s birth robs her of her fertility, the mother avoids her own daughter. Although children were all Fran ever wanted, she does not find the strength to face Mia who, comparable to a trigger, reminds her of her traumas that she desperately tries to keep suppressed.

Apart from her mother’s failure to provide a pillar of strength, Mia receives love and support from her father Issey. He, surly, represents the most important attachment figure in the life of the plagued child. He does not only spend all his free time with his beloved daughter, but also has a feeling for her condition and develops a ritual that apparently helps to appease Mia’s nightmares and hallucinations. When he was still a little boy, his dying mother pressed the dreamcloth into his hands, affirming that no earthly treasure was ever more precious to her than this cloth. Essentially, it is this old piece of fabric, (Rochel’s present to Maya at her departure to South Africa) that can take the terrifying dreams away: “Dads knew these things. And then he would let her hold the cloth. Just feel it between her fingers” (55). With his love and understanding, Issey represents Mia’s refuge when the wailing of her ghost becomes too loud. Similarly, the black housemaid Sarafina is what comes closest to a mother figure. Immediately after Mia’s birth, Fran demands medication for drying up her milk. Consequently, the constantly crying baby is handed to the maid who, still lactating herself, takes over the daily chores of Mia’s mother: “For the madam did not want to feed the child and the child only cried when it was with the madam. Sarafina would strap the baby to her back [...] and under the shade of the willow trees, behind the shrubbery in a secluded spot [...] would feed that baby from the maroon ache of her nipples [...]” (38). In striking contrast to the otherwise minor roles that black characters play (only dwelling at the margins of the novel), Sarafina holds an important function for the development of the plot. She is the first of the characters to directly draw the

reader's attention to Mia's 'involvement' with the ancestors and would "softly implore the ancestral spirits that held onto the child to be kind, for they were not pleasing to her" (38). Moreover, Sarafina does not ridicule Mia's fits like her mother, but provides much needed understanding and support. The maid uses traditional African muti and regularly prepares, for example, ointments for Mia's supposedly scorched hands. Zaide Yankel also senses the presence of old ghosts and is the first to openly address this issue within the family: "And with this child,' he said [...] 'is somethink [sic.] going on. I don't know what it is, but it is somethink. Somethink of your mama,'" (71 [emphasis added]). While Mia's Zaide is able to read the signs, he has nevertheless no chance to offer any assistance: "The first time she was put in [his] arms, only days old, she exploded into a fit of screeching so horrible it was as if his very touch was scorching numbers into her baby's flesh" (60). Obviously, it is Mia's ghost who provokes these strong feelings of antipathy, if not to say, hatred in the child. From this first moment in Zaide's arms, Mia hates her grandfather and avoids any contact with him.

While some family members may provide Mia with the necessary support, a curious incident provokes surprising changes in the condition of the child. To be more precise, Mia feels a strange kind of consolidation the moment Asher crosses their doorstep. Looking into the eyes of this stranger, who "hoped to meet with 'the family of his late mother's dear friend,' [...]" (201) stirs a strange kind of familiarity in Mia's soul and gives her the impression of having found somebody who could help clearing the mists of her confused and haunted being: "Mia lowered her ear to her shoulder as if shyness was overtaking her. She knew then that she could ask Asher anything and he would know the answer that would put the asking to rest" (209 [emphasis added]). This suggests that, already at a young age, Mia feels that something about her is not normal. To put it differently, she seems to clearly sense the presence of something unsaid, the void of which she has become the vessel. Bearing an unspoken truth that actually has nothing to do with her, contributes to her increasing confusion and fear. In this sense, Asher's strange effect leaves her bewildered. In his presence, she feels how the puzzle pieces inside her start

shifting as this stranger is, somehow, related to the 'unspoken' that has been clouding her family ever since she can remember. However, Mia's dire premonition "Don't let him in," (204) which she voiced during a family dinner where the arrival of this stranger was announced, were justified. Accordingly, Asher turns out to be Rochel's son who, traumatized by his mother's affair, as well as her suicide, seeks revenge on Maya's descendants. Gradually infiltrating the family, he manages to seduce Fran and win Mia's trust and love. Nevertheless, after having stolen his mother's dreamcloth, the intruder disappears into thin air and the tragic developments in Mia's family take their course.

At this stage of the novel, the significant role of the dreamcloth becomes evident, as its disappearance is the trigger for the following traumatic incidents. Issey, who discovers Asher's true intentions, tries to save his family but falls on deaf ears when he tries to talk sense into his wife and daughter. Issey cannot cope with witnessing how the intruder, slowly but surely, takes his place in the family. He is ravaged by his wife's infidelity and particularly concerned about his beloved daughter. As nobody listens to what he has to say, he gradually withdraws into insanity. In this respect, it may be grotesque for the reader to witness Issey's end, as the novel establishes a dire link to the hidden past. Reminiscent of the horrors that happened back in Lithuania, where Rochel ended her long struggle to escape the misery by hanging herself, Mia's father commits suicide. This tragic ending of Mia's family can be considered a direct consequence of the buried and unintegrated trauma. In this manner, the novel strongly emphasizes how literally destructive trauma-educed silence can be. In this context, the dreamcloth constitutes a transitional object, which provides the only anchor for a family doomed by the silenced trauma of previous generations. Especially for those members of Maya's ancestral family line, the little piece of cloth provides a means for filling the void, left by Yankel's secrecy. Consequently, being robbed of the only means of reference, the silence appears more threatening than ever.

The dreamcloth's disappearance is especially disastrous for Mia as it had the power to appease her wailing ghost. With the cloth gone, Mia develops into

a driven adult who restlessly runs from one misery to the next. In this context, the theoretical concept of “screen memories” enters the discussion. As a journalist, she has the possibility to bury her own distress under an enormous heap of strange traumata: “In seven years, she had been drawn from one disaster to the next, witnessing, listening, writing fiercely, documenting other people’s pain” (24). The young woman herself muses and attributes this behavior to her ‘Jewish-gypsy blood’: “Perhaps her Jewish blood was made of nomadic DNA and she carried leaving inside her like a genetic deformity” (27). Nonetheless, it is evident that Mia’s distress and restlessness have another origin. This is substantiated as her condition betters after having received the dreamcloth from the hands of dying Asher. For Rochel’s heavily traumatized son, the cloth had an equally redemptive effect and, having arrived at the end of his life, Asher can finally let go. He hands down the fabric to the next generation, which is just as much haunted and plagued by the void of the silenced trauma as he was.

While this development certainly contributes to finally bringing the phantom to rest, one crucial character still needs to find a voice. In one of the last chapters of *The Dreamcloth*, the committed and tenacious cemetery guard finally opens the crypt. His asking for Mia to come and pay him a visit at the old people’s home where Yankel feels his end coming, introduces one of the most important scenes of the entire novel. There in the small room fraught with the near presence of death Yankel finally finds the words to voice the ‘unspeakable’:

A man makes many mistakes in his lifetime. None so many as those he makes when he is an ignorant youth. [...] Regrets is not good to have. I didn’t think I was doing somethink [sic.] wrong. It is not to pardon what I did, but I did no know a better way. Shame for me. [...] She wanted forgiveness from me, but I told her only Hashem forgives...’ He did not speak her name, but the way things were spoken lifted edges from the darkness of ignorance and her ghost arched towards his voice, as the old man spoke to it directly. (308)

As Schwab puts it: “[o]nly a process of breaking traumatic silence and revealing a buried secret can help to exorcise its ghostly presence from the inner world. Such a process entails one’s taking responsibility for one’s actions, working

through guilt and shame, and mourning unbearable loss” (80). A close reading of the novel suggests that Yankel felt the presence of his wife’s ghost already at a comparably early stage of the novel. When the baby Mia starts to scream and wail in his arms, Yankel’s reaction says more than words: “The incident so distressed Zaide Yankel that he wept for the first time since his young wife had died inexplicably thirty-five years before, and collapsed into a gargle of Yiddish curses about how much a man was expected to suffer in his lifetime” (60 [emphasis added]). Throughout the rest of his life, Yankel manages to repress and bury his wife’s secret love to a woman, living and cultivating an untruthful memory of her. His repression even goes as far as claiming her love poems for himself. Nevertheless, feeling his end close, his vision seems finally cleared and he can admit that “[...] they loved one another. Of that I am certain” (309). He continues: “‘Who could help but hope that such words were meant for him?’ [...] One word. That is all that stood between me and my love. One word.’ Slowly he looked up at Mia, and said, ‘The letter begins, ‘My beloved – Rochel’” (311). Once more, the great relevance of Abraham and Torok’s theory for understanding and describing Fedler’s novel becomes evident. Abraham explains: “The phantom will vanish only when its radically heterogeneous nature with respect to the subject is recognized [...]” (*Notes on* 174-175). With Yankel’s act of breaking the silence, he absolves Mia from the burdensome legacy of her grandmother:

