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Jackals with muddy whiskers: re-centering decolonized memory in South Africa through performativity and text

Adam Levin[a], Deirdre C. Byrne[b], Gerhard Genis[c] and Toni Gennrich[d]

[a]Department of English, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa; [b]Department of English Studies, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa; [c]Department of Humanities Education, Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa; [d]Independent Scholar, Cape St Francis, South Africa

ABSTRACT

This article discusses dialogues between South African poets and ourselves. The poets describe their roles as purveyors of memory, bringing experiences with nature into the present, providing universal interconnectedness. Our title is a proverb meaning "the jackal that survives is the one with muddy whiskers". To survive, a jackal must know the world deeply, utilizing deep listening and respectful engagement. The poets describe poetry as a multimodal act, grounded in their geospatial locations. They weave memories of their communities and cultures into multimedia works, integrating diverse art forms. They decolonize the study of memory by subverting the centering of Northern epistemologies and re-centering their experience as distinctively (South) African. Writing as "implicated subjects" who have benefited from systems of privilege, we are part of a community of poets. We engage with the poets through found poetry as we trace connections between the poets and their work towards healing.

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Introduction

This article demonstrates how South African poets and poetry reframe and reclaim memory. Both memory and poetry are intergenerational,[1] drawing on affective flows and interactions across time and space. The poets whose work we examine offer new perspectives on memory as a reaffirmation of the inextricable interconnectedness of the planetary ecosystem. Their work recentres the Global South and actively speaks back to epistemologies of the Global North. South African poet, Mongane

CONTACT Toni Gennrich toni.gennrich@gmail.com 45 St Francis Way, Cape St Francis, 6313, South Africa

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Wally Serote,[2] quotes a Setswana proverb "*Phokoje gotshela yoodithetsenyana*", meaning "the jackal that survives is the one with muddy whiskers". This proverb implies that if we are to learn from a jackal how to survive, we must be with it, walk in its footsteps, and know the world as it does. To do so requires "deep listening"[3] a process of relationship-building through respectful engagement as we pay attention to all the utterances and silences of our world.

The interviews discussed in this article were conducted by members of the South African Poetry Project (ZAPP), a community of poets, researchers, and schoolteachers, dedicated to fostering appreciation of South African poetry. The interviews aimed to facilitate dialogues between the interviewers and the poets, focusing on the poets' interactions with indigenous knowledge. Through these dialogues, the poets reflected on their connections with the "more-than-human world".[4] These connections are rooted in the poets' ancestral pasts. Through their own processes of deep listening, the poets engage with their ancestors' experiences of the natural world, and they bring these experiences into the present, allowing them to shape their life-worlds. The poets' conceptualization of memory in relation to the more-than-human world produces memories which are cultural, cyclical, multimodal and emphasize our universal interconnectedness.

In this article, we examine how Zena John, Quaz Roodt, Malika Ndlovu, and Toni Stuart shape their conceptualizations of memory. These poets represent a range of responses to spiritual and natural phenomena. We understand spirituality as an inner capacity and connection with others, the world, past and present. Our discussion shows how the poets are interconnected despite their cultural and generational differences. Although the poets come from different religious backgrounds, they share a common spirituality of deep connection. Together, they offer a unique approach to creating intergenerational bonds and ecologies of memory. This approach does not exclude traditional understandings of memory and spirituality: rather, it shifts and enriches received cultural beliefs and centers the poets' experiences as distinctively (South) African and relevant to current contexts.

We begin by reflecting on our own positionality in relation to that of the poets. As South Africans, we are connected to the poets by virtue of our shared national identities. However, our whiteness, and the meanings attached to it within South African society, implies that we are distanced from their experiences. Consequently, we consider the implications of this for our approach and perspectives. Developing from this, we outline our theoretical framework. This leads into in-depth discussion of our interviews with four poets. In our analysis, we integrate found poems derived from the interviews.

Positionality

Rothberg[5] addresses the problem experienced by communities and groups who, while not being active perpetrators of violence or oppression, still feel burdened by inhumane acts committed in the name of groups they belong to. The framework of

[2]Serote, "Reflection", 32–7.
[3]Oliveros, *Quantum Listening*.
[4]Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*.
[5]Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject*.

"implicated subjects" has provided us with a springboard from which to write respectfully about the creative endeavors of people who belong to different cultures and races, and who were oppressed by people from our cultural and racial groups.

Movements such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall (which took place between 2015 and 2016)[6] have highlighted how the racial divisions within the country have extended to the continued presence of westernized approaches to thinking and learning. In response, they emphasized the importance of a decolonized approach to learning, which gives voice to groups who experience marginalization and "Othering" within post-apartheid South African society. As researchers, we endeavor to participate in this decolonization by positioning ourselves as part of a community of creative meaning-makers and knowledge holders. We understand ourselves as intergenerationally linked, through memory, with past and future generations, as well as with the more-than-human world. We explore these connections through deep listening as we listen and learn together with the poets. We employ a "kincentric"[7] perspective as we reflect on the poets' approaches toward shaping memory by drawing on the ecological, cultural and environmental facets that make up individual and collective identities.

