8-2004

Exploring memory as a narrative strategy for enabling black consciousness in Ezekial Mphahlele's Down Second Avenue and Mongane Serote's To every birth its blood

Christina Leigh Buckland

EXPLORING MEMORY AS A NARRATIVE STRATEGY FOR ENABLING BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS IN EZEKIAL MPHAHLELE'S DOWN SECOND AVENUE AND MONGANE SEROTE'S TO EVERY BIRTH ITS BLOOD

Christina Leigh Buckland

Master of Arts, English

University of Richmond

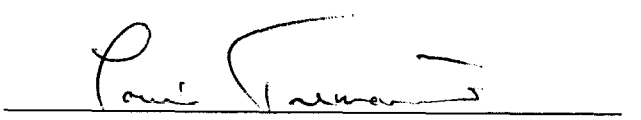
2004

Dr. Louis Tremaine, Thesis Director

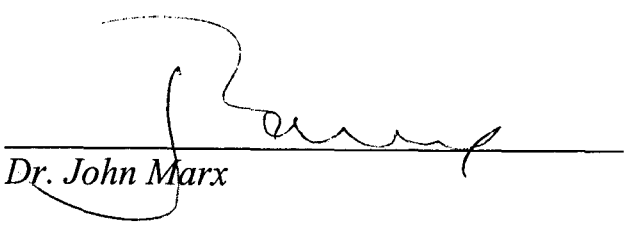
ABSTRACT: Ezekial Mphahlele in Down Second Avenue and Mongane Serote in To Every Birth Its Blood use the function of memory as a narrative strategy to illuminate the evolution of individual black consciousness. Mphahlele's novel is autobiographical, investigating the chronological memory of Zeke as his consciousness evolves. Serote's work is a collection of stories investigating several characters whose individual experiential memories create a collective consciousness. For Zeke in Down Second Avenue and the characters in To Every Birth Its Blood, memory is an active device which can recall apartheid experience in order to heighten black consciousness and analyze the current sociopolitical condition. Memory, therefore, becomes a functional tool for mediating apartheid experiences and enacting change.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



Dr. Louis Tremaine, Thesis Advisor



Dr. John Marx

EXPLORING MEMORY AS A NARRATIVE STRATEGY FOR ENABLING BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS IN EZEKIAL MPHAHLELE'S DOWN SECOND AVENUE AND MONGANE SEROTE'S TO EVERY BIRTH ITS BLOOD

By

CHRISTINA LEIGH BUCKLAND

B.A., Mary Washington College, 2001

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the University of Richmond

in Candidacy

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

English

August, 2004

Richmond, Virginia

Memory is a cognitive apparatus which retains and recalls experiences and stores them into certain conceptual schema. How these sometimes-fragmented cognitive experiences get produced and reproduced is up to the individual. Memory can mean the act or instance of remembering or recollecting, all that a person can remember, or a period of time covered by the remembrance or recollection of a person or group of persons. For Ezekial Mphahlele in *Down Second Avenue* and Mongane Serote in *To Every Birth Its Blood,* "memory" is a narrative strategy (the *act* of recollecting) for analyzing apartheid society and awakening the black consciousness of the characters in each novel. For the characters in each novel, memory is the content of what is processed through their life experiences (all that a person can [or *will*] remember—distinct memories) in apartheid. For Zeke in *Down Second Avenue* and Tsi, Boykie, John, Oupa, and Dikeledi in *To Every Birth Its Blood,* memory as the embodiment of apartheid experience enables the emergence of black consciousness and creates the platform for analyzing inequalities under the apartheid regime.

Ezekial Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* and Mongane Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood* explore the function of memory in creating black consciousness during the apartheid era. Mphahlele's autobiographical novel, published in 1959, precedes the Black Consciousness Movement but presents Zeke's awakening of consciousness: through his experiential memory, Zeke realizes the ineffectiveness of government education and Christianity as means to ameliorate the black condition. Serote's novel, published in 1981, is a fictional dive into the sociopolitical sphere of apartheid Alexandra in which the youth have long ago relinquished Christianity and the Afrikaans educational system as

means for improvement. Black Consciousness as a movement for them has already proved ineffective: what Serote presents us with are youth who, through individual memories of apartheid, create a collective consciousness that proposes revolutionary action against apartheid.

Structurally, Mphahlele and Serote use memory as a literary narrative which illuminates and organizes black conscientization coming to the forefront through the experiences of various characters. For Mphahlele and Serote as authors, memory is a narrative strategy which results in the awakening black consciousness of their characters and provides a tool with which to analyze the apartheid regime. Mphahlele's work is autobiographical: Zeke's progression of consciousness emerges as he ages. His personal memories and experiences are linear. Conversely, Serote's work is organized in a schizophrenic structure which mimics the process of memory itself, pieced together by fragmented but related experience. The novel is first narrated through the character of Tsi, a lost figure in apartheid society who tries to ignore much of his memory through escape in alcohol and music. Tsi illuminates the internal identity confusion for a black person in apartheid society. However, Serote later moves Tsi to the background in order to expose the individual conscientization of other characters manifested through interweaving experiences and memories, creating a collective black consciousness producing ideas of revolution and change in an intolerable apartheid society. Zeke and the characters in *To Every Birth Its Blood,* memory is the active narrative of black consciousness—their individual memories are what create their consciousness: at the moment of recalling their memories, the characters evolve their consciousness.

Ezekial Mphahlele recounts his life in apartheid South Africa in his autobiography, *Down Second Avenue*. Memory for Mphahlele the writer is a narrative strategy which he organizes chronologically. In his work, Mphahlele takes us from the life of a young boy innocuously observing his surroundings to an adult activist working to combat black South Africans' oppression due to apartheid. *Down Second Avenue* explores Mphahlele's chronological encounters with poverty and abuse growing up in a black ghetto during apartheid, and later his flight into exile due to intellectual persecution. Educated in government Christian-influenced schools, Ezekial in *Down Second Avenue* experiences an awakening of consciousness in which he shuns Western education and religion as a means to improve the black South African condition. As Zeke grows older, he becomes more acutely aware of and enraged by numerous examples of social degradation and political oppression of black South Africans. Mphahlele as author recounts several experiences which enable him to re-construct a narrative of many of his own memories: a childhood in Pretoria's slums, Western education, alienation, assimilation, and resistance. Zeke's character arrives at his black consciousness as the product of his experiential memory; Zeke's black consciousness is the destination of Mphahlele's use of memory as a narrative device.