The riddle righted itself. The swirly twirl of a childhood dream, blood on her hands, a piercing shrill cry from a distant place, the knobbly texture of the dreamcloth, and something in her heart shifted, a small motion, like the rounding of a moon on its day of fullness, or the imperceptible flicker that sets the embryo’s heart a-ticking, or the final gnaw of a mouth’s tooth on a rope, and the world changed. Mia felt the unravelling of a lifetime’s bondage as the umbilicus between her and her ghost spun in giddy spirals separating them to different times and places. (311-312)

Taking the form of a confession, Yankel’s words are in fact much more. He discloses the true course of events, so far buried and denied. In this manner, Mia’s Zaide directly addresses the ghost, accepts his personal failure and pays tribute to Maya’s true self. Through eventually breaking the dark edges of his crypt, the shamed and wronged ghost of Maya can finally find peace. The

strong hate Mia had always felt for her Zaide simultaneously disappears together with the uncanny presence inside her. For the first time, she can see beyond the presence of her legacy and beholds an old, shattered man, broken by a secret, which had made him a living dead long before death finally claims him. The effects and impact of Yankel's words are considerable and in this sense, *The Dreamcloth* provides an artistically remarkable depiction of how a haunting spell can finally be broken.

6. A Daughter's Legacy

In 2006, Pamphilia Hlapa published her first novel *A Daughter's Legacy* and enriched the genre of contemporary South African novel with the moving story of Kedibone, the heroine of her work. According to Schwab, who identifies trauma transmission on the family, communal and national level (see 52), Hlapa's work illustrates how traumas are maintained within and transferred across communities. While the previous novel, *The Dreamcloth*, clearly focuses on the confined and secluded space of the family, Hlapa's work is instrumental in extending the scope of this thesis, namely by illustrating the fatal consequences that a community's engagement in a morbid cult of silence engenders.

However, considering the author's note it becomes clear that a transgenerational enslavement through silence is not the only remarkable feature: "*I know Kedibone's story. I have seen my friends, my cousins, my sister and my mother endure her pain in silence. Kedibone did not suffer alone. She represents the stories of the boy-children and girl-children whom society and culture have failed*" (Hlapa i [emphasis added]). With this first and straightforward sentence, the author makes a crucial claim, namely of knowing her protagonist's story. The first person narrative following this introductory line is kept throughout the entire novel and substantiates the assumption that the plot presented is not mere fiction. Interestingly enough, the homepage of the *African Book Club* presents *A Daughter's Legacy* in the section of autobiographies and memoirs. Here, Makatile reveals that 'Kedibone' is "the author's given African name that hung like an albatross around her neck" (Don Makatile). In other words, *A Daughter's Legacy* is Hlapa's memoir of her childhood traumas, as well as her struggle of coming to terms with it. In this sense, the novel offers a chronologically ordered overview of Kedibone's life, starting in early childhood and reaching into mid-adulthood, sometime after the birth of her first child.

At the tender age of six, and having been born into an African community which is shrouded in superstitions and strict cultural beliefs, the heroine's suffering

takes its unmerciful lead. The girl's misery is fed by repeated rape assaults and virtually constant molestation. However, most of all, it is Kedibone's impossibility to address these issues within her social surroundings that seals her tragic fate. Consequently, there is nobody to step in for the child, which leaves her exposed to further traumatization. The suffering of her early years eventually culminates in a dreadful backstreet abortion, which imprints yet another traumatic mark upon her much too young soul. Disappearing into the namelessness of Cape Town University does not bring the aspired relief as all the suppressed and unintegrated traumas begin to surface in the form of PTSD symptoms, as well as in terrifying somatic ways. No counseling session can provide the necessary support as Kedibone has never learned to relate her horror. Having said this, she wrestles with the ghosts of her past until the day her baby boy is born. Although the child is the fruit of a most destructive relationship, it eventually gives meaning to Kedibone's struggle for facing her past. She starts to understand that she carries a poisonous and contagious horror inside her that must never befall her child. This is the moment when Kedibone is ready to confront her past and steps on the stony path of introjection.

On the whole, the heroine's story is a sad but illustrious example of how a legacy of silence can destroy the life of trauma survivors. In *The Dreamcloth*, the disastrous effects of transgenerational silence are presented in form of a haunting phantom. While no such phantom is to be found in Hlapa's work, her novel expounds the cultural denial of wounded female voices by showing the disastrous and life-long death imprint of non-introjected trauma in all its harshness. In this sense, Kedibone's story lends itself to discussing three particular aspects of transgenerational trauma.

First of all, the traumatizing circumstances that dominate and control Kedibone's home village shall be presented. The morbid dynamics of an absolute patriarchy, being kept alive across the generations through the concealment of its fatal consequences, will be considered.

What is more, having learned about the severe consequences of trauma incorporation, Hlapa's work, similar to the other novel included in this thesis,

shows how silence does not bring an end to the suffering, but serves as a catalyst for further and sheer incessant traumatic developments. Due to this 'culture of silence', Kedibone has to undergo repeated traumatization throughout her coming of age. These traumatic experiences shall change and influence the protagonist's life considerably and are therefore included in the analysis.

Eventually, while the dark shadow of silence hovers over the entire novel, Hlapa's work also allows to make a strong claim for the importance of 'finding a voice' in the aftermath of trauma. In this respect, the tedious and cumbersome integration process of Kedibone provides the necessary 'literary' data to illustrate this essential component of trauma integration.

6.1 Sisters in Silence - A Female Legacy

*Koma re bolla kgororwane, khupamarama re hwa nayo
(we only talk about the initiation
but we take the secret of what happens
there with us to the grave) [...] (Hlapa 32).*

A rural and close knitted community in western South Africa provides the setting for Kedibone's story. The protagonist's place of birth is indeed countrified and, above all, remote. In this context, the reader is drawn into the story of a collectivity that values 'the community' above everything else. It is a place that, through its great geographical distance to cities, has managed to preserve its cultural identity and traditions. Nonetheless, its seclusion also implicates poverty as white domination brings growing wealth to the cities only. In times of such hardship, traditions and costumes are more important than ever. They provide something to 'hold on to', a form of coping with the harshness of everyday life, so to speak.

However, while the cultural bonds of the villagers provide support in times of hardship, and traditions and folk wisdom their necessary roots, it is, above all, a male-dominated community. Being born a woman means to accept a tragic fate as certain cultural beliefs and the high value of superstition doom

female community members. A glimpse into traditional African culture shows that superstition and witchcraft represented (and continue to do so in certain regions) important pillars in the social network of this culture. Essentially, Akosah-Sarpong's remark on "deadly superstitions"¹⁴ gives a first impression of what the female members of this South African community have to deal with.

The essence of the female community members' suffering finds expression in the following saying: "ditsela tsa monna ga di botsiswe" ('you do not question a man's behavior') (Hlapa v). The mere existence of this phrase, but even more its common use among members of the community, clearly illustrates how male domination has soaked the social fabric of this group. The reigning patriarchy has irrevocably permeated Kedibone's social surroundings. It is a commonly held belief and, above all, generally accepted that men are beyond a woman's influence and can therefore do whatever pleases them. Adulterous behavior in men, for instance, is willingly accepted and even part of communal 'joke-culture'. In other words, the inviolability of men has literally been included into the cultural reservoir and therefore makes it impossible and, first and foremost, culturally disrespectful to hold them responsible for any crime against women. Needless to say, this results in a shockingly high rate of domestic violence, rape, and child abuse. The number of sexually transmitted infections, dreadful and often lethal backstreet abortions, and much too early pregnancies experience a horrifying high, without mentioning the psychic damage and the resulting troubles. To put it very plainly, women in Kedibone's village have no chance to escape as "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi, meaning 'a woman's death and grave is in her marriage'" (iv). Women are commonly sold into marriage, regardless of their age in order to guarantee their families' survival. However, this supposed 'holy bond' does not bring any security for women as marriage is generally marked by physical and mental abuse. What is more, most of the men disappear into the namelessness of big cities, never to be seen again. As a

¹⁴ Akosah-Sarpong

<http://www.africanexecutive.com/modules/magazine/sections.php?magazine=244§ions=59>

result, the abandoned families are dependent on the mothers who have to accept the burdensome task of providing for the family as the only breadwinners left. In this respect, Kedibone's family is not the only 'broken family', but one of many to be found in the small village.