Theoretical frameworks

We have been influenced by Michael Rothberg's seminal work in *Multidirectional Memory*.[8] Rothberg demonstrates that cultural memory circulates in many temporal directions. He refers to interpretations of Holocaust memory as an entry point to consider how different historical memories interact. He observes that these historical memories are too often placed in competition with one another. Instead, he proposes that interactions between historical memories should occur through "ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing".[9] Historical memories, he argues, "come into being through their dialogical interactions with others",[10] which create potential for "new forms of solidarity and new visions of justice".[11]

We also use Rosanne Kennedy's concept of multidirectional eco-memory, which creates "dialogical interactions"[12] between humans and animals. The term "eco-memory", for Kennedy, is rooted in a "deep memory of a habitat, conceived as an ecological assemblage in which all elements, human and nonhuman, are mobile, connected, and interactive".[13]

African decolonial scholar, Achille Mbembe, cites Éduard Glissant's concept of "*Tout-Monde*, or *All-World*"[14] when he writes that "in the end, there is only one world".[15] This statement aims to overcome the separation between people, and

[6]Booysen, *Student Revolt*.
[7]Reo, "Inawendiwin and Relational Accountability."
[8]Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*.
[9]Ibid., 3.
[10]Ibid., 5.
[11]Ibid.
[12]Kennedy, "Multidirectional Eco-Memory."
[13]Ibid., 269.
[14]Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*.
[15]Ibid., 180.

between people and other life-forms, in twenty-first-century culture. Mbembe evokes indigenous African reverence for the seed as a symbol of life and death to illustrate the entanglement of humanity and more-than-human life: “it is in the relationship that we maintain with the totality of the living world that the truth of who we are is made visible”.[16] This conviction is also found in the work of new materialist physicist, Barad,[17] when she writes about the entanglement of matter and meaning. Another articulation is found in the work of indigenous anthropologist, Enrique Salmón. Salmón explains: “*Iwígara* [an indigenous Ruramai word] is the total interconnectedness of all life in the Sierra Madres, physical and spiritual”.[18] Salmón develops the idea of “kincentric ecology”, which stresses the interrelatedness of all forms of life. When we realize we are kin with every more-than-human phenomenon around us, we are more likely to treat them with respect and care. The conviction that we are all inseparably intertwined with living and non-living natural phenomena is shared by the poets discussed in this article, as well as by us.

Central to many indigenous traditions is the practice of deep listening. The ancient KhoiSan people listened deeply to their ancestral and physical worlds. They achieved communion with their life-worlds through “boiling” or word-meditations, by painting on rock faces and dancing around communal fires.[19] These practices were also used to mend relationships with the ancestors, and to heal the body and spirit.[20] Some Australian indigenous people refer to this as *dadirri*,[21] equating it to the practice of meditation. Manathunga et al.[22] argue that “deep listening/listening with the heart” forms part of the indigenous poetic experience, a view shared by Ndlovu.[23] The phrase is also used by composer Pauline Oliveros,[24] who defines deep listening as a voluntary transformative process of attending to experience, which can bring about individual and social healing.

Deep listening through word-meditations has a sensory quality. d’Abdon,[25] Ndlovu[26] and Manathunga et al.[27] hold that indigenous poetry, which includes spoken word poetry, is a multisensory and multimodal expression of memory. This multimodal and multisensory act of memory construction is deeply embedded in our genetic and cultural fiber.

Poetic inquiry as a methodology

We used the arts-based research methodology of poetic inquiry in our analysis. Poetic inquiry is a method of crafting “research poems” from data in the social

[16]Ibid.
[17]Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*.
[18]Salmón, “Kincentric Ecology”, 1328, original emphasis.
[19]Lewis-Williams, *The Mind in the Cave*.
[20]Ndlovu, “Dancing with Mountains.”
[21]Ungunmerr, “Dadirri.”
[22]Manathunga et al, “Decolonisation through Poetry.”
[23]Ndlovu, “Dancing with Mountains.”
[24]Oliveros, *Quantum Listening*.
[25]D’Abdon, “Teaching Spoken Word Poetry.”
[26]Ndlovu, “Dancing with Mountains.”
[27]Manathunga et al, “Decolonisation through Poetry.”

sciences and humanities. The resulting poems "are written with the primary purpose of remaining faithful to the text, experience, or phenomena being represented"[28] as opposed to "literary poems". Following this methodology, we created found poems, using the exact words in the transcriptions of semi-structured interviews with the poets, in the same order as they appear in the transcriptions. We chose words which focused on the major themes and ideas that the interviewees emphasized. The resulting found poems are the sole creations of each researcher and were not shared with the poets. We find it fitting that, since our subject is South African poets, we should honor them by presenting poetry based on their reflections, using their own words but shaped into new poems by us.