Structurally, *Down Second Avenue* as an autobiography is purely chronological with the exception of the five interludes placed in the novel which serve as scathing vignettes of apartheid life. The interludes themselves, although fictional, serve as pieces of memory exposing a stream-of-consciousness collage of inequality, slum life, and police brutality. Ruth Obee in her work *Es'Kia Mphahlele: Themes of Alienation and*

African Humanism discusses the significance of the interludes in the overall structure of the autobiography:

> Structurally, *Down Second Avenue* has a circular jazz-like contrapuntal form, relying heavily on five fugue-like interludes written in the present tense that recapitulate the main body of the text which is set in the past. The stream-of-consciousness and poetic ligaments serve to connect episodic chapters that like folk tales could very nearly stand alone as individual, well-crafted units. (82)

The fictional interludes recall the memory of a specific past steeped in oral tradition and ancestral unity while at the same time recall a history of violence, inequality and degradation. Mphahlele writes his interludes in present tense and evokes memories reminiscent of the historical violence and humiliation of apartheid. Zeke conflates two memories—his own and a European memory disguised as history—to create a narrative of evolving black consciousness. The interludes serve to show how memory can shape experiences to make those experiences part of a developing consciousness. Indeed, Zeke acknowledges how the dominant discourses can use memory to manipulate knowledge and history so that their status as social constructions is overlooked to the point of seeming neutral. Although Mphahlele's interludes evoke the violence and inequality of apartheid, his ability to construct the seeming episodic flashbacks allow Zeke to take authority away from the colonial "memory" and invest himself with the power to use his memory to construct a different narrative of history, one which consciously analyzes the structures maintaining apartheid.

Early in his autobiography, a very young Zeke immediately recounts his earliest memories of Western-imposed industrialization, education and religion when he and his siblings are relocated to Maupaneng while their parents remain in the city to work. He

distinguishes very early between the discriminatory differences set up by religion such as division of the Christian communities such as his and the tribal kraal communities called "heathens" by the Christians. He relishes the time he spends in the fields with his grandparents, cultivating the land. The closing scene in chapter one and the opening of chapter two is set at the village fireplace with such sages and storytellers as Old Modise and Old Segone who represent tribal unity and ancestral history. Immediately readers are presented with a sense of community built on ancestral kinship and preservation of the land.

One of Zeke's most significant early memories of education seems to be that of the communal fireplace at the Leshoana Sands where he learns the importance of the oral tradition in preserving his ancestral history: "We learned a great deal at the fire-place, even before we were aware of it: history, tradition, and custom, code of behaviour, communal responsibility, social living, and so on" (15). Here a sense of communal history established through orality is presented to Zeke at a very young age. Obee states that "While listening to the African sage Zeke imbibes his collective wisdom through proverbs, tales, and the recounting of tribal history and myths" (*Es'Kia* … 92). The oral tradition relies on recitation. To *remember,* to evoke a memory, is to know one's ancestral history: at the same time Zeke produces a memory of community life, he is creating *his* history and informing his consciousness. This recapitulation of tribal history and culture provides Zeke with the memory of community steeped in oral tradition and grounds him in a sense of community and belonging in the country. But the cultural education Zeke receives as a younger child comes into conflict with the Western-

influenced education he receives in his formal schooling. From his earliest childhood memories of "formal" learning, Zeke's education includes Christian tenets so that education and Christianity seem synonymous. Zeke associates his initial childhood memories of the Western educational teaching methods with inequality and unfair punishment. His teachers' methods of instruction later become overshadowed by the overtly racist content of the material he learns in school. Obee elaborates: "The Christian-influenced alienation, conflict, and cruelty that Zeke has experienced so far in his schooling stand in opposition to the serene gathering and the communal fire where standards of conduct are imparted through the African oral tradition of talk and storytelling" (*Es'Kia* ... 92). Zeke quickly begins to "detest the whole idea of school," as he immediately equates school practices with violence and inequality and acknowledges that the superintendent of every church school is a white minister serving European government (12). From a young age his memory of school is one that is corrupted by Eurocentric domination and the rural, communal education he received becomes replaced with an abrasive government education.

At a young age Zeke leaves the rural area of Maupaneng and moves to Second Avenue in the urban, fractured slums of Pretoria to be with his parents. From this point on he accommodates new schemata into his experiential memory. The only identity he has known—a communal, agrarian identification with his ancestors—is disrupted as he searches for an identity in the capitalistic, urban slum of Marabastad (a township outside of Pretoria). The alienation between place and self can be traced to the original loss of ancestral land, with the slum of Marabastad growing out of rural to urban migration

caused by the 1913 Land Act. Obee explains how the growing industrial urban areas coupled with the need for cheap labor forced many black South Africans into slum life and de jure segregation: "The massive rural-to-urban black diaspora brought about by demands for labor in mining and manufacturing industries parallels Mphahlele's childhood move from rural Maupaneng to urban Marabastad in 1924" (*Es'Kia*... 87). Mphaphlele subtly but scathingly exposes the problem of ghettoization created by the forced migration of South Africans into cities as the result of western industrialization. Here the communal, agrarian society reminiscent of Zeke's childhood becomes overshadowed by a modern, urban community such as Pretoria: "The young able-bodied men were leaving the villages to seek work in answer to the call of the city. Vaguely I understood that Pretoria was the Mecca" (22). The rapidly-growing industrial society flourishes with a new generation of young workers coming back to the country in dashing clothes to tell the story of "the glamour of the city life, the money, and the electric lights and trams and motor cars ... " (22). The sense of community created by the tribal fireplace becomes replaced with a community built on capitalism and industry. The choice is not merely one of being prosperous in the country versus being prosperous in the city, for while the white-governed cities employing black workers are exploding, the tribal rural areas are not reaping positive results: "The land was not giving out much. The Black man could work only the strip given him by the chief. The chief had no more to give out. The old men at the fire-place complained endlessly that most of their lands had been taken away by the white man" (23). The tribal system dissipates as a hierarchical capitalistic and labor-driven society comes to the forefront. The ancestral and historical

connection to the land is replaced with avarice for money and migration to urban areas. In addition, the new urban areas consist of substandard housing so that the forced migration of the black workers looking for more money and jobs in the city lead to the creation of ghetto life: "That is how a country bumpkin dived into slum life" (24). The implicit forced migration of black South Africans into cities create "ghetto diasporas" in which they are first taught to believe in the trappings of monetary gain and upward mobility with the new jobs in the city, then forced into separate, substandard townships, doing mostly menial labor for minimum wages.

The problematic side effects of apartheid are illuminated on Second Avenue in Marabastad. Zeke directly contrasts the dissipating lifestyle he had in the country to his new home:

> Avenues and streets were new to us. Now why would people go and build houses all in a straight line? ... Why would people want to be cut off from one another by putting up fences? It wasn't so at Maupaneng. Houses didn't stand in any order and we visited one another and could sit round the communal fire and tell one another stories until the cocks crowed. Not in Second Avenue. (34)

Zeke paints the picture well of a traditional culture representing rural, communal values becoming replaced by a new, fragmented community "cut off from one another"; Second Avenue represents the transition in community lifestyle and it is here on Second Avenue that Zeke recalls his first memory of his people's impoverished and adverse circumstances created by an industrial, apartheid society.