The women of the community have to accept the daily struggle of facing these tragic circumstances, which they call 'their life'. They are raised in order to do everything in their power to assure the continuity of their culture, regardless of the fact that it is breaking them. Afraid of "disturbing the normal day-to-day activities of the community," (ii) a fatal 'culture of silence' is established and cultivated, irrespective of the consequences: "You can die as long as you die within cultural confinements; only then is your death dignified" (Ibid.). In view of these traumatizing living conditions, death often represents the only way to escape this vicious cultural circle. Those who live on naturally experience the fatal psychological consequences of their repeated traumatization and are then confronted with yet another dreadful consequence of their community's superstitions: "Malnutrition and poor health conditions will merit sympathetic support. Mental illnesses and psychological disorders are seen as either the results of witchcraft or as a punishment of angry ancestors" (iv). In this respect, the women in Kedibone's village are prisoners of their hopelessness which seems to have been instilled in them from birth onwards:

You are taught not to question but to abide and listen to your elders in the name of respect. If you challenge anything, the thinking goes, you will end up having a lot of bad luck and mishaps in your life and you will be miserable until you die. [...] From an early age you start believing that you do not have a choice. In most cases, you are expected to give in to the pressures. If you fight, you are viewed as a rebel. This will not earn you any moral support at all because you will be seen as bringing scandal to the community. (iv)

From the cradle to the grave, Kedibone and her female fellows share the same tragic fate. They are chained by a traumatic legacy that has been handed down from generation to generation. The female ancestral line is, so to say, poisoned by bearing the burden of suffering in silence and does therefore not generate appropriate female role models for the generations to come. In this context, Hlapa raises the justified question "What kinds of mothers and fathers are we

nurturing for our future descendants?” (iv) In Kedibone’s world, being born a woman is inescapably connected to carrying the burden of one’s ancestors. Their having walked the paths of the little village has not brought any change to the prevailing tragic circumstances. In view of this ‘all devouring speechlessness’, it is essential to recall the fatal consequences of trauma-induced silence. This view makes it possible to understand the setting of Hlapa’s novel as an infernal breeding ground for considerable traumatic damage.

The picture of this community reverses, in a grotesque manner, what Herman has to say about the crucial role of social support in the aftermath of trauma: “The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience [...] Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms” (215). In fact, as for Kedibone, the opposite is true. Being part of a closely knitted community does not provide any support, but represents the actual source of the traumatization. As the women of her village are engulfed in absolute subordination, they must accept the legacy of silence that continues to be passed on. In this sense, ‘the group’ does not represent the antidote, but the actual substance that causes the contamination. Similarly, as the first chapter of this thesis shows, the DSM IV views trauma as an event “outside the normal range of human experience”. However, the novel’s setting is in alignment with Herman’s feminist motivated criticism of this diagnostic criterion: “[...] the lives of girls and women, [...] the secret, private, hidden experiences of everyday pain, remin[d] us that traumatic events do lie within the range of normal human experience” (110). Indeed, the everyday pain Herman refers to represents the harsh living conditions of Kedibone’s communal life. In this respect, trauma is clearly not outside the experience of the village women but constitutes an ongoing and permanent source of further traumatization. As Caruth clearly emphasizes: “*None find peace in silence*, even when it is their choice to remain silent. [...] The “not telling” of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny” (*Explorations* 64 [emphasis added]). Essentially, understanding that silence is one of the most

influential mechanisms of trauma transmission, Kedibone's social surroundings hold the following generations in the relentless grip of its traumatic past. As the community's traumatic conflicts are ignored, descendants are forced to repeat the old patterns continuously.

6.2 *Kedibone's Initiation to the Community of Silence*

[...] something happened that as an adult I believe
destroyed my spark and the excitement in my eyes for good.

The memory is still fresh in my mind
even today (Hlapa 7).

Considering the concept of *weltanschauung*, standing for the trust in an ordered, secure and benign world, leads to assume that probably no world view shows more belief and trust in the good than a child's. Under ideal circumstances, children have the freedom to hold to this belief as long as possible in order to go through a natural and sane development. However while this represents the ideal case, this belief in the good also makes children especially vulnerable to trauma. The following section shall therefore demonstrate how the fragile world of an idyllic childhood becomes invaded for the sake of maintaining morbid cultural constraints.

“Rain, rain, go away; come again another day; little Kedibone wants to play; rain, rain go away” (Hlapa 1). This introductory line of the novel introduces the reader to the ‘sacred’ world of Kedibone's early childhood where the four-year old spends her days chasing rainclouds and playfully hiding from the rare white faces that appear in the neighborhood. As the youngest of her siblings, she is ‘everybody's darling’ and her mother, a local teacher and therefore respected woman, lovingly calls her “mommy's little angel” (2). However, sadly enough, this idyll shall not last. Casting a retrospective glance, the author speaks through her heroine and comments on the first traumatic blow that shattered her childhood. At the age of six “something happened that as an adult, I believe

destroyed my spark and the excitement in my eyes for good” (7). When the little girl and committed first grader is making her way home from school, she is ferociously attacked by a man and raped in a backstreet. Kedibone who, until this particular point, only knows that her private parts fulfill the function of “answering the call of nature,” (8) freezes in a state of shock. Completely overwhelmed, the girl experiences the powerful natural defense mechanisms that suffocate any scream and numb any feeling. The little girl, somehow, dissociates from time and place of the assault until she finds herself hesitantly touching her genitals in order to locate the source of the strange pressure pain and the bleeding.

Irrespective of the fact that a six-year old does, in all probability, not have the according knowledge, nor the mental capacities to reconstruct such an assault, Kedibone describes that: “[e]ven though I did not know what the guy had done, I felt *invaded* and shocked” (Ibid. [emphasis added]). On a scholarly level, Luckhurst equally compares trauma impact to a feeling of invasion when saying that: “Trauma is a piercing or breach of a border that puts inside and outside into a strange communication. Trauma violently opens passageways between systems that were once discrete [...]” (3). This is to say that even though Kedibone cannot ‘fully grasp’ the impact of the attack, she certainly has a feeling for the borders between private and the public spaces. In this respect, the brutal invasion of her most private space leaves the child shocked and utterly confused. The girl does not have the necessary resources to deal with this attack and therefore relates the rape to herself, reasoning that she must have been punished for misbehavior. As her caregivers show no reaction to the dirty and torn clothes, the puffy red eyes, the child’s strikingly confused state of mind, as well as her absence from school, Kedibone “realised [that she] had to keep quiet – [she] had no idea what to say or to whom or why” (Hlapa 8). This experience represents Kedibone’s first hard lesson of keeping such matters to oneself. With this first attack, the girl joins the many heavily traumatized, but silent women of her village and thus starts carrying the burdensome legacy of her community.