Zena John

Zena John, a South African poet of Indian heritage, describes herself as Hindu in her culture and spiritual belief system. She resists having any identity imposed from outside and explains how her multimodal anthology, *Beyond Spice*,[29] a collaboration with five visual artists, resists the stereotypical ways in which women, particularly Indian women, are perceived. She challenges the outsider gaze that limits women of Indian heritage in South Africa, noting that the anthology is an attempt to "slash and smash and break all boundaries, and to emerge as creative beings regardless of whatever paternal, and sometimes maternal society has put on us". Here Zena[30] rejects the memory of how she and other South Asian women have been presented and asserts her personal and spiritual memory, which might find a connection with other women.

It is the duality of her African and South-Asian identity, "a kind of marrying the two", that she addresses in the first poem in *Beyond Spice*: "Lifesong", which describes her identity as a "duet with the sun", in which her soul is hidden. The first stanza recalls her struggle to reach a sense of comfort and "home" in Africa, through words that connote some initial discomfort, such as "tugging" and "tweaking". In contrast, she remembers "centuries of bell-jingling footsteps' ' that have contributed to her South Asian identity, giving her soul flight and enjoying the glistening of the moon on "the holy waters". The two continents are linked within her, as are the sun and the moon. In the conversation between Zena and the interviewer, Soorie Naidoo (also a South African Indian), they acknowledge how the visual image accompanying this poem, of a young Indian woman emerging like a flower from a plant, could represent breaking through stereotypes to emerge into one's own identity. Wilson argues[31] that "[k]nowledge is not created or owned by individuals," but, rather, lies in connections and relationships. Similarly, connectedness dominates the conversation between Soorie and Zena, and this is reflected in the fact that, despite the artworks in the anthology in most cases having been created independently of the poetry, Zena is interested in the synergies between the two modes.

[28]Van Rooyen and d'Abdon, "Transforming Data into Poems."
[29]John, *Beyond Spice*.
[30]Our poets are referred to by their first names in recognition of the informal nature of the interviews.
[31]Wilson in Reo, "Inawendiwin and Relational Accountability."

Connectedness, which traverses space and time, is further highlighted as Zena explains how she travels in Africa and yet feels a "sense of home and peace" wherever she visits. Zena speaks of "the interconnectedness or interconnectivity of *everything* and, at our essence we're all the same, we're all one" (original emphasis). She argues that not only our connectedness is important, but also our relationship to everything in the world.

> … the connectedness; and I know I am stressing that word but, the poems sometimes, I feel, help people understand that they're not separate – they're not alone; that the human is not the only being that matters in this world; that the natural world is so much a part of who we are; we gain so much peace from it, never mind all the things we gain from nature—mother nature is bountiful, so giving to us; everything we consume comes from mother nature, whether it's plant-based, or animal, water, the air we breathe.

Just as Reo[32] argues for honoring the interconnectedness between us and all of creation, Zena claims that this is what her poetry offers: the need to recognize that the more-than-human beings are part of a "web of relations",[33] but that they can also be our teachers. To listen deeply, we need to be attentive to this connectedness.[34]

For Zena, this connectedness equates to spirituality, and because poetry is the language and "music of the soul", it provides the reader with opportunities to examine their souls:

> For me the idea is to have people re-examine themselves, their lives, their roles [and ideas of] who they are in this world, *who they are as souls* and that can take expression in any way. (original emphasis)

Whether poems come from the traditional canon, or are indigenous or a performance piece, she believes they can take people to a "place of profound *soulness* within themselves". This comes through the work of the poet and the work of the reader and what the reader draws from the poem "depends on the reader's perspective and what they're going through at any given time".

The following found poem articulates Zena's understanding of the spiritual role her poetry plays:

> Mystical meditation
> Introspective spirituality
> Transcends and cuts through the boundaries
> poetry is normally
> locked
> into.
>
> It cuts through religions, generations, atheism, poets and poems.
> We are given a state of grace
>   and truth
> We're all one.
> I didn't know I knew the truth
> until I found the truth
> and it was
> so simple.

[32]Reo, "Inawendiwin and Relational Accountability."
[33]Ibid., 72.
[34]Brearley, "Deep Listening and Leadership."

> We all have the flame of God in us.
> We all have that light of love, which is part of God.
> We're all life – the creation side of God.
> Our connection to the divine creator is the same.
>
> I am a spiritual mirror and people see in me
> who they really are
> Metaphorical
> Deep
> Nuanced
> When I connect with people at a soul level
> God comes through me to them.

Zena calls herself "an accidental poet" because:

> I'm not a dedicated poet who intended writing poetry; it just happened. I don't follow any kind of genre, it's free flowing, and a lot of times I believe that the poems write themselves through me.