Mphahlele employs memory as a narrative device which enables Zeke's black consciousness as Zeke grows older and experiences the everyday facets of apartheid life in Marabastad. Mphahlele's probe into domestic life on one hand attempts to free his

autobiography from the easily-pinned label of "postcolonial literature" destined for an "assimilative" or "resistant" reading and on the other hand expertly demonstrates how apartheid not only manages to smother one's sociopolitical freedom, but intrudes on personal relationships and penetrates the core of one's psyche. Zeke's recollection of the effects of apartheid subtly begins with his acknowledgement of his parents' quarrelling. The primary subject of his parents' quarrelling in Pretoria is his father's drinking. Zeke's mother berates Zeke's father over the money he spends on drinking in the shebeens and also for drinking the beer she brews for supplemental income. Zeke's father becomes a victim of the trap set by a capitalistic white-led South Africa. Many black persons, such as Zeke's mother, had to resort to illegal brewing as a means of survival; the menial labor they were forced to do was not sufficient income alone to support a family. A disastrous domestic cycle is set in place: because Zeke's father cannot find sufficient work, Zeke's mother must brew beer to provide for her family, as did many black South Africans. Zeke's father becomes addicted to that which his people are forced to do to survive and consequently becomes an ineffective member of society, both in the family and in the workforce. Consequently, in the domestic sphere there is a constant cycle of addiction, violence, and anger.

Zeke's memories of the black community's state of oppression become more perceptible as time progresses. Zeke recalls the weekends in Marabastad, remembering that "There were Saturday and Sunday mornings when the streets literally flowed with beer" (43) due to the police raids on breweries. The Sunday mornings flooded with beer sharply contrast the intermingling of the holy day of Christianity, Sunday, and a

"heathen" concoction associated with un-holy behavior. In this respect, the black South Africans are dually oppressed: they are exploited by having no choice but to work jobs which require mainly manual labor, and they are then put out of commission and (violently) punished for trying to subsidize their meager earnings. In this manner, the white-governed society was not only provoking them to sell beer by depriving them of a decent income, but controlling the way in which they reacted to that provocation (selling beer) by smashing the beer distillation bins (Biko 51). Mphahlele brilliantly interweaves dialogues of the domestic, religious, social, and political spheres to expose the far-reaching effects of apartheid on every facet of the black South African's life.

Zeke's progressive enlightenment about religious oppression arises as a culmination of his memories and experiences mainly on Second Avenue. As Zeke grows older, and his perceptions of the sociopolitical situation of black South Africans evolve, he begins to see Christianity as a tool of government manipulation. Stephen Biko in his Black Consciousness manifesto, *I Write What I Like,* illustrates the way in which missionaries employed by the colonial regime created a "dominant discourse" and manipulated memory for the purposes of assimilation and conquest:

> The first people to come and relate to the blacks in a human way in South Africa were the missionaries ... People had to discard their clothes and their customs in order to be accepted into this new religion. With the ultimate acceptance of the western religion down went our cultural values ....Their arrogance and their monopoly on truth, beauty, and moral judgment taught them to despise native customs and traditions and to seek to infuse their own new values into these societies. (94)

Biko elaborates how the influx of the Christian religion into South Africa created a different History of South Africa—one which eradicated African customs and traditions.

Here memory functions as a tool of oppression designed to assimilate blacks and create hierarchical difference: A religious platform uses memory to create a historical narrative in order to subjugate blacks. Biko's sentiments illustrate how a governmental conception of memory works to manipulate religion and history so that they are devices of exploitation. Zeke's analysis of the hypocrisy of Christianity points to the government's attempt at using religion to maintain and justify segregation.

As Zeke and his family sat out on the veranda on Sunday afternoons, he explains: "It was a common Sunday afternoon spectacle for a policeman to pass in front of our house propelling a man by the scruff of the neck to the police station" (35). Zeke explains this in such a casual manner that this intimidating police state hardly seems abnormal. Since the proselytization of blacks by Western missionaries sent to convert and educate the savages, Sunday was the day of Christian worship for many South Africans, both black and white. Ironically, as Mphahlele subtly cautions, the religion which helped confine black South Africans was the same religion they passively believed would aid in their liberation. It is appropriately ironic that Zeke describes his family and his neighbors as sitting complacently on the veranda, casually watching these foot soldiers abuse their people, as if it is a tragic yet inevitable spectacle. What Zeke comes to find in place of an oppressive Christian theology is a consciousness steeped in awareness and activism. This event serves as a catalyst for Zeke's increasingly more self-reflective questions of injustice in apartheid South Africa.

One of the first glances we see of the beginnings of Zeke's disillusionment with Christianity as an effective tool of black liberation occurs when he acknowledges the

point in his life in which he "acquired the passion to roam from one church to another on different Sundays" (99). Here Zeke speaks of the freedom he feels to experience the different customs of various religions, presenting an opportunity to explore former Christian truths he may have previously believed infallible. In his evolution of personal awareness, Sundays come to represent the days Zeke searches for a new kind of education not dictated by religion and challenges what he has been programmed to accept. His previous church did not satisfy his need for an acceptable explanation of the condition of his people, so he searches from church to church in hopes of an accommodating solution to black suffering under apartheid.

As Zeke's personal education concerning the black condition in South Africa increases, so does his disillusionment with the Church as a form of salvation from apartheid. Zeke relies on his memory to mediate his former experiences of inequality and develop his sociopolitical consciousness. The most pointed symbolic example of Zeke's disavowal of Christianity occurs when Zeke begins to attend the African National Congress' meetings on Sundays; he goes out of curiosity to hear the ANC's platform (139). The answers Zeke was formerly searching for through the Church have been replaced and he searches for acceptable answers through collective political mobility. Here the religious reverence traditionally exhibited on a typical day of worship is replaced with desire to participate in political activism for the liberation of black South Africans.

In 1947, Zeke relinquishes any previous religious views when he decides not to go to church anymore because the church in general has based its doctrine on: "...a

savage national attitude said to be built on a Christian sense of justice. Fellowship? Love? Obedience to the law? Suddenly I did not know what these meant in terms of my place in society and I revolted against such preachments" (163). Zeke at this juncture in his life has seen the hypocritical nature of the Church and, as a result of his impatience and disillusionment, rejects the Church altogether: "I have become progressively weary of all the trappings of mystical formalism that go together with South African 'churchianity'.... I'm content to move on, free of this sort of allegiance ... I am glad that I can at last exercise that right" (222). Christianity for Zeke is inextricably linked with a distorted history by which he has been excluded and subjugated. Why wait for the white "Christian" South Africans to take action or for God to save black South Africans when blacks should be collectively mobilizing to take action for themselves? Zeke finds no acceptable solutions proposed by the vacillating statements of the church.

Mphahlele continues to employ memory as a narrative strategy: Zeke's developing consciousness enables him to reevaluate his past memories and experiences and analyze them in a society rife with sociopolitical inequality and religious hypocrisy. Zeke questions the "Christian sense of justice" enacted by political parties such as the United Party which forced the demolition of Marabastad: "Something dramatic was taking place inside of me. Where I had accepted things as part of a normal programme, my personality revolted. It seemed like there was no escaping from Second Avenue, and that my hate was reconstructing every house in that street. I questioned the necessity of religion" (164). His memories—those of a submissive life in squalor—are evoked in order to pronounce his hatred for the hypocritical governmental education and religious

systems designed to subjugate blacks. Zeke cannot forget his life of oppression in Marabastad; the caustic memories he evokes catapult him to a heightened individual consciousness as he analyzes his role in apartheid. His hate reconstructs the memory of his childhood, and his memory will not let him forget the rampant inequality. Zeke's memory propels his consciousness forward and compels him to take action.