As neither Kedibone's immediate social surroundings, nor her teachers take any notice of her condition, she is left alone with the pain and confusion. As the girl is confronted with this sheer impenetrable wall of silence and ignorance, her traumatic experience needs to find other channels through which it can run down. Hence, Kedibone's behavior shows radical changes. Before "an outgoing, free-spirited little girl," (2) she displays aggressive behavior which manifests most distinctly in game situations with other children "Most of the games were very competitive ones where there had to be a winner, and suddenly winning was important to me. My carefree spirit was dead and I would throw tantrums if I lost a game" (9). Considering what the girl has gone through, such behavior is not at all surprising. As Herman explains: "[p]sychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless. At the moment of trauma the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force. [...] Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning" (33). During the attack, the child was exposed to the most terrifying experience of utter helplessness, and this during a time where a sense of security is most vital for a sane development. Given that young children's developmental process is far from being completed, they are "particularly susceptible to harm," (Herman 60). Consequently, the impact of this first traumatic blow is so deep that, comparable to what Lifton calls the "indelible image of trauma," (qtd in Everly 39) Kedibone, then a grown woman, highlights the vividness of the pictures she still carries inside her: "The memory is still fresh in my mind even today. [...] I can't even close my eyes now without seeing his image" (7). The child's changing behavior can be seen as an attempt to compensate for the overwhelming traumatic experience of being helplessly exposed to the will of another. Her conduct with peers shows that she needs to be the one in control, the one who initiates activities and the one who triumphs over others. This behavior earns her the fear of friends but also the hidings of her mother, as the latter mistakes her daughter's behavior for becoming a spoilt brat.

Afraid of her mother's corporal punishments, as well as in a desperate attempt to catch the latter's attention Kedibone becomes a more than eager

student. Although the girl has now found a way to exercise control and catch attention, her suppressed horror starts to manifest on the physical level. When Kedibone starts suffering from various illnesses, the child's body becomes the expression of her destroyed inner life. The sick child catches the attention of other community members and soon experiences how her family is confronted with accusations of witchcraft. Although these accusations are never carried any further, the stigma imprints itself on the protagonist's young soul.

Herman rightly affirms that: "[...] the silence of women [gives] license to every form of sexual and domestic exploitation" (28). Accordingly, as Kedibone's trauma is never discussed, let alone avenged, the pact of silence is not broken but 'allowed' to inflict further harm on the child. While Kedibone struggles hard to come to terms with her shattered childhood, the threat which emanates from the men of the village is increasing. Irrespective of the fact that she has learned to fear adult men, Kedibone's male peers gradually show equally abusive behavior as they start imitating their male role models. Although the boys of the village represent a constant nuisance through their acts of propositioning and molestation, bigger groups begin to pursue girls with the explicit aim of demonstrating their manhood by means of "having sex" with them:

Although there was never penetration, the boys wanted to put their penises on the girls' genitals. It was called *go robalana* (having sex, to those who understood it). Each day on the way home from school, one boy called Masilu would try to prove his manhood by propositioning me. When I refused repeatedly, he decided to show me what he was made of. On this particular day, Masilu chased me into the field behind the bushes and forced himself onto me. Masilu had 'sex' with me [...]. The other boys in the group were cheering Masilu while I was fighting [...]. (11-12)

Even though this 'boy's game' does not implicate actual penetration, it is nevertheless a more than embarrassing and humiliating experience for the girls involved. However, as for Kedibone, this game goes far beyond embarrassment. In this moment, while even one of her brothers is cheering her tantalizer on, Kedibone is triggered and has to relive the moment of her greatest fear. This 'playful rape' feels like yet another assault to the girl. Needless to say, Kedibone's brother does not come to her rescue or reports the incident to his

mother. As he is equally entangled in the morbid customs of his community, he does not see any harm in these games.

In addition, Kedibone has to experience another bitter disappointment when her father leaves the family, never to be seen again. At this point, the child does not only lose her father whom she loved dearly, but also the only stable and trustworthy male role model she has ever had. With her father gone and left as the only breadwinner, Kedibone's mother takes up studying in order to better her qualifications. During the mother's frequent absence, the gardener, Bra Jo, who has been hired to help with the most necessary chores, starts molesting Kedibone: "Bra Joe liked playing with me and calling me pet names. I did not like the games. Bra Joe would ask me to show him my underwear" (13). One night, Bra Jo goes as far as sneaking into Kedibone's sleeping room, which she shares with her older brother, and rapes her. This time, the girl has the presence of mind to defend herself and starts screaming. Although the girl's reaction makes Bra Joe flee the scene of crime and awakens her mother, the 'incident' has no further consequences. Her brother, who was witness to the assault, pretends not having heard anything. Likewise, Kedibone's mother does not bother to examine her or ask any questions. She hastily dismisses it as a nightmare.

The girl clearly understands that something terrible has happened to her again, nevertheless, her personal perception is not reflected in the conduct of her attachment figures. In this context, Kuehner refers to the serious consequences of a "Widerspruch zwischen dem eigenen Wahrnehmen und der Erzaehlung der Familie" (74). In this sense, Kedibone has no possibility to make sense of her traumatic experiences and is therefore lured even deeper into the terrible dynamics of unintegrated trauma. Moreover, this incident has yet another dreadful effect on the child's salvation: "*I knew I was never going to be safe anywhere again* – not in my home, not while walking back from school, not in my own village or community" (Hlapa 14 [emphasis added]). In other words, the accumulation of dreadful incidents forces the child to believe that there exists no place in her world where she can eventually feel safe from harm. Not

even the privacy of her own home can provide her with a shelter from the horror. Her feeling of helplessness is now paired with the elemental fear of constant threat.

Kedibone's most important attachment figures, her father, her mother, as well as her older brother have proven to offer no help. They willingly oversee the child's suffering in order to maintain the illusion of a 'trouble-free community life'. In this respect, Kedibone's caregivers fail to fulfill their primary function, which is to "provide [...] a sense of security in environments that induce fear" (Bowlby qtd in Fonagy 94-95). As the previous theory chapter made clear, for developing a natural and sane understanding of the self and one's identity, the child is dependent on "the high reflective capacity in the caregiver" (Fonagy 102). The way the parent mirrors his child's intentions and reactions to the world, crucially determines the latter's identity formation process. As the child's "[...] observation of the self becomes meaningful in the context of the caregiver's reactions [...]," (Ibid.) It seems safe to say that Kedibone, from the beginning of her life, is deprived of any vital basis necessary for undergoing a healthy development process.

All family members continue featuring ignorance and the full little voices of Kedibone's school quire do not get tired of heartedly singing "We are happy, we are happy, we are happy, indeed we do not have any troubles. Others are troublemakers, they are short-tempered because they do not understand the rules and the ways of us little stars" (Hlapa 12). Village life continues, irrespective of the fact that the benign world of a child has been smashed, and is crumbling into pieces under the heavy pillars of community life.

6.3 *Growing into a Troubled Womanhood*

Besides the fact that the cultural constraints of Kedibone's commune bring a brutal and much too early end to her childhood, it needs to be said that they are just as much destructive when it comes to the sensitive phase of growing into adulthood. In other words, living in this community means that children, on the one hand, are confronted with issues that force them to mature at an

unnaturally fast pace but are, on the other hand, not provided with a social network that would support them accordingly.

Comparable to what Schwab describes as “the walling-off phenomenon,” (114-115) all potential adult role models, equally imprisoned in the swirl of trauma and silence, do not show any concern. It can be argued that if they allowed themselves to sympathize with their children, they would no longer be capable of maintaining ‘their walls’. Essentially, these solid walls around their own traumatized selves seem to be the only means by which they manage their everyday burden. Acknowledging the suffering of the future generations would inevitably mean to see their affliction. However, as suppressing trauma has become their second nature, it can be assumed that such a moment of insight would shatter these women beyond repair.

This provides the context of Kedibone’s teenage years where the already multiply traumatized thirteen-year old feels the weight of her confusion and helplessness stronger than ever before: “This life was all I knew – people moving around a lot, sex, drunk adults and stories of witchcraft. I was full of questions and there were no answers anywhere” (Hlapa 35). Nobody in the heroine’s environment manages to ease this confusion; in fact, rather the opposite is true. Her maturation process does not only raise questions about identity and her body, but makes her even more vulnerable to the other sex.