She views herself as a conduit for the poetry:

> There's a kind of life they have of their own. I don't edit poems; I don't rewrite them. [They exist] as they come out – almost a stream of consciousness – and then I sit back, and I appreciate and understand what I have written.

Zena reframes conventional notions of what it means to write poetry. Her consciousness is suspended, and the poem comes into being through her. Reader, poem, and poet are seemingly not distinct. The poem is not a representation: the poet and poem are intertwined or "entangled"[35] and there is an intricate and dynamic relationship between the poem and the reader. Woodland et al.,[36] describing their audio production work with First Nation women in prison, argue that indigenous meaning-making happens in the connection between storyteller and story as "living stories held within indigenous bodies".[37] Zena's relationship with her poems is such that something deep within her is brought to the fore in the writing down of the poem. There is a further dynamic process as meanings between poem, poet and reader are co-constituted. Recalling Rothberg's[38] "multidirectional" memory, Zena suggests that there are multidirectional intra-actions happening as poem, poet, and reader relate.

Zena taps into her Hindu spirituality to bring about healing for all people, regardless of their faith or lack thereof. She views herself as a conduit for the "God energy" that people need. Rather than imposing her understanding of spirituality onto the reader, it is through the inherent connectedness of all life-forms and her acting as a spiritual mirror that her readers can see who they are spiritually through the interactions happening across time and space.

Closely linked to the idea of spiritual healing is Zena's drawing on the elements. She recognizes that the elements in the more-than-human world are an essential part of our experience. Fire is a healing, sacred energy, destroying blockages "that keep us from fulfilling our soul lessons, and our sole (soul) purpose". The spiritual space opened by fire

[35]Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*.
[36]Woodland et al, "Listening to Country."
[37]Woodland et al., "Listening to Country", 75.
[38]Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*.

is filled with water, which heals with “magical abilities”. Zena (like Malika Ndlovu, whose interview is discussed later in this article) argues that humans are made up of water and that this relationship is reflected in the ways water is affected by our thoughts. Fire and water are both necessary for a spiritual realization of connectedness. Zena’s approach to poetry emphasizes the dynamic, transformative and reflective nature of writing and reading or listening to poetry. Poetry (as well as other art forms) can be used to break boundaries imposed by the past and to build on new synergies and relationships between the spirit, mind and body as well as the human and non-human.

Richard (Quaz) Roodt

The found poem below was crafted from an interview with Quaz, conducted by Gerhard Genis. Both the poet and the interviewer are home-language speakers of Afrikaans.

raw, using our languages
just me and my demons.
The text is what carries the spirit of the story forward,
and helps it to exist in spaces which I might never be able to visit
gravitating towards something that really speaks to the human spirit
the poems exist in quiet moments,
in homes,
with kids,
on the road,
next to the dam while you’re
looking at the sunset.
Poetry creates that space and brings it right back to where my people are;
giving the work to the people,
but also making sure that the work finds them.

This poem goes to the heart of Quaz’s conceptualization of being a South African poet or storyteller. He believes that poetic memory has two conduits: performativity and textuality. He started out as a performance poet, but later gravitated toward the page. For him (unusually), the timeless textual quality and form of the poem are more important than the transient oral and visual performance on stage. This observation appears to contradict the view that spoken word poetry frees the poem’s spirit or soul from dead printed pages through multimodal meaning-making.[39] Quaz holds that the page becomes a receptacle for memory and opens new spaces of becoming, where “quiet moments” form close ancestral bonds. This conceptualization connects with indigenous concepts of experience and memory, which are connected “intergenerational[ly] and multidirectional[ly] across time and space’.[40] This epistemology sees memory as circular, formed by a harmonious coexistence that encompasses the life-worlds of the quick and the dead. Newfield and Bozalek[41] apply the term to a South African context of communal time, space and action as “hauntology”,[42] which implies that “Writing is […] a bodily and a spiritual action”.[43]

[39]d’Abdon, “Teaching Spoken Word Poetry”, 46.
[40]Manathunga et al., “Decolonisation through Poetry”, 14.
[41]Newfield and Bozalek, “A Thebuwa Hauntology”, 37.
[42]Newfield and Bozalek, “A Thebuwa Hauntology.”
[43]Ibid.

Here they draw on Jacques Derrida's[44] "hauntology", which is language oscillating between the past, present and future, pushing the boundaries between life and death in the service of social justice.

Quaz also sees his work as hauntings: "with the Afrikaans work [poetry], digging into my father's history and culture and forgotten history, I find myself fuelled by a different passion". Afrikaans, which is partly descended from the Khoekhoegowab languages, "gives me the tools to be […] more honest, vulnerable and makes me feel the way that I want a poem to feel [… Afrikaans is a] vehicle to allow myself to speak honestly." He has re-envisioned the erstwhile "language of the oppressor" as a poetic strategy for authenticity. Afrikaans was appropriated by the apartheid government as a language of oppression, and as a language of power. Quaz reclaims this language for the black communities to which it also belongs. He conjures his ancestry best in his native tongue, Afrikaans, as it "just rip[s] a piece of my heart out".