For Zeke, the religion that he comes to shun is bound up with the Eurocentric education he has received designed to subjugate blacks by presenting a white-created history. V.Y. Mudimbe in his work *The Invention of Africa* explains how, at the onset of colonialism, a Eurocentric re-creation of history legitimized colonial conquests and produced a new social evolution of modernity in which "Knowledge" functioned as a form of power. The rapid and forceful dissemination of the English language through print media and the "explorers" became crucial in "educating" the "natives," culminating in an attempt to conquer and convert (27). In this way, with white governmental "overseers" running church schools that Zeke attended, education, religion, and colonialism become intimately linked. For Zeke, religion and education go hand in hand, as both are European instruments of oppression: "Before I was fully aware of the change that was coming over my outlook on life as a Black man, I found myself in the teachers' movement" (167). Zeke fights against an unfair educational system promoting an erroneous history to blacks:

> I condemned the textbooks ordered by the Education Department for use in African schools: a history book with several distortions meant to glorify white colonization, frontier wars, the defeat of African tribes, and white rule; Afrikaans grammar books which abound with examples like: *the Kaffir has stolen a knife; that is a lazy Kaffir*.... (167)

Mphahlele caustically alludes to the downfalls of adhering to an education versed in the history and language of oppression for black South Africans and rejects the history of South Africa that the white European textbooks are trying to promulgate. Homi K. Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* asserts that "the dominant discourses articulate the signs of cultural difference and reimplicate them within the deferential relations of colonial power-hierarchy, normalization, marginalization and so forth" (111). Bhabha's theory can be used to explain how the dominant discourses use memory to create conceptions of knowledge and history. Bhabha extends this notion further to imply that the dominant discourses maintain power through memory by using the new "knowledge" and "history" to create hierarchy and reify "otherness" in order to discriminate and subjugate. Zeke employs his own experiential memory to recall his apartheid experiences, view how he has been marginalized by the government's educational and religious practices, and develop a consciousness more aware of the sociopolitical inequalities in South Africa. Zeke refuses to be the child-like, passive assimilationist who starts to believe a mythological history that brainwashes black South Africans into passively accepting rampant inequality. V.Y. Mudimbe numerates the three stages of conversion of the native in *The Idea of Africa*:

> 1) There is a referential symbol, in this case a human being, who speaks in the name of both political power and absolute truth. 2) The speech communicating has an edifying style, a spirituality, and, at any rate, refers itself to an absolute truth. 3) The alienation process is the phase where the convert, individually a "child," assumes the identity of a style imposed upon him or her to the point of displaying it as his or her nature; the conversion has then worked perfectly: the "child" is now a candidate for assimilation. (109)

Conversion, religious or political, works very specifically: the hegemonic power constructs an artificial version of history, makes it absolute and universal, and insists on assimilation of the natives. *History* is a flawed term because it requires a version of colonial memory which requires "the domination of physical space and the reformation of natives' minds" (Mudimbe 2). Zeke refuses to accept the version of history force-fed to him through his Western religious education; he comes to reject the religious and educational systems of his oppressors and slowly raises his consciousness of the sociopolitical condition for blacks under apartheid as he finds his identity to be one of resistance in struggling for educational equality.

Ezekial Mphahlele's autobiography, although written over a decade before the historical Black Consciousness Movement, embodies many of the stages that led up to it: reliance on God to save blacks from their miserable condition, rejection of God and Christianity, and then unity as a black people and a motivated responsibility to fix social/political stratification themselves. Zeke's experiential memory for him enables his growing black consciousness: he rejects Christianity and government education and becomes politically active in the hopes of dismantling apartheid. What we get from Mphahlele the author is a novel which narrates the evolution of Zeke's consciousness by using memory as a chronological narrative device. Mphahlele challenges the dominant discourses and uses memory to write a historical narrative in which Zeke's consciousness evolves and he has the tools with which to analyze apartheid and work to dismantle it.

In his work and throughout his life Zeke goes from a vacuous sense of self and vague political consciousness (*Down Second*...148) to an extreme self-awareness and

political activism that allow him to create his own story in which he personally dismantles educational and religious hypocrisy:

> It is unfair to ask me to subsist on mission school sermons about Christian conduct and passive resistance in circumstance where it is considered a crime to be decent ... For years now I have been thinking it was all right for me to feel spiritually strong after a church service. And now I find it is not the kind of strength that answers the demand of suffering humanity around me. It doesn't even seem to answer the longings of my own heart. (178)

It is appropriate that the novel is an autobiography, because the biggest feat Mphahlele accomplishes in the novel is one of authority (as well as author-ity) and re-creating a history from the perspective of personal memory. This re-creation of a personal history comes from a different type of cognition produced by Mphahlele in which he employs memory as a narrative strategy which precipitates questions on how memory gets re-presented and represented. The most relevant question with which he leaves his readers is one of authorship: *who gets to tell the story?*

Mphahlele is a writer who was exiled by an apartheid government for subversive writing yet an author also writing in the language of his oppressors and educated under an apartheid system. As a result, he realizes the conflicting duality of his consciousness: "Because of his education, his language, his frame of literary reference," Wlad Godzich writes, "Mphahlele is white inside while on the outside, he is black—and this outside can never be forgotten in the land of apartheid" (29). Therefore, in *Down Second Avenue,* Mphahlele strives for more than just Zeke's *black* consciousness: to make Zeke's consciousness solely synonymous with black identity would be to relegate it to an identity conceived in a dialogue of "otherness" maintained by notions of white identity.

What Mphahlele seems to urge, then, is that for Zeke, "consciousness" is "a locus from which a reinscribing of black and white relations can be launched" (Godzich 30). Using memory as a narrative device enables a core analysis of apartheid relations and what can be done to eradicate the apartheid system, not just the recognition of "blackness" or "whiteness" defined in terms of colonialist apartheid in the first place.

Mongane Serote says of Mphahlele that he has developed "'two tongues, one to expose and fight against the fallacy which the oppressor creates in order to justify his position of dominance ... another to inspire the oppressed'" (qtd. in Obee 120). What Mphahlele presents us with through Zeke is a person who, by recalling his experiential memory to raise his awareness of the hypocrisy of Christianity and education, recognizes that he is a product of the colonial encounter, can analyze his sociopolitical role in apartheid, and form a proactive identity in which he works to dismantle the inequality of an apartheid regime.

Whereas Mphahlele explores memory as a function that can be utilized positively to create an individual consciousness, Mongane Serote's novel *To Every Birth Its Blood* employs multiple memories (which enable *and* entrap) that narrate how a collective consciousness can be formed through individual experiences. Mongane Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood* opens with the character of Tsi, the irresponsible escapist wanting to stay in an intoxicated state of oblivion, entrapped in self-medication in the shebeens and enraptured with jazz music. From the very first page of the novel we are confronted with a sense of hopelessness and addiction for Tsi who finds that he can escape the constant memory of the black South African condition through beer, which "makes things easy"

(7). Tsi handles his ineffectiveness in the domestic and professional sphere through the outlets of alcohol and music: he feels trapped and useless. Tsi serves as the ever-pessimistic, escapist, undefined individual in the midst of sociopolitical chaos.