Since the day she was attacked and raped, Kedibone struggles with chronic pain in her genitals, as well as strange and smelly fluids. Without any possibility of asking for help or advice, she is left to herself – suffering in silence: “One day Aunty Hunadi [...] thought I was sleeping and started washing herself in front of me. I was interested to see how she washed her private parts. [...] I started imitating her when washing. That helped me a bit with the smell I now lived with most of the time [...]” (11). Left alone to deal with their changing bodies and the issues involved, the children of Kedibone’s village have no other possibility than secretly obtaining information through, for example, watching the elders. Even the local schools do not provide the necessary input, let alone decent sexuality education. On the contrary, teachers have their share in the youth’s suffering as they do not hesitate to publicly humiliate those who have

already fallen victim to their lack of knowledge, or yet another rape attack: “Girls, you see what happens when instead of studying at night you play around with boys? These are the consequences of your behaviour” (32). Particularly demeaning are the so called ‘health care checkups’ where teachers want to make sure that the students wash themselves properly: “All the girls were asked to line up and pull up our school dresses for the teachers to see if there was a map of urine on our panties” (35). As the underwear of one girl shows red stains, Kedibone, for the first time in her life, hears the word ‘menstruation’. However, her curiosity on this matter is never fed and her mother’s words: “You must know that this means if you sleep with a boy, you will have a child” (36) do not provide any elucidation when Kedibone herself graduates into adulthood. As she suffers from heavy menstrual pains, her mother uses this as a pretense to secretly prescribe her an oral contraceptive. Assuming that the tablets would ease her abdominal pains, Kedibone willingly swallows them every day, on her mother’s explicit order, always at the same time. However, when the girl eventually finds out that she has been tricked all along, she is hurt and very much angry about her mother’s preconceptions and lack of trust.

The issues presented above, make one thing abundantly clear: the ‘macrocosm’ of the community, as well as the caregiver’s conduct on the ‘microcosm’ of Kedibone’s life, display ignorance and abandonment. The shortcomings of Kedibone’s parental generation during a crucial period of Kedibone’s developmental process have two immediate and considerable consequences. First of all, the neediness and confusion of the young adult is ignored, which drives Kedibone even deeper into misery. Secondly, the incapability of the caregivers destroys the important bond between child and parent. Kedibone no longer feels that her mother represents a refuge in times of crisis and this, paired with the disappointments of community life, represent the dynamics for the further traumatic unfolding of the plot.

It is grandmother Koko who explains to Kedibone that menstruating means to be a woman. Indeed, having barely crossed the age line of ten years, the girls of the village are repeatedly confronted with this ‘new role’ in their community.

With the intention of visiting an Easter showground, Kedibone and her two friends get to feel the full impact of their 'being grown girls now'. A man, helping them to find their way, makes explicit what he expects in return for his favor: "Don't be terrified, [...] ('the one with a big behind will be my *woman* today')" (24 [emphasis added]). As Kedibone's female proportions are not yet as developed as her friend's, she has to bear witness to the rape of her good friend: "It all looked so familiar – I recognised what was being done to my friend. I saw Ephraim's half-naked body on top of Mosibudi and the scene made me run" (27).

While Kedibone's maturation process increases the likelihood of molestation and abuse, she is also confronted with first feelings of affection and love. Utterly inexperienced in these matters, she mistakes the shy advances of a seemingly decent boy as love, and consequently seals her tragic fate. In some ways reminiscent of the psychological phenomenon of a *self-fulfilling prophecy*, Kedibone falls pregnant. Having silently witnessed how various women in her family managed to gravely disappoint their mothers with early pregnancies, Kedibone has always avoided contact with boys. In this sense, the circumstances of the conception are indeed peculiar. The day she kicks the boy who pretended to love her off her in order to avoid yet another rape attack, leaves his semen on her underwear. Due to her lack of the according background knowledge, she had been misinterpreting the signs of the pregnancy for more than three months. Even the movements of the baby inside her womb did not make any sense to Kedibone. With nobody to talk about her confusing condition, she turns to the local doctor. Instead of giving professional support, the gynecologist's reaction is unexpected:

'I did not know you were naughty [...] Look now what you have got yourself into! How is your mother taking all this? I know she is proud of you. I was with her the other day and she told me that you got accepted to go and study at a university in Cape Town. She is proud of you. She did not want you to have a child at such an early age before you finish school, just like your sister and your other three cousins. You have managed to disappoint me. How can you fall pregnant?' (47)

As a result, the diagnosis of this virtual 'immaculate conception' leaves Kedibone in a state of extreme shock. The teenager is horrified by the thought

of confronting her mother and, confiding in her best friend, takes the desperate decision to abort the baby: “The two of us were naive and inexperienced. We had no knowledge about how far along you should be to terminate a pregnancy and what mental and physical scars you would carry with you: “[...] We knew nothing about pregnancy abortion counselling or counselling in general” (51). The scenes following the horrific and illegal backstreet procedure would certainly shatter the most solid and resilient individual. For Kedibone, they do not only hold the crude essence of deadly terror, but damage her soul beyond repair. Following the most horrific agony during the abortion procedure and the following ejection phase of the fetus, the subsequent moments irrevocably imprint themselves on her soul:

Something dropped out of my body onto the floor. ‘Mmawee, mmawee,’ (‘Mommy, Mommy’) ‘please help, this thing is going to bite me – it even has a tail!’ That was me screaming for help. I was frightened that the thing I saw lying on the floor next to me which had come out of my vagina was a small dog that was going to bite me. In shock, I had no idea what I thought I was seeing. [...] I was in a deranged state. I was shocked by the fact that its tail was attached to me and I could not move without it moving with me. [...] Now, lying on the floor, the scary thing that might bite me was having its tail cut off by the two nurses. There it was, lying on the floor, an almost seventeen-week-old male fetus. I could see its genitals and the heart beating, and I watched it as life left it after the cord was cut by one of the nurses. (57)

Having been robbed of the innocence of her childhood days at the age of six years does not mark the end of Kedibone’s suffering. Indeed, the opposite is the case: “a culture of silence and secrecy,” (64) ties the hands of her caregivers and enables men to inflict further and even more traumatizing damage on the child. Moreover, the heroine’s coming of age goes hand in hand with her being pushed into the role of a grown woman much too early. Facing the wall of silence and receiving no answers, let alone support in an important phase of her development, does not equip her with the necessary resources for dealing with her pain. In this respect, Hlapa’s heroine is entangled in a vicious circle of ongoing traumatization which eventually culminates in the horrendous blow of the abortion. After having recovered the physical wounds of this shattering experience, Kedibone flees the destructive dynamics of her village and seeks to disperse her horrible past in the anonymity of Cape Town. There, she tries to

bury the horror under the possibilities that a modern and progressive city brings and hopes to start a new life.

6.4 Trauma and Silence - The Fatal Consequences of a Legacy

In their seminal work, *Narrating our Healing: Perspectives on Working through Trauma*, Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela put it the following way: “We inherit a communal past from our families, cities, countries; it is never possible to make a completely ‘new beginning’” (4). Accordingly, Kedibone’s attempt to cut off her roots is futile. However, considering the fact that she was forsaken by all attachment figures, as well as multiply traumatized within the supposedly secure confinements of her ‘home’, running away – at first – seems tempting. However, the shadows of her legacy easily transcend any geographical distance. Although Kedibone affirms “Cape Town seemed like another world to me, a strange place with strange people and buildings,” (Hlapa 61) it can be argued that no place on the globe could be far enough away for her shadows to follow every of her steps. When Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela talk about the inheritance of a communal past, it is the young woman’s communal legacy of silence that has been instilled into her. As this legacy has soaked the fabric of the protagonist’s essence, it has become part of her being, which makes escape impossible.

Apart from the fact that the silencing of trauma has been handed down within Kedibone’s female ancestral line, her incapability to relate her traumas has yet another reason. With reference to the first chapter on general trauma theory, trauma is an all-shattering experience. Brison elaborates on the severe effects of trauma and refers to what she terms the “undoing of the self” (71). The tearing down of all protective shields and the subsequent invasion of a human being’s integrity brings loss at all possible levels: “loss of control, loss of one’s identity, loss of the ability to remember, and loss of language to describe the horrific events” (Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela vii). According to Caruth, trauma goes hand in hand with being overwhelmed to the extent that an

appropriation of the entire horror can never be achieved. This so called “unclaimed experience,” weighs heavy on trauma victims and Kedibone’s traumatic experiences have equally shattered any means of fully comprehending and ‘regaining’ what she has lived through. Having said this, it is possible to identify a ‘twofold affliction’ of the heroine: First of all, it is the legacy of the village women and secondly, the already inert aspect of “unclaimed experience” of trauma that confine the protagonist’s trauma to a secret and hidden place in her soul. The fatal consequences thereof shall be considered subsequently.