> I'm trying to have the poems speak about the language and guide you there; a pool of knowledge that exists here and if reading this poem is the key that helps unlock and open the door, and [helps one to] see what's behind there, and then use the poem in that way.

He says: "so, the language itself presents this door, but I'm also opening pieces of myself that I've usually hidden in English." Poetry, especially in Afrikaans, serves as a portal that links the ancestors with the living, and through which intergenerational memory is shared in indigenous cultures.[45,46]

His poetic storytelling is a bodily and spiritual remembering of the past: it is a living trace with a soul and memory,[47] as indicated in his poem "To Remember":

> To remember is to peel away the scab
> Each letter in your name is a muffled bell
> Swaying in the windless death
> A fading chime made of flesh asks to disappear into the earth
>
> To remember is to breathe
> To hold you in my forever eye is true sight
> A melting candle, a guitar string, a burnt notebook,
> At the foot of memory,
> The sunlit altar where I always find you[48]

Despite Quaz's preference for the printed page, the poem's impact is created by a multimodal ensemble of "peel[ing]", "bell", "[s]waying", "chime", "breathe", "sight" and "melting". The aural, visual, tactile and kinesthetic modes are invoked to conjure faded memory more sharply in the mind's eye. Through immersing the senses of hearing, seeing and feeling/moving in poetic language, memory is embodied and rises from the seemingly dead page as multimodal meaning-making.[49]

[44]Derrida, *Specters of Marx*.
[45]Krog, *The Stars Say 'Tsau'*.
[46]Ndlovu, "Dancing with Mountains."
[47]Lo Liyong, "Indigenous African Literary Forms."
[48]Roodt, "To Remember."
[49]D'Abdon, "Teaching Spoken Word Poetry."

Quaz emphasizes that his work is influenced by his people's traditions, which are part of cultural memory: "the language needs people, and the language needs the ears and the eyes [of people] to see how it interacts with the people". He "sees" and responds to these traditions and shares his poetic storytelling with his community in Promosa (in the North-West Province of South Africa):

> So, it's about finding the language; also [it] becoming a tool for me to take [the poetry] home and to bring it to my people that know me as a poet, at home. To bring it home and say, 'This is your story, this is your language as well. Come let's see if we can have a conversation together.

His poetic memory and language are rooted in his coloured ancestry. Adhikari[50] observes that coloured people have always occupied a liminal position within South Africa, in which they are "othered" because they are neither black enough, nor white enough to identify with either racial group. What is defined as Colored history, identity and memory is frequently disputed. Wicomb observes that Colored memory has been repressed by a culture of shame: "[we possess] shame for our origins of slavery, shame for miscegenation, and shame, as colonial racism becomes institutionalized for being black".[51]

Quaz identifies with the KhoiSan tradition, which consists of "rock art and how that can be translated into [poetry]". The KhoiSan were alternatively migrant livestock herders and nomadic hunters, who turned many rocky landscapes in the interior of South Africa into open-air exhibitions of storytelling through rock art. He describes how his father, as a child, remembered

> seeing a leopard in the mountain, and then spending three days running, crossing the river looking for the leopard. Those are beautiful memories. And then, while looking for the leopard, running through the valley, [encountering] a group of old Khoi folk doing a trance dance [laughs]. So those are the stories.

The ancient tradition of multimodal storytelling around fires is part of Quaz's poetic memory, culture and language passed on from his father, memories of speaking, drumming, humming, singing, and clapping, woven into a fabric of warmth and communion with the ancestors.

Interestingly for a poet who is so concerned with his ancestry, Quaz views digital technology (ambisonics technology, used in virtual reality, which provides full-sphere surround sound) and "code-switching" as conduits for sharing intergenerational memory with a wider audience: "how language can be manipulated in text". The construction of indigenous memory, for Quaz, is part of a multimodal stage of performativity: "the page as a stage for the text" in creating a space where memory can be conjured in current places, similar to the rock paintings and engravings of his KhoiSan ancestors.

This poetic space allows for healing[52] in the aftermath of colonial subjugation and for reaffirming identities: "emerging, healing, poetry and finding common ground". The KhoiSan consulted the ancestors for advice on physical and spiritual

[50]Adhikari, *Not White Enough*.
[51]Wicomb, "Shame and Identity."
[52]Ndlovu, "Dancing with Mountains."

healing and communion, and for providing physical sustenance through various food sources.[53,54] By evoking his ancestral traditions, Quaz is able to speak to and for a communal South Africa and Africa. His poetry provides "one more colour on this palette of the African voice and the African canon". Importantly, the Colored community is an integral part and "colour" on this multicultural palette. Quaz's poetry speaks of the KhoiSan who are claimed as ancestors by the Colored community and whose descendents are acknowledged as indigenous Southern African people. The rock art markers are evidence for this; these paintings and engravings were created in conjunction with conversations with the ancestors: place, people and language are therefore inseparable.