For Tsi, memory is at first stifling and he searches to recover a new type of memory which will provide insight on how to deal with life in apartheid. Tsi becomes trapped by the memory of his past experiences: he recognizes his addiction to the shebeens in Alexandra and acknowledges that it affects his productivity as a member of society. When Tsi goes to visit his grandfather's grave, he thinks of his past promises: "...I was getting tired of going to the shebeen; and that I wouldn't go to church .... I know he is listening, and asking whether I was willing to change. That is where the trouble started—was I willing to change?" (12). He finds no solace, however, in religion, for he has seen religion to be a futile investment. Tsi acknowledges his apathy and lack of identity in his society, but cannot find any hope for change. The memories he has of Alexandra are full of despair; he bitterly accepts apartheid policy and refuses to take a personal proactive role. As he looks down on Alexandra from the graveyard, he notes that "it looked like a graveyard" (13). Tsi can only see death and decay in Alexandra; for him there is no hope of regeneration.

When Tsi leaves his home to Nina Simone's voice pounding like a hammer in his head, he escapes as usual into the streets of Alexandra. The description of urban Alexandra as momentarily utopian is immediately contrasted with a sense of despair and inequality beneath any fleeting glimpses of optimism:

> Alexandra is a creation of schizophrenics like Jan Smuts; it is a makeshift place of abode, a township—that is, black people live here. Live here only

> if the whims of the Verwoerds are stable to that end. Memory can be an unreliable mirror. It shifts and shifts, now and then emphasizing the dramatic, now and then leaving out detail, now and then flushing out detail at surprising moments. My memory of Alexandra, as I knew when I was very young, is sharp and blunt and blunt and sharp .... There were people: some went to church in suits, some in dresses, whether men or women; some went to houses where the guitar wailed and wailed, the drum boomed and boomed; some people owned mules, cattle and donkeys, some Cadillacs; some had nothing but the pipe and the broken car and children. (22)

Tsi's memories of Alexandra are an array of utopian and dystopian images of religion, music, capitalism, racism, and inequality. Tsi is astute in realizing that memory is schizophrenic and subjective. Although he remembers ("sharp" memories), he tries to forget ("blunt" memories). Serote, like Mphahlele, addresses the problem of ghetto diasporas created by Verwoerd and National Party in which black South Africans are condemned to certain areas with substandard housing or no housing at all, coupled with unemployment or menial jobs. Here, Tsi recalls a black South Africa whose culture has been erased by the white Afrikaner government. Alexandra is presented as a self-fulfilling prophecy of its creators: it is at once a contrived home and yet attempts to be a real community. From Tsi's childhood memories of Alexandra there is a hierarchy of those who have learned to be pawns in a capitalistic society and have accumulated property and assets and those who have been denied or displaced from jobs and shelter. Serote uses memory as a narrative strategy to question how Tsi's "culture" was formed by a Eurocentric history; Tsi's ghetto culture was created by the sly *givenness* appropriated by the white government under the guise of betterment and opportunity for blacks. Serote is quick to explore the function of memory; a memory which in Tsi's case is acutely mindful of—but wants to forget—the injustices and oppression he has faced all

his life, and a memory that, like Verwoerd's, can be invented or distorted to portray a version of history which alienates and oppresses. Tsi recognizes that memory is subjective, depending on who's employing it and for what agenda: "There were the police. They came on horseback, in fast cars, in huge trucks, and shot for real; they came in Saracens and with machine guns and banged on doors, shouting 'Afrika, Afrika.' Alexandra met them in song, rallies, and demonstrations. There were the beer raids. The pass raids" (22). Tsi sharply contrasts two versions of memory rallying for a certain version of Africa/Afrika: Black South Africans and European settlers. The rallying cry of the white government issuing a unifying "national" cry of allegiance is coupled with its brutality in subjugating blacks. The various protests by townspeople in Durban attempting to counteract the blatant violence and injustice of the government immediately seem futile in the all-encompassing law enforcement of beer raids and pass raids created to keep them "legally" subservient.

As much as Tsi seeks refuge and escape from the atrocities and injustices in his community through jazz music, he cannot escape the troubling memories of the voices of his loved ones who have been imprisoned or killed under apartheid. Tsi uses jazz as a way to "cope" with his loss of identity in the midst of the turbulent environment around him. He contemplates if his brother Fix, a political detainee, is still in prison or even still alive, as he wanders to the bathroom in a drunken oblivion as jazz music plays in the background:

> What is it that we do not know? Despair? Fear? Crying? Laughing? Maybe we know too much of everything. Maybe. And maybe that is why, that is why we have never lived? So what? Miles Davis. Kinds of blue? The drums kept watch, a careful watch. Bass, there, behind, lonely, there

> as if all the time waiting to take action. Coltrane coming in with his battle, perpetual battle that must have at last killed him, at times going through walls, through barbed wire, sightless, uncaring, carrying his mission out, to seek to search, at times as if a dam had burst, and the angry water was rushing through everything, leaving nothing behind. So what? (27)

Tsi refuses to recall painful memories of death, destruction, and inequality and will not utilize those memories as a tool for understanding his role in improving the conditions of apartheid. Rather, he begs to recover a knowledge which is *not yet known* and questions how memory must be recovered in order to ameliorate conditions in South Africa. Tsi questions why his people are still imprisoned and oppressed and compares his feelings of frustration and futility to the jazz music he hears. Tsi maintains his hopelessness to the degree that even the music of Miles Davis and John Coltrane suddenly seems bleak. The instruments in Davis's jazz band are personified so that, like many black South Africans, the drums are tentative, the bass is complacently patient. Tsi implies that Coltrane's personified music roars with a fierce instrumentality that ultimately burns itself out. Both types of music describe Tsi: he is at once passive and escapist and also angry, irresponsible, and self-destructive. Despite his job as an ever-absent reporter and his obligations to his wife, Lily, he cannot break his cycle of addiction and escape: "Yet, here I was, lost in the streets. I went up the steps. I could hear the music coming. The voices. The laughter. Hands clapping. I opened the door. Smoke. Fumes. The smell of alcohol. Music. Voices and voices and voices. Laughter" (31). For Tsi, the camaraderie he experiences combined with a state of temporary euphoric escape creates for him not just an addiction to alcohol but also addiction to the streets, keeping him an unproductive, non-contributing member of society, both personally in the domestic sphere and

professionally. On one of his unpredictable trips back home, Lily berates him for losing the money to buy their residential living permit: "'I gave you the money to pay for the permit last week and you drank it, you fool, now here I am, scared because they are going to pick you up'" (34). Like Zeke's father whose addiction perpetuates a nasty cycle of self-medication and participation in the white governmental system of capitalism, Tsi remains further controlled by the government: he puts his money into their system and remains an unproductive and complacent member of black society.