6.4.1 ‘A Vendetta’ of Unacknowledged Traumas

This thesis has clearly accentuated the morbid effects of keeping trauma secret, not least with stressing its crucial role in handing down the “unfinished business” to following generations. Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela address the central conflict of Hlapa’s novel by warning that: “if [traumas] remain unacknowledged, [they] continue to disempower victims, and intensify the feelings of shame and humiliation [...]” (vii). Additionally, they draw attention to the “internal dimension,” that ‘unprocessed trauma’ takes on. They elucidate: “[...] while the source of trauma may be external, the recurrent effects of trauma, and the impairment of memory function [...] are primarily reflections of an inner breakdown of the self and of an inner emotional conflict” (Ibid.). In this sense, Hlapa’s heroine is a more than an illustrious example for the arguments just presented. Kedibone cannot face her traumas and therefore dooms them to secrecy. Accordingly, ‘the unintegrated’ develops a disastrous and independent existence that shall gravely influence the young woman’s life. Essentially, this inner dimension of the suppressed horror unsettles and weakens Kedibone, gradually transforming her into a “body in pain” (Schwab 2). Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela provide an equally adequate description when saying that “[v]ictims [...] feel helpless and at the mercy of the intrusive and fragmentary memories of trauma, unable to control these memories and completely victimized by them” (vii).

While the years of Kedibone's childhood and teenage time are scattered with multiple traumas, the days of her early adulthood are characterized by the disastrous effects of her legacy. To put it differently, far away from home and supposedly freed from the horrors of her past 'the suppressed and unintegrated' starts reaching to the surface. Accordingly, Kedibone's inability to confront her horror makes it impossible for her to enjoy her newly acquired liberty. Although she even manages to make some good friends at the campus, the reader quickly understands that the protagonist is still a prisoner of her past as she is not capable of confiding in anybody. The heroine explains: "I was used to a culture of secrecy and silence [...] The society and community believe that a lot of things are taboo. I suffered alone in silence. I could not talk to my room-mate or to my new friends [...] about my background. I was not able to be free with them" (Hlapa 64). As she takes the desperate decision to keep everything to herself, she kicks off a horrific process that assumes proportions that are, very soon, beyond her control.

This uncanny process begins with prototypical symptoms of a post-traumatic stress disorder. While during the day Kedibone still manages to somehow distract herself by keeping to a strict routine, the impact of the suppressed becomes most obvious during the nights where she has to surrender to the uncontrollable, unconscious depths of sleep. Screaming, and tossing and turning in her bed, she sends goose bumps down her roommate's spine: "I was battling to sleep at night. If I did fall asleep, I had nightmares and night terrors. I thought I was being suffocated. One day Dipuo asked me why I was looking sad and tired" (ibid.). At this point, it is possible to make reference to a well-known controversy in trauma symptomatology: "Trauma victims have a contradictory desire to suppress their trauma as well as to talk about it" (Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela viii). While Kedibone actually longs for being understood, she hastily dismisses her room-mate's attempts to seek dialogue. She convinces herself that nobody would understand the situation anyway; therefore sticking to what she was learned by her female role models back in the village.

What is more, as Schwab argues “[t]raumatic memories entrap us in a prison house of repetition compulsion” (2). The compulsion to repeat certain aspects of one’s traumatic experience was already acknowledged by Freud and further elucidated by Caruth. As defined in her influential theory of *unclaimed experience* “[...] it is this lack of direct experience that, paradoxically, becomes the basis for the repetition [...]” (*Unclaimed* 62). In this sense, trauma survivors feel the uncanny compulsion to re-enact certain aspects of their trauma in order to find a meaning which they were not able to attain at the moment of trauma. Hlapa’s heroine also lives through such a repetition compulsion. Showing a particular form of re-enactment, the young woman tries to recover experiences that the shattering nature of trauma denied her in the first place. As already discussed, during the repeated sexual assaults, Kedibone was exposed to the will of men and did not have any means of defense that she could effectively oppose. Her body became invaded, her innocence and privacy penetrated in most horrible ways. This results in a behavior that Kedibone already showed in the direct aftermath of the first rape. Now, as a young adult, Kedibone feels an even stronger urge ‘to bring something under her control’. She excels at university and elaborates a fixed and rigid schedule for her everyday life and pursues it mercilessly. Furthermore, she starts taking interest in the other sex, but not without ulterior motives. The author puts it bluntly when saying: “I was on a man-hurting spree” (Hlapa 67). In this respect, the following comment of Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela is particularly interesting: “Instead of working through trauma, victims of trauma typically *re-enact it, but with a reversal of roles: with themselves as perpetrator, where they have the power and are in control, so that they can transfer their revenge onto a new victim* (viii [emphasis added]). Kedibone starts experimenting with sexual relationships, regardless of the pain she causes: “I would see Paul sometimes, meet up with Alan, and visit Titus at his home. None of them was aware of my other involvements. [...] Time after time I distanced myself [...] and tried to have fun with other men” (Hlapa 67). Despite the fact that some of these men, especially Alan, have true and honest feelings for her, Kedibone makes one thing very clear: “I knew nothing about love and wondered if I could truly love anyone”

(66). Consequently, the only thing that counts for her is that “[t]his time around at least [she] would be the one playing the game” (Ibid.). With Titus, the boy from her village who caused her unwanted pregnancy, Kedibone pursues a particular aim: “I asked him to be my boyfriend and this time I told myself I would be able to get back at him and *control him, punish him for what he had done*” (67 [emphasis added]). The arguments presented clearly demonstrate how Kedibone tries to gain control over men in order to compensate for the helplessness that she experienced during her traumas. However, at the bottom of this morbid re-enactment lies the heroine’s desperate wish for being loved. Apart from all the suffering that men caused in her life, including the abandonment of her father, she explains that, in fact, “[i]t was undeniable that I wanted to be loved. I was eager to find love and hold on to it and my eagerness turned into desperation and anxiety” (93).

With her gradually subsiding thirst for control and revenge, Kedibone tries hard to stay in a relationship. However, she is not able to achieve this aim, as her unintegrated past, as well as the fact that she has never experienced love from anyone, make this an impossible task. To be more precise, it seems safe to say that her relationships present yet another battlefield where the protagonist is forced to face the fact that a burial of the past is impossible. Trauma’s so called “unrelenting grip,” (Schwab 1) becomes particularly apparent during a fight between Kedibone and Alan, her self-declared “first real experience of falling in love” (67):

‘I will kill you. I am going to kill you. I want to kill you!’ I cried as I tried to stick the knife into Alan’s throat. When he managed to take the knife from me, I reached for a glass and broke it on the window sill. [...] As I was trying to stab him, the only thought in my mind was that *no man would ever hurt me again* and get away with it. [...] The more Alan tried to calm me down, the more dangerous I became. *I was no longer talking to him; I was seeing images*. The stabbing was not strategic or that of someone who knew how to fight. The person fighting Alan *was not an adult but a little girl*. (78 [emphasis added])

Kedibone, like various other trauma survivors, is trapped in a morbid antagonism which makes her “withdraw from close relationships and [...] seek them desperately” (Herman 56). The reasons behind these contradictory feelings are to be found within the traumatic event itself. Herman explains: “[t]he

profound disruption in basic trust, the common feelings of shame, guilt, and inferiority, and the need to avoid reminders of the trauma [...] all foster withdrawal from close relationships. But the terror of the traumatic event intensifies the need for protective attachments” (Ibid). Consequently, Kedibone, on the one hand, wants to keep Alan on her side, but on the other hand, humiliates and abandons him constantly. After his several attempts of proving his love, Alan finally starts an affair with another girl. When Kedibone hears about his infidelity, she confronts him, and the ensuing argument ends with him slapping her face: “He had not only humiliated me and was about to abandon me, he had now *invaded my body* with the slap. He deserved to die and *pay for his sins and those of others*” (80). The moment when Alan slaps Kedibone’s face is momentous as the heroine becomes triggered and is thrown back to relive the moments of her traumas. Considering the above-mentioned quotation, it must not be forgotten that the author speaks through the heroine and casts a retrospective glance on the incident. The choice of words and the description of the incident reveal a reflective understanding that the protagonist, at this stage of the novel, has not yet attained. The author explains that Kedibone is not actually fighting Alan, but all the other men who hurt her. In this moment, Kedibone is no longer capable of distinguishing between the present and the past.