Malika Ndlovu

South African poet, Malika Ndlovu, is a holder of ancient indigenous knowledge. She holds knowledge in trust for younger generations of poets and acts as a poetic conduit for indigenous ways of creating knowledge through multimodal art.

In an interview with Deirdre Byrne, Malika recalls growing up in a racially mixed household at a time when this was illegal. In South Africa in the 1970s, sex with people of other races was criminalized, making her, like Trevor Noah, "born a crime".[55] Malika's Colored identity did not allow her to understand "why […] half the family [feels] so ashamed about physical features". Her parents, although not professional authors, had literary bents. Her father habitually recited proverbs around the house, expressing truths in words, and her mother told stories as rewards if the children behaved well. Malika astutely identifies her mother's stories as indigenous stories, a recognition that, as Jean-François Lyotard notes, elevates "little stories" (*les petits récits*) about local phenomena to the same level of significance as "grand narratives".[56] Malika's mother's stories were narratives of ordinary people's lives that are important in creating an archive of lived experiences.

Malika understands herself as an "applied artist", who uses her work to aid the project of healing that is desperately needed in South Africa, where the traumatic wounds of the apartheid past (1948-1994) are still fresh. She describes her poetic mission in terms of the indigenous concept of ubuntu, which literally means "humanity", but is usually translated as "A person is a person through other persons".[57] The following found poem articulates her *ars poetica*:

> The goal is to surface invisible stories.
> It's ubuntu: I see myself as you.
> We need to recognize ourselves
>   in each other.
> If you recognize something
>   in the story
> I am telling

[53]Lewis-Williams, *The Mind in the Cave*.
[54]Van der Post, *The Heart of the Hunter*.
[55]Noah, *Born a Crime*.
[56]Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 60.
[57]Tutu, Desmond. *No Future without Forgiveness*, 35.

on stage,
on page,
in poetry,
doesn't it take you back
in your life
to where those stories surface?

Understanding "myself as you" entails that "I" do not impose a hierarchy that makes me more important than you, but instead, I respect you as equally important and valuable and as being interdependent with me. Malika's art is powerfully multimodal ("on stage,/on page,/in poetry"), which, she says, is a common feature of indigenous African poetic practices. It draws on the affective, the embodied, and the spiritual, while working with multimedia as diverse as glass balls, strips of cloth and film.

Malika recognizes the persistent presence of watery themes and motifs in her poetry and in her life, as the following found poem indicates:

The listening practice
has been with me
all along:
it's echo-location.
I was a whale
in a previous life;
the gap in my teeth
is a blowhole;
my voice sings songs
as they would sound underwater:
as ritual.

The common ground
is water.
Water is ocean
or river
or a drink
or rain
or drought
or a bay
or the harbour.
We are all connected
in ways we are not even aware of.

Malika says that, as a woman, she is particularly drawn to water and the rhythms of the ocean and its denizens. Her "inner whale" not only travels long distances, but also taps into indigenous ancestral memories. Her association with water includes the planet when she asserts "the common ground is water". She notices that ground and water are opposed, but also that "ground" means a substrate for organic life. The fact that this common substrate is actually water is a paradox. Malika goes on to explain that even dunes, where it appears that there is no water to be seen, are based on water. Dunes are created by the action of waves, and by the wind that blows off the ocean, so they are profoundly dependent on water. In this way, water becomes, for Malika, a medium that links the entire network of planetary existence: human, more-than-human, and inanimate. The metaphor of water becomes, in her work, an

oceanic and capacious repository for many kinds of memory: the cultural memory of indigenous rituals as well as eco-memory. At the same time, water makes new connections by making its own channels through the ground. In the same way, Malika notes, the separation between people in the world, and especially in South Africa, is illusory: all the life-forms on the planet, not only all the humans, are part of a single network of (watery) life.

From a decolonial perspective, some bodies of water contain multidirectional memories of trauma. These are histories of violent racial and gender oppression, which "flow" from the past into the present and back. Koleka Putuma's award-winning poem "Water"[58] reimagines the ocean from the perspective of a descendant of slaves, oppressed by settlers who arrived via the sea. Malika's "watery" poetry contrasts with Putuma's by democratizing the ocean and emphasizing its healing and connective powers.

Toni Stuart

In her interview with Deirdre Byrne, Toni highlights three concerns that inform her poetry and its articulation of memory: a reimagining of the self and history, listening to communal and ancestral voices, and the symbolic significance of water. In a South African context, Toni is classified as Colored. She emphasizes a need to eradicate shame, and, in doing so, reclaim and recreate a South African Colored self and memory. As the epigraph on her website states, "I write poems and stories that help us heal our inherited and ancestral traumas, and access our ancestral wisdoms and gifts, so we can remember who and what we truly are".[59] She suggests that, to heal and remember, people must practise deep listening as they attend to their communities and the ancestral past.