When Tsi goes home to visit his parents he puts on Coltrane as a way of trying to recall a memory which would enable him to understand his family, his history, and his sense of place. He remains angry with his parents for their complacency with the current governmental system of oppression and questions what kind of future his parents tried to build for their children:

> Yet somehow it seems it is important to know where you come from, what happened; it seems important to link you to the present, so you can order the future, which is supposedly built for you. Fuck Coltrane .... Starting from scratch, as if he had no journey whatsoever in his life; Coltrane, starting from the beginning, as if a newly-born baby, trying, finding, searching a future, searching the past that we all know so little about. Coltrane, beating, searching, slowing down, stalking, digging all the energy, using it, digging, digging, finding out, and beginning from the beginning. Shit. Coltrane. Whose son was he? (39)

Again Serote explores the function of memory as it encapsulates versions of history that have been erased, recreated, and reified. A past with which Tsi can identify does not exist, and here he chastises Coltrane for being able to easily translate his sentiments into music and find a fresh start with which to produce something positive. Tsi knows that he has a past filled with painful memories but chooses *not to remember* the subjugation and

torture of his people. Tsi's escape of responsibility through music and alcohol exposes the coping strategy of a man who feels alienated both in purpose and place in society: "What is this mess? Our home. Our country. Our world. Alexandra. Permits. Passes. Police. Security Police. Permit Police. CID. South African Police. Pass Police. Murder and Robbery Squad ....What is Alexandra? Why do I ask? I have lived all of my life here, why do I ask?" (36). Like Zeke in Marabastad, Tsi searches to reconcile a sense of self with a sense of place but cannot since the only home he has ever known is one that is temporarily leased out and regulated by the government. When his friend John asks Boykie and him for what they are really struggling, Tsi thinks to himself: "I would never be able to answer that question, even if it meant my life, I could not answer it" (37). Although Tsi undoubtedly recognizes the inequality all around him and turns to music and alcohol for escape, he finds refuge in passivity and therefore refuses to think about any active role he could take in revolution. Much like Zeke in *Down Second Avenue,* Tsi rejects Christianity as a means of salvation from apartheid:

> There was the church. There were the priests .... We prayed for our souls to be saved. And while I was there my memory haunted me. Glimpses, flashes of my streets days, flirted with me many times while I knelt to pray, while we made the pious voices in song, hoping to be redeemed and to be saved. I had seen too many boys and girls vomit their lives in the streets, and I wondered how I had survived. The priest said pray, pray that you may be saved, the lord loves you. I prayed. I sang. I fasted. Then, the same lord who loved me, who wanted to save me, threw me back into the Alexandra streets. He could not give me a travelling document. (46).

Once again, Tsi's schizophrenic memory—a memory which at once cannot remember (a positive, ancestral past not ruptured by inequality)—cannot forget either (that Christian faith has not dismantled apartheid or provided any working solutions to erase it). He

condemns religion for keeping black South Africans passive and complacent. For Tsi his choice seems to be to go to church and pretend to believe in the hypocrisy of religion, or stay in the streets and live in the reality of inequality that he has known all of his life. Tsi cannot begin to look for a positive change when he feels ill-equipped to deal with memories of inequality and subordination.

Tsi's detainment and abuse by policemen precipitate an internal change in which he reconciles his painful memories of oppression and exploitation with a collective voice of unified ancestral identification. When Boykie and Tsi are on an assignment and are assaulted and detained by the police for no apparent reason, Tsi slowly begins an internal change in which he can no longer pretend to be complacent. He recalls his memory of his grandmother and what she would have said to him: "... if on my journey, I met people who could not sing, or who did not take with them their guitars, their drums, and their songs, who, when they tried to sing, their voices became hoarse, mine too would be hoarse, we would never make the journey" (54). The passive escape that Tsi previously found in the jazz music of Coltrane, Davis, and Simone is contrasted with an awakening of his consciousness and his needed participation in a collective voice of change. The memory he recalls for the first time is positive, relates him to an ancestral identification and collective mobilization, and encourages him to take action. The jazz music in which Tsi once found solace slowly starts to prove an ineffective means of escape and ironically prompts Tsi to start looking for a new method of identification.

Tsi's job as reporter is ironic since he had become so callous to the injustices on which he reported: "when a man allows his heart to rot, we are capable of beginning to

feed on the worms that rise, weave, create all sorts of patterns as they emerge from the rot. We can lick, and begin to enjoy their taste. I did—as a reporter" (45). But after Tsi's encounter with police brutality when on assignment with Boykie, he decides that his passive role as complacent reporter is no longer adequate:

> The hot and furious days of my time as a journalist and would-be photographer had gone. I had the scars to show, nothing more. The streets, perhaps because the scars were so visible, still demanded a photo from me ... I responded, but this time without a pen and a note book, and without the camera. I witnessed .... What I could not leave in the newsroom, my memory, I took with me, and was going to make sure that it never haunted me. (79)

Tsi's haunting memory of the past now becomes a positive tool for analyzing conditions in apartheid—he feels he can no longer escape the atrocities to which he bears witness. Memory here demands of Tsi that he become socio-politically responsible. He relinquishes his role as a passive journalist taking pictures of and reporting on inequality and violence and decides that the memory he tried so long to forget is now the memory he will use as a foundation for positive personal political activity. He replaces the jazz music that provided his escape with the silence that draws attention to social inequality and stagnation that he can no longer ignore:

> I heard the silence in me .... And then I began to become aware that between the melody, harmony, and rhythm of the music that now and then filled my house, from Hugh, Dollar, Nina, Letta, Miriam, Kippie, Cyril Magubane, Coltrane, Miles ... between their melody, harmony, and rhythm, when the pants are down, the silence is there. This is not an easy find. It is heavy. I could no longer listen to the music that taught me so much! (79)

The music to which he related and identified no longer allows him an escape route; for Tsi, his heightened sociopolitical awareness can no longer remain dormant in the jazz

which formerly provided a mechanism for coping with painful memories. Whenever he thinks of having his pants around his ankles and his genitals squeezed when he was unfairly detained, tortured, and humiliated, he can no longer pretend to ignore the injustices of apartheid by escaping into jazz music. Tsi's gradual evolution of consciousness results through his acknowledgement of a need for change from the painful memories of exploitation and abuse that he can no longer ignore.

When Tsi renounces his job as reporter and goes to work for a tutorial college, he is interrogated by the Afrikaans government and consequently shares his views on the need for educational equality: "'There is an alternative to the present educational system for blacks .... The alternative would be based on the dynamic relation between consciousness and reality, and would respect the principle that knowledge must be supplemented by action'" (92). Tsi acknowledges the relationship of memory to consciousness: to use memory to mediate past experience is to learn from that experience, heighten one's consciousness, and deal with the reality of the situation. Memory informs consciousness. Tsi now promotes an education which combines an awareness of self, both individually and collectively: he argues that the reality of the sociopolitical inequality necessitates political activism. Furthermore, he once again acknowledges memory as subjective, as it has created a history which has tried to permanently subordinate blacks and legalize inequality: "'History is taught, in both white and black schools, to distort the reality of South Africa; enforced segregation in schools entrenches the segregation system as a whole'" (92). Like Zeke in *Down Second Avenue*, Tsi realizes

that the inaccurate memory (history) of South Africa taught in schools serves as the cornerstone for perpetuating and justifying inequality.

Mongane Serote opens the first part of his novel with the focus on Tsi to present a singular narrative memory of the individual struggle to forge an identity in the midst of an urban apartheid environment. Serote later moves Tsi to the background as the novel progresses to highlight the experiential memory of other South African youth. Tsi's interactions with others in the community introduce us to varying individuals whose collective consciousness begins to emerge at a time fraught with sociopolitical tension.