As this dreadful fight damages the relationship to Alan beyond repair, Kedibone feels the pressing need to quickly commit herself to another man: “I thought that if I found a man I could hold on to, my life would be better. I hoped that if I could be a good girl, the man would love me and I would forget all about my pain. I wanted to find someone who could rescue me, and I was determined that this time around I would try to sustain the relationship” (91). However, while Kedibone was not able to reciprocate Alan’s love, her new relationship is marked by her compulsion to make it work, which soon borders on masochism. In other words, the new man in her life, Timothy, represents the epitome of a horrible partner. However, Kedibone stays and accepts his lies, cheating, and humiliation. Truly blinded by her desperate wish to found a family, she tries to stay and gives everything, assuming that this will be enough in the end. For her

immediate surroundings, as well as the psychotherapist Kedibone is now seeing on a regular basis, her behaviour borders on insanity. As this shows, Kedibone is still not ready to confront her past, although the symptoms of her suppression become worse continually. Ignoring the pestering advice of her therapist, she tries to circumvent a confrontation by burying her pain, together with the accumulating haunting symptoms, in a 'happy family life'. Needless to say, her behaviour does not ease her growing distress and soon, her body takes over the function of communicating what she is not able to say.

There is yet another 'rebellious expression' of Kedibone's buried traumas can be identified. Broadly speaking, Kedibone's health has been afflicted ever since her first rape. However, as an adult, certain sufferings come to the fore and the author finds the appropriate words when saying: "My body mirrored my troubled mental state" (145). Indeed, besides her worryingly deteriorating mental stability, Kedibone develops severe illnesses whereof some suggest a connection to her unintegrated traumas. During Kedibone's student time, her physical integrity is shaken by horrifying epileptic seizures: "[...] I woke up in the night trembling and shivering. I had wet the bed and was struggling to speak. I started biting my tongue and fell out of the bed" (72). Apart from the fact that doctors have difficulty in determining the cause of Kedibone's seizures, the girl is terrified by the 'cultural stigma' that comes with "bolwetsi bja go wa," which she was taught to believe "was something that was either related to poverty or that happened to you when your ancestors were trying to communicate with you" (69). Additionally, the heroine is plagued by heavy abdominal pain. Although she has already been coping with these troubles ever since her first rape, the symptoms are increasing in severity and exercise great impact on her professional, as well as private life. It needs to be said that her suffering increases in the destructive relationship with Timothy: "If I was not suffering from extremely heavy menstrual flow accompanied by a lot of clotting, I would bleed moderately for more than two weeks. I also experienced abdominal bloating. The pain was almost constant – before, during and after my periods, and during and after intercourse" (96-97). Interestingly enough, her struggle

with this peculiar issue brings a long ignored event back on the plan. Observed more closely, not before the abdominal pain starts controlling Kedibone's life is she able to confront the horrible abortion she had. Until then, the reader witnesses a heroine who seems detached from this specific traumatic event: "Titus wanted to know what had happened to the pregnancy and I told him what I had done. *I had no feelings about the whole thing*" (67). Referring to the abortion as "the thing" shows how much Kedibone had to distance herself from this tragedy. However, now that her reproductive organs are affected in this peculiar way, her suppressed feelings about the dreadful abortion start to show. In this respect, guilt plays a central role: "Above all, my main worry was that I was being punished for having killed my baby. I was concerned I would not be able to have other children if the pain persisted" (97). As a result, the novel suggests a psychosomatic link between Kedibone's endometriosis and her buried feelings about the abortion.

Having reached this stage of the novel, the reader bears witness to the alarmingly deteriorating psychological and physical state of the protagonist. Comparable to what Makatile terms a "cesspool,"¹⁵ Kedibone, as the vessel of her community's legacy, is on the verge of bursting. Ignorance and acts of suppression have been constant companions on her way into oblivion: "I did not recognise that there was something wrong with my behaviour. I was sick all the time [...] When I had left home [...] I had felt relieved, *unaware that there are certain things in your life that cannot be forgotten. I was haunted* by memories of my life back home" (79 [emphasis added]). In view of the heroine's course of life, her ending in a bed on a psychiatric ward is not surprising:

I was very depressed and scared, scared that this time around I really was going to die because *I could no longer face the things that kept bubbling to the surface. [...] I had reached a dead end in my journey. [...]* This time I had no choice; *I was becoming something I could not handle.* I had been too sick too often and my energies were spent on trying to get better while I neglected other aspects of my life. [...] Lying in hospital now forced me to confront all the hidden things that had turned me into a

¹⁵ Makatile <http://www.africabookclub.com/?p=8947>

silent child who kept drawing strength by withdrawing to a private world. (145-148 [emphasis added])

Together with the birth of her son Tumi, Kedibone's hospital admission gives her enough reasons for trying to defy the legacy of her community and confront the past.

6.5 Narrative and Healing - On the Stony Path of Introjection

Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela get to the heart of the novel's central conflict when saying that "[...] psychic imprints of trauma 'cry out' for articulation even if they are not fully grasped, or indeed known by those who experience them. What seems to be suggested by this is that 'trauma will out' in one way or another, in spite of being silenced or denied" (30). Terr, who writes about childhood and trauma, distinctly argues for the value of an idyllic and peaceful childhood (*Childhood Traumas* 302). However the heroine of Hlapa's novel is befallen by a very different fate. Through considering the different stages of the character's maturation process, it was possible to illustrate that both, Kedibone's early childhood, as well as teenage days were scattered with traumatic blows that could strike due to the ignorance of her caregivers in the first place. Resorting, like various other trauma researchers, to the lexical field of illnesses, Terr compares the unacknowledged traumas of children to 'rheumatic fever'. To be more precise: "[...] trauma begins with events outside the child, but once the events take place, a number of internal changes occur in the child. These changes last. As in the case of rheumatic fever, the changes stay active for years" (Ibid.). Consequently, childhood trauma, paired with ignorance and silence, are the core constituents of a fatal amalgam.

While *A Daughter's Legacy* illustrates the communal dynamics of trauma transmission, it would be wrong to assume that the problems presented are restricted to rural, South African communities. Taking a more 'Western perspective' shows that the 1970s women's liberation movement brought an end to equally enslaving conditions in supposedly more developed countries, such as the United States for example. Herman points out that:

The real conditions of women's lives were hidden in the sphere of the personal, in private life. The cherished value of privacy created a powerful barrier to consciousness and rendered women's reality practicable invisible. To speak about experiences in sexual or domestic life was to invite public humiliation, ridicule, and disbelief. Women were silenced by fear and shame, and the silence of women gave license to every form of sexual and domestic exploitation. (28)

Kedibone's story does not only present the plight of South African women, but has potential to raise our awareness for the deplorable and shared fate of many women all over the world. Beyond that, *A Daughter's Legacy* is invaluable for pointing to the essential role of 'finding a voice'. According to what Brison describes as the "remaking of the self," (71) Kedibone steps on the stony path of introjecting the traumas of her past. Trauma researchers unanimously agree that it is necessary to break the traumatic silence in order to 'exorcise' trauma's morbid 'inner dimension'. While Kedibone had to endure the horrendous 'boomerang effect' of her ignorance and suffered considerable setbacks first, she starts to realize that she cannot be a role model for her son: "I could not sow the seeds of my anger and resentment into his life. I had to start afresh [...] before I could become a mother to my son," (Hlapa 159). The heroine continues: "I have to show my son how to have normal male-female relationships [...] I am responsible for instilling in him roots and values that will make him a proud man" (161). Having gained this insight, Kedibone struggles to find a way that helps her to confront everything that she has been ignoring.