Through deep listening, Toni not only engages with her ancestors but also experiences elements of the natural world which were central to the formation of their being. The following found poem explores Toni's understanding of water:

I'm a water person.

I'm a child of the mountain

and I'm a child of the sea.

I am a descendant of the Khoi, the Bushmen.

They have their own relationship with water.

A big part of my work with the ancestors has been

through the memories that the water holds;

the kind of gifts and medicine that the water provides.

Water, like time, is not linear,

    it's a spiral.

[58]Putuma, "Water."
[59]Stuart, Toni Stuart.

Water is everything:

it's previous life, our lives

under the ocean.

In listening to the "memories that the water holds" for the ancestors, Toni recognizes how water functions as a matrix, which allows her to come into being through memory. She emphasizes this by referring to herself as a "water person", whose origins connect her with "the mountain" and "the sea". In speaking of herself in these terms, Toni presents an alternative perspective of memory. Memory is usually understood as constructed by the historical, social, and political realities of individuals and communities. To apply racialized thinking to the formation of memory is to "carry the oppressor's gaze". The gaze of the white oppressor is shaped and structured in relation to the racialized black "other".[60,61] If the "other" formulates selfhood and memory in relation to the oppressor, they serve the oppressor's narrative. By looking toward the more-than-human world in shaping her memory, Toni turns the gaze away from the oppressor and onto "ancestral work […] African spirituality [and] indigenous African spirituality". This emphasis is crucial because apartheid laws deemed African spirituality to be illegal. Therefore, by bringing it to the forefront, she illuminates approaches to engaging with memory that were previously suppressed.

Interacting with memory through the more-than-human world has implications for how selfhood, the lived environment and time are constructed and perceived. In reflecting on herself as a "water person", Toni envisions existing in connection with her spirit animal: the whale. She sees humans and animals as integrally involved in one another's processes of coming into being. Because water acts as the force which connects them, Toni does not see her memory, or that of her ancestors and community, as rooted in the earth. Instead, she sees their lives as belonging to the ocean. Within this environment, the notion of time as linear falls away as it replicates the motions of water in a spiral. In all these interactions, the racial markers that define one as Colored cease to exist, forging a path for more holistic and unrestricted ways of being.

Toni depicts this approach to memory in her unpublished "Cape Jazz poem" *Krotoa-Eva's suite*.[62] This work pays tribute to the memory of Krotoa-Eva, a 17th-century Capetonian Khoi woman. Krotoa-Eva is a significant figure within the South African Colored community's history. Working in the home of Dutch commander Jan van Riebeeck, Krotoa-Eva straddled the Khoi and Dutch communities. She served as translator for the Khoi and the Dutch during the Dutch-Khoi cattle wars and encountered rejection from both communities after marrying a Dutch settler.

Toni's poem about Krotoa-Eva unearths facets of her memory which have been silenced. She adopts Krotoa-Eva's voice in the poem. Deep listening is crucial as Toni reflects on how water and its memories are central to Krotoa-Eva as a KhoiSan woman. Krotoa-Eva wants to shatter her bones and flesh like "wave on rock"[63] in

[60]Alley-Young, "Articulating Identity."
[61]DiAngelo, *White Fragility*.
[62]Stuart, *Krotoa-Eva*.
[63]Stuart, *Krotoa-Eva*, 4:40.

order to reach the part of her "where silence lives".[64] In doing so, Krotoa-Eva becomes the "silent water burning in every woman of this land"[65] and the "spent wave, receding, emptying the shore, becoming ocean again".[66] The audio-visual recording of the poem accompanies these words with filmed images of waves crashing against the shore. Together, these position Krotoa-Eva as a figure whose true self and memory are located within the water. Through Krotoa-Eva, Toni pleads with her community to search for their own authentic being within the more-than-human world, in the "memories that water holds".

Conclusion

In this article we have explored four interviews with South African poets, which we conducted from the perspective of implicated subjects. Taken together, these show how the poets' work draws on intergenerational connectedness amongst humans and the more-than-human world. It is this multidirectional connection across time and space that can lead to spiritual healing as we grow to understand ourselves better. As the poets resist and kick against stereotypes and othering, they draw on these connections, as well as collective and individual memory. They open up possibilities to heal the divisions and separation of the past and bring connectedness and healing into the present and the future.