Structurally, Serote's novel offers a series of different vignettes of overlapping experiences and memories of characters in the midst of apartheid. What we get through these individual memories is the collective consciousness of Alexandra youth dealing with apartheid through varying means combining personal responsibility and political activism. The multiple-memory narrative structure of *To Every Birth Its Blood* seems to recount an oral tradition in which there is a collective memory involved in telling a tale: the task of patching memory together requires many participants, although each person's story must be told. Where Tsi's central role in the story may be comparable to that of a community member beginning the story, soon the other youth become co-authors in the new history, adding their own personal memories and unique experiences. Serote uses memory as a narrative strategy to show the ways in which memory can be distorted and fragmented in the active thought processes of individuals but come together to form a unified realization. The characters interrupt the loosely-structured plot to bring in their memories, just like memory itself is often interrupted or non-sequential. What results is a

narrative structure similar to a story by Manuel Rui described by Godzich: "This complex creative process, at once traditional and revolutionary ... is constantly redefining the boundaries of the historical and the fictional, with attention to aesthetic, cognitive, and political significance" (Godzich 32). It is at the moment of these interweaving narratives that a story is being told which combines past, present, and future, calling on individual narratives of memory which create a collective consciousness.

While Part One of Serote's novel explores the personal evolution of black consciousness through an almost entirely singular narrative, Part Two drops readers into a South Africa in sociopolitical crisis and explores the interweaving narratives of young activists in "The Movement," some unsure of their roles, some militant, all ready to fight for a radical change in South Africa. While Mphahlele's novel explores the chronological conscientization of a singular memory which evolves over time to reject institutions of discrimination, Serote's work immerses us in the lives of various young South Africans, some who allow their memories to enable them, some who allow their memories to entrap and stifle them, all of whom are at different phases of conscientization: "We all believe that we must be free. We all believe that we must work towards that, that it is necessarily a voluntary act" (143). Part Two explores the volatile tension of South African blacks after the "Power Days" in which the National Party pillaged, devastated, and murdered many blacks and black townships to quell all of the political resistance beginning to take place.

Boykie, a photographer for the newspaper where Tsi is a reporter, represents a political activist who is discontent with the steps other political parties have taken to

enact change. For Boykie, recalling memory is extremely important since it is an active, mediating tool of experience which provides awareness of and reflection on the apartheid-state. Whereas Tsi is in a state of continual drunken oblivion, Boykie is constantly dissatisfied with lack of effective political mobilization and change. He always urges Tsi to become more cognizant of what transpires around him and chastises Tsi for his constant drinking: "'You can't be drunk and alert at the same time'" (33). Whereas Tsi is often truant or absent from his job as reporter, Boykie feels a political and personal responsibility to take pictures of the injustices he sees, even if it costs him his life. When Tsi points out that a picture is not worth Boykie's life, he replies: "'I said that is what I can do for now. If I see any other alternative, and I feel I can use it effectively, I will, without hesitation, use it .... That is what I can do for now. You either understand what I am saying or you don't and if you do, you don't go on the way you are'" (48). Unlike Zeke, Boykie not only expresses discontent with the lack of change around him, he proposes ideas for effectively communicating a message to the people: "'We have to find other ways than the press. You see for now the Black Students' Organization is not even dealing with the people. No, the issue is still to get it straight to the settlers, to define what they have done, to draw the lines, and then to make a move'" (48). Boykie acutely exposes the core of urbanized slums—cheap labor needed for a capitalistic society and a government intent on keeping blacks impoverished and subservient. Furthermore, he remains intent on reminding Tsi and others of a distant memory of black community and ownership of the land. Serote here presents the power of memory through a positive, revolutionary filter such as Boykie:

> You know yourself how now and then you have to consciously fight and fight and fight to keep your simple right to walk a Pretoria street, or any other street for that matter, you know that. You know that is only in our memory that this is our land. We imagine that we have a home, we know that in reality, if there was a quick way that these settlers would wipe us out, they would, and if they did not need our labour, they would .... The jails tell that story, death lists, even the graveyards can tell that story very well. (49)

Boykie interrupts a European, capitalist narrative of history by intervening with his own memory. He acutely remembers an ancestral identification with the land and comments that it is necessary to *recall* that memory along with the current memory of inequality and death under apartheid rule in order to enact change.

> What I am saying is that no matter what comes, or rather, who comes and professes to be with the people in fighting for our rights, they have to convince this whole nation that they have the power to do so. How do you do that? A few well-organized people have to challenge the power of the settlers, while the people watch, and if you convince the people that you know what you are doing, they in turn will lead the revolution. I am with the BSO right now, but I realise that that is only a stage, just a stage in our battle to reclaim a home for ourselves." (49)

Boykie realizes that memory—recalling an ancestral history and claim to the land—is a necessary first step to get blacks to begin thinking independently not just about liberation and equality, but about the social, political, and mental obstacles that have been created in order to get blacks to accept history as natural. Boykie mandates the creation of a new narrative, first as individuals and then as a collective group. Boykie argues for a political activism directed straight at settlers: he refuses to place himself in the role of native-as-exile and argues that the only way for revolutionary change is not to hide behind ideology but to directly confront the power in control. Furthermore, Boykie acknowledges the

forced migration into ghettos for employment and urges a rediscovery of ancestral history and activism necessary to reclaim land and create real community.

At the opening of Part Two we are introduced to John who is rendered ineffective by the memory of the death of his lover, Nolizwe, in the violent struggle between force and resistance: "He had listened to the Prime Minister say that people who thought there was a crisis in South Africa were out of their minds. John wept that day. He understood that Nolizwe was among many, was only one of the many, many people who were dying because there was no crisis in his country" (96). John despairs over the memory of the death of many South African protestors, a memory that the Afrikaans government will not acknowledge. Other characters like his friends Onalenna and Dikeledi, however, remind him that he must fight for the greater cause of liberation and equality. Onalenna and Dikeledi encourage the collective mobilization of cause and activism that is necessary for change. Dikeledi tells John she thinks he is spending too much time indulging in self-pity (102), a self-pity that, as witnessed by Tsi, can trap one in a sense of hopelessness and futility. Onalenna also realizes that, while the Power Days claimed many lives and devastated many areas, black activists were making strides which obviously threatened the security of the government. She creates a poem which recalls an ancestral history of community and ends it with a tone of awareness needed for revolution: "We are people / Who have struggled a long long time / *Now we have to use the lessons of our struggle*" (100, emphasis added). Ona recalls the memory of a history of struggle and urges that only through analysis of memory can one learn lessons which will create awareness and change. When John asks Ona what she thinks will become of

the country, she replies that the right question should be: "...What can we do to change what is going on? ... Because otherwise, if you put it the way you put it, all we can do is react" (104). Ona denies the passive role that blacks have been given in society and encourages an awareness that is needed to take a proactive role in changing inequality.

One of the more complex characters is Dikeledi, an activist and reporter involved in the liberation movement, but unsure of her role. Through meta-cognition, Dikeledi explores the evolution of her consciousness and possesses the astute ability to change her ideals based on an experiential memory of what has and has not been effective politically: "She was coming out of the Black Consciousness days .... Dikeledi in those days had believed that something was going to happen .... It was so long ago" (133). Dikeledi realizes that stronger intellectual force is necessary to ameliorate the black condition, and decides to become a contributing member of the Movement: "It was strange to know that she was one with this wind" (153). Dikeledi serves as an example of someone who uses her experiential memory to recall the past, analyze what methods of change have not been effective in dismantling apartheid, and participate in collective mobilization in the hopes of producing revolutionary change.