In this respect, it is necessary to return to and appreciate the fact that *A Daughter's Legacy* is the author's own life story put to paper. What is more, following the advice of her therapist, Kedibone takes up writing in order to find salvation. Towards the end of the novel, the narration becomes interspersed with letters where Kedibone addresses her aborted son, her mother, as well as herself. Considering the role of narratives for Hlapa's novel allows interlinking the healing process of trauma with creating a narrative. Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela substantiate this assumption by saying that "[...] healing of trauma, that is, the restoration of the self and the reclaiming of one's sense of control of memory, of the capacity to reflect, understand, and to perceive things as they are or were, requires transformation of traumatic memory into narrative

memory” (vii). As already mentioned, trauma is the antithesis of order and integrity and engenders loss at all possible levels of human life. Creating a narrative requires skills that are in clear opposition to that. To be more precise, narrating trauma is all about “finding structure, coherence and meaning [...]” (Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela 6). The researchers explain further that “[t]he recovery from trauma begins with the finding of words and of a story about what happened; ‘translating’ trauma into the structure of a language and a narrative is a way of bringing order and coherence into the chaotic experience” (15). In this sense, giving the horror a form of expression is described as one of the most effective ways of re-emerging from under the long shadow of trauma. Comparable to what Schwab has to say about literature’s empirical value for trauma studies, Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela go as far as asserting that “[l]iterary narratives can help a traumatized person to confront suppressed feelings. When victims find it too hard to confront their trauma directly and to talk openly about it, literature can provide a way of facing it indirectly – partly acknowledging and partly disguising their trauma [...]” (58). In this respect, the publication of *A Daughter’s Legacy* is a strong symbol calling our attention to the paramount role of breaking ‘traumatic silence’:

Well, I am talking now and perhaps because of everything I have to say, my ancestors are tossing and turning in their graves over my delinquency and because I broke the silence. Because I have become a rabble-rouser, fate-tempting or not, my children will not be subjected to any of those constraints and I will teach them to make choices. My children are not going to live life through my eyes and those of my community. (Hlapa vi)

7. Conclusion

At present, it remains to be seen whether the publication of the next Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders will provide deeper insights into the issue of transgenerational trauma. However, the currently latest version, the DSM IV, acknowledges the fact that one does not necessarily have to be directly concerned in order to be affected by trauma. In other words, the fatal consequences of 'bearing witness' have already found their way into trauma studies. Similarly, the comprehensive overview of trauma theory in the first section of this paper has made one thing clear – trauma can be highly contagious.

Furthermore, along with trauma researchers such as Van der Merwe, Gobodo-Madikizela and Schwab, the present thesis claimed literature as a valuable and fertile source for studying trauma and its consequences. Generally speaking, the in-depth analysis of the primary sources showed that the contemporary South African novel does not only lend itself to applying concepts of trauma theory, but significantly contributes to a fuller and deeper understanding of the advances in this field of study.

The great value of Fedler's work, for instance, lies in its depiction of a haunting ghost which cannot find peace until a silenced family secret becomes integrated. The shamed and unacknowledged ghost of Mia's grandmother is presumably one of the most direct references to transgenerational trauma in the South African novel genre. Essentially, dealing with the ghostly heritage of the heroine allows an elucidation of what has come to be known as *Abraham and Torok's phantom theory*. In this respect, it was possible to show that theory and narrative can complement each other well. In other words, Fedler's work and Abraham and Torok's understanding of haunting traumas stand in a complementary and fruitful interrelationship which allows illustrating one with the help of the other.

The second novel, *A Daughter's Legacy*, does not only take the analysis beyond the microcosm of family life by providing insights into the cultural dynamics of trauma transmission, but is particularly relevant for expounding trauma's aftermath. Contrary to the purely fictional world of *The Dreamcloth*,

Hlapa's book presents the story of her personal traumas, as well as the struggle with their integration. While a vivid demonstration of the destructive and worryingly independent dynamics of incorporated trauma are central, this novel furthermore accentuates the fundamental necessity for breaking trauma-induced silence.

Thus, while each chapter of the present thesis is instrumental in elucidating and expounding different aspects of trauma and its transference, the intensive examination of these issues revealed an interesting finding.

As for the introductory theory chapters, having dealt with trauma in general and its inheritance more specifically, brings home to us the fact that silence holds a key role in these discussions. As many researchers rightly point out, trauma destroys any means of relating to the horrible event and therefore exposes victims to the phenomenon of repetition compulsion, as well as to the continued conflict between speaking and staying silent. What is more, the scrutiny of transference mechanisms in chapter two made clear that silence is deemed to be the most significant factor responsible for a continuation of traumas. Coming to talk about the primary sources selected, it needs to be said that silence plays an equally salient role in both works. *The Dreamcloth*, as well as *A Daughter's Legacy* demonstrate the fatal consequences of silencing trauma instead of facing it. Once, it is the haunting of a transgenerational phantom, and then the ordeal of a heroine who narrowly escapes the annihilating inner dimension of her unintegrated horror. To be more precise, each novel depicts silence as trigger for the transgenerationality of the traumas. In this respect the boundaries between the rationality of science and the worlds of narrative fiction become blurred and enable the valuable insight that silence constitutes a core constituent of trauma and its transference.

Witnessing current trends in trauma studies inevitably results in acknowledging that trauma is soaking our social fabric and therefore starts to significantly shape the way we see and understand ourselves and the world around us. Whether this 'commonplace' of trauma will eventually lead to a depreciation of

its impact or the direct opposite is currently difficult to predict. Nonetheless, it is a sad fact of our everyday-life that trauma will continue to shatter the lives of children and adults, of blacks and whites, of men and women all over the world. Be it in the context of modern slavery just like the South Africa apartheid regime, or in the seemingly secure privacy of a person's home. Just like the much feared *Tokoloshe* in African myth culture, trauma will continue 'to steal many more souls' of people. However, when the first wave of utmost fear and helplessness has subsided, there is a place where the unspeakable may be transformed into forms of expression. Literature can provide a means for lifting the lid of the crypt in order to mark a new beginning.

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10. Appendix

10.1 Zusammenfassung

Die Veröffentlichung der vierten Auflage des Diagnostischen und Statistischen Handbuchs Psychischer Störungen (1994) hat die Entstehung des gegenwärtigen Traumaverständnisses entscheidend beeinflusst und geformt. Mit dem Versuch, die umfassende Symptomatologie von traumatischen Belastungsstörungen zu klassifizieren, ist es Experten ebenso gelungen, den Traumbegriff insofern auszuweiten, als dass er auch jene Menschen miteinschließt, welche nicht direkt von dem traumatischen Ereignis betroffen sind. In diesem Sinne hat der sogenannte DSM, wenn auch bis dato nur indirekt, zu dem Verständnis beigetragen, dass Trauma auf eine grotesk anmutende Weise ‚ansteckend‘ sein kann. Nicht zuletzt die rasanten Entwicklungen auf dem Gebiet der Epigenetik, mit ihrer Untersuchung der Weitergabe von Trauma auf genetischer Ebene, haben zur Folge, dass das Interesse an transgenerationalen Trauma immer mehr ins Licht der Öffentlichkeit rückt.

Vor diesem Hintergrund beschäftigt sich die vorliegende Arbeit mit dem Phänomen der Traumavererbung und deren Verarbeitung im Genre des zeitgenössischen Südafrika Romans. Auch heute noch hält der lange Schatten des grausamen Apartheid Regimes die südafrikanische Bevölkerung fest im Griff. Apartheid steht für das Trauma einer ganzen Nation, und dessen Verarbeitungsprozesse haben sich ihren Weg bis tief in die folgenden Generationen gebahnt. Während manche Forscher davon überzeugt sind, dass Trauma niemals wirklich begriffen oder gar ausgedrückt werden kann, werden andere Stimmen laut, die sich klar dafür aussprechen, dass nur eine langsame und schrittweise Konfrontation, nämlich durch das ‚Finden einer Stimme‘ für das Geschehene, Erlösung bringen kann. Gleichmaßen wie Schwab oder Van der Merwe und Gobodo-Madikizela wird die Hypothese vertreten, dass Literatur eine der wichtigsten empirischen Ressourcen zur ganzheitlichen Untersuchung von Trauma darstellt. In diesem Sinne widmet sich diese Arbeit einer intensiven theoretischen Auseinandersetzung mit Trauma und seiner Vererbung, um

anschließend die daraus gewonnenen zentralen theoretischen Konzepte anhand von zwei südafrikanischen Romanen darzustellen und zu vertiefen. Die bemerkenswerten Arbeiten von Joanne Fedler, *The Dreamcloth* und Pamphilia Hlapa, *A Daughter's Legacy*, ermöglichen eine dienliche Zusammenführung von Rationalität und Fiktionalität, um einen noch tieferen und nachhaltigeren Einblick in die morbiden Dynamiken von Traumavererbung bieten zu können.

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