The poets invite us to walk with them, to listen deeply with them to what the ancestors, the spiritual world, animals, and the elements want us to experience and learn. This resonates with kincentric approaches to the more-than-human natural world. Drawing on the elements as part of the more-than-human world is important in creating a space for spiritual healing. For Zena and Toni, water is explored as a positive element. Toni sees water as bringing gifts such as medicine and as a carrier of ancestral memory, while Zena argues that, because we are made up of 70 percent water, water not only affects us but is affected by us: this reminds us how we are intricately connected, evoking multidirectional eco-memory.[67] According to Byrne,[68] women are powerfully associated with water in cultural memory. Women's bodies 'leak' tears, blood and milk, and respond to the tides that move in tune with the lunar cycle around the Earth. The association goes both ways, with water's fluid, protean nature also being associated with femininity. Linkages between women and water have been exploited powerfully by South African poets, as we have discussed in this article. Similarly, fire is healing and associated with the divine, breaking through boundaries and removing blockages. Zena, Malika and Toni see themselves as "kin" with elemental forces such as water and fire.

As we have shown, indigenous poetry can provide a communal space where the ancestors are remembered[69] and re-membered (Newfield & Bozalek 2019: 37, 52) in current places, as representations of memory. The poets all remind us of the need for

[64]Stuart, *Krotoa-Eva*, 4:46.
[65]Stuart, *Krotoa-Eva*, 5:28.
[66]Stuart, *Krotoa-Eva*, 5:35.
[67]Kennedy, "Multi-Directional Eco-Memory."
[68]Byrne, "Water in the Anthropocene."
[69]Gunner, "Remaking the Warrior?"

deep listening. Quaz recounts his father's pursuit of a leopard and in that pursuit encountering his fellow KhoiSan. This is reminiscent of Serote's[70] reference to the Setswana proverb meaning "the jackal that survives is the one with muddy whiskers". For Serote, these proverbs remind us to listen deeply to the more-than-human world in the "search of knowledge, truth, and the creation of a point of reference in search of living a life of quality and creating a liveable environment and world".[71] Humans can learn from these encounters by understanding themselves as kin with nonhuman natural beings. The jackal teaches us how to survive thirst and how to endure hardship. The "touch of wet mud on its whiskers" confirms that it has found water to drink. By seeing our connection to the more-than-human world and "discovering inherent and intrinsic characteristics"[72] that we share, emphasizing our universal connectedness, we can re-frame and reclaim our individual and collective memory.

Notes on contributors

Deirdre C. Byrne is the Director of ZAPP (the South African Poetry Project), a practising poet, and a Professor of English Studies at the University of South Africa. She has published research on decolonizing poetry in education in South Africa in *Education as Change*, and has published on black and white decolonial feminisms in *The International Journal of Women's Studies*. Her work on ecofeminist readings of speculative fiction has been published in *Extrapolation. The Lion and the Unicorn* recently accepted an article from her on the representation of trees as repositories of memory in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.

Gerhard Genis is a member of the South African Poetry Project (ZAPP), and an Associate Professor in the Department of Humanities Education (Faculty of Education) at the University of Pretoria, where he teaches English and Multiliteracies. His research fields include conflict/war and indigenous poetry, poetry for the classroom and multiliteracies education. He has published on poetry as embodiments of intergenerational memory and trauma in the journals *Education as Change*, *Scrutiny 2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa*, *Yesterday & Today*, and *Pharos Journal of Theology*. He is the author of *Poetic bodies and corpses of war: South African Great War poetry* (published by Unisa Press, 2018). He has contributed to Jane Potter's, *A history of World War One poetry* (Cambridge University Press, Chapter 16: South Africa, 259-276, 2023), and is the consultative editor for the publication, *Multiliteracies in education: South African perspectives* (published by Van Schaik, 2019).

Toni Gennrich (PhD) is a member of South African Poetry Project (ZAPP). She has taught in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand and in Media Studies at the Nelson Mandela University. Her research interests include multiliteracies, multi-modality, poetry and identity. She has published in: *Reading and Writing; African Perspectives of Research and Teaching* and the *South African Journal of Higher Education.* She coauthored a chapter on 'Teachers' literate habitus' in *The International Handbook of Research on Children's Literacy, Learning, and Culture* (Wiley-Blackwell). She is currently involved in *the Decolonizing Childhood Discourses (DCD)* reading group focusing on agential realism, posthumanism and new materialism and the *Global StoryBridges Project* (University of Wisconsin-Madison). Recent conference presentations include collaborative papers at the *International Symposium on Poetic Inquiry* and at the University of Cambridge, Education conference *'Going Places' with the spoken word community, Youth Education between spiritual and poetic justice'.*

[70]Serote, "Reflections."
[71]Ibid., 34.
[72]Ibid.

Adam Levin is a member of the South African Poetry Project (ZAPP) and a postdoctoral research fellow at the African Center for the Study of the United States (ACSUS) at the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. His research focuses on representations of traumatic memory and cultural memory in works of Holocaust literature, African American literature, and post-apartheid literature. His work has been featured in publications such as *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History*, *English Studies in Africa*, and *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* and *Safundi*. His article from *English Studies in Africa* was recently reproduced in the essay collection *Cultures of Populism: Institutions, Practices and Resistance* (published by Routledge, 2022). He serves on the executive board of the International Network of Genocide Scholars (INoGS).

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