Oupa, the most militant member of The Movement, sets the tone for the direct, aggressive action needed to take place for true change to occur. Oupa sees the massacre of blacks by the government in the "Power Days" as a time creating the catalyst for resistance and revolution: "For the first time, we were one; school children, father, mother, teacher, shopkeeper, rich and poor, we stood as one and fought, and helped each other .... South Africa will never be the same again, you know why? People have

realised, have discovered who they are, and what they can do" (110-11). Oupa recognizes that the sociopolitical climate is ripe for change and he calls on his friends to act immediately and with forceful political resistance that cannot be overlooked. He is hopeful that a collective consciousness is emerging and he mandates that his comrades recall a positive ancestral history, look to the memories of European exploitation, and see what revolutionary strategies can be implemented to create black liberation. He tells Tsi, his uncle, that "the people are claiming their history" (182). Oupa's memory is lucid with a picture of a collective, communal, ancestral history which stands in sharp contrast to Tsi's memory which had been clouded for so long. Although Tsi and his comrades are successful in their attack on the blue Granada, Oupa ends up dying for his cause after he gets caught with a pamphlet on the Movement in his pocket.

Through the varying personal narratives of memory of the characters creating a collective consciousness and questioning history, Serote keeps the Movement vague and mysterious because what it fictionally refers to is not as relevant as what it represents:

> The Movement is old. It is as old as the grave of the first San or Khoikhoi who was killed by a bullet that came from a ship which had anchored at Cape Town to establish a stop station. The Movement is as young as the idea of throwing stones, of hurling one's life at the armed men who believe in God and shoot with guns. The Movement is the eyes which see how poverty is akin to a skeleton. (179)

The Movement recalls memories of the futility of life spent in inescapable poverty, squalor, and inopportunity. The Movement acknowledges a History used as a tool of oppressive manipulation and recognizes that capitalism recreated a new slave trade of laborers. The Movement requires forceful and aggressive political action that must

confront the oppressors. The Movement represents a reclamation of land, community, and ancestral history:

> The Movement is an idea in the mind of a people; a resolve that it will never accept the process of defeat. Since the settlers first settled, all their laws and wars have succeeded in only postponing the real issue—that the people want and need their land. (183)

The Movement is psychological warfare manifested through physical action. The Movement is a collection of memories which prompt action and create a collective consciousness which insists on a reunification with a land and with a history of black South Africans. For Tuki when he thinks introspectively about the Movement, he recalls a memory steeped in ancestral history which encourages his revolutionary involvement.

At the end of Serote's novel, after positive revolutionary advances combine with the sadness of the death and loss of Oupa and many others, we come back to Tsi, now a political refugee who resolves to be more active after he learns of the death of his nephew: "I knew that my country needed to be saved by us, its people. Oupa had told me so. He had told me this with a clarity which had sobered my drunken escapism. I had known this before. I had seen it. I had heard it. I had experienced it. Now I knew that it was not only important to know. The most important thing was, what does one do once one knows?" (193). Memory must be the first step in creating consciousness, analyzing the situation, and forming a call to action. Serote uses memory as a narrative strategy to produce a collective black consciousness; Serote implies through his characters that memory and personal identification are the first steps in creating awareness and deconstructing and dismantling all inequalities of apartheid. Tsi realizes the significance of summoning memory not as a tool which stifles, but as a tool that enables. The lyrical

excerpt at the beginning of Tsi's experience represented his clouded memory and sense of purposelessness:

> Where, where does a river begin
> to make, to take its journey
> where does a river begin
> to take its journey to the sea? (41)

Toward the end of the novel, however, Tsi has begun his journey as the Movement gains momentum. The sea symbolizes the Movement: "The Movement, like the sea, is deep, is vast, is reflective. It can be calm, rough and tough" (200). More importantly, however, memory is symbolic of the sea: for Tsi to become socio-politically responsible requires him to recount a memory steeped in vast and reflective experiences—he must search to find the good memories of a communal, agrarian, ancestral history, and hard memories of oppression, violence, and humiliation under apartheid.

The last experiential musical encounter Tsi has is antithetical to his previous music of escape—it is a song sung by children in Soweto that he hears on the radio; he compares it to a sharp needle gutting him (196), opening up his consciousness and exposing him as vulnerable to the turmoil in his country. The novel ends with an electricity in the air over the revolts taking place by students, workers, and clergy. Tsi continues to acknowledge the volatile and dangerous situation around him but offers a glimpse of hope that "...this cannot go on forever. The first leg of the journey is now well and truly in progress" (205). Tsi recounts the memories of his ancestral past, his experiences being oppressed and abused, and realizes that steps must be taken to enact immediate change on this new journey for black liberation. Like the graphic birth scene at the end of the novel symbolizing rebirth and connection to the earth, the last sentiment

of Tsi's as he goes on the road of his long journey is one saying "'Push, push, push'" (206).

Black Consciousness, as Serote and Mphahlele would agree, calls for a history written from the individual black experience. V.Y. Mudimbe cites Foucault who charges history with the project of "bringing man's consciousness back to its real condition, of restoring to it the contents and forms that brought it into being, and elude us within it" (188). Whereas the structure of Ezekial Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* chronicles the linear narrative memory of Zeke which results in the development of his consciousness, Mongane Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood* is a ruptured, fragmented, schizophrenic narrative of ensnaring and enabling memories which create a collective consciousness through various experiences of apartheid: the self-destructiveness and eventual enlightenment of Tsi, the militant behavior of Oupa, the self-reflectiveness of Dikeledi, and the heartbreak of John. Ezekial Mphahlele and Mongane Serote brilliantly develop memory as a narrative for unfolding the dynamic psychological and emotional tensions played out in the mind of the developing consciousness of black South Africans in the apartheid regime.

WORKS CITED

Bhabha, Homi K. The Location of Culture. London: Routledge, 1994.

Biko, Steven. I Write What I Like. New York: Harper Collins, 1979.

Godzich, Wlad. "Emergent Literature and the Field of Comparative Literature." The Comparative Perspective on Literature: Approaches to Theory and Practice. Ed. Clayton Koelb and Susan Noakes. London: Cornell UP, 1988. 18-36.

Mphaphlele, Ezekial. Down Second Avenue. London: Faber and Faber, 1959.

Mudimbe, V.Y. The Idea of Africa. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994.

Mudimbe, V.Y. The Invention of Africa. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988

Obee, Ruth. Es'Kia Mphahlele: Themes of Alienation and African Humanism. Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP, 1999.

Serote, Mongane. To Every Birth Its Blood. New York: Thunder's Mouth, 1989.

The Author

Christina Buckland graduated from Mary Washington College in 2001 with a B.A. in English and certification in Secondary Education. She will receive her M.A. degree in English with a concentration in Postcolonial Studies in August 2004. She hopes to attain her Doctorate in Postcolonial Literature and to pursue professional endeavors in publishing or teaching at the university